

Stranger in a Strange Land Study Guide

Stranger in a Strange Land by Robert A. Heinlein

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Overview

Stranger in a Strange Land depicts a future world that is oriented as much toward social and religious concerns as it is toward technical ones. In the novel Heinlein is frank about what he considers the pretentious, artificial, and shameful elements of modern society.

The various characters—both appealing and repugnant—represent a segment of society. The social institutions of the press, government, medicine, entertainment, religion, and the military all come under Heinlein's critical gaze. He uses the characters as examples of both the good and the bad aspects of each institution. Most are portrayed unfavorably, but a few emerge as responsible, honest examples of the best that humanity can produce.

The book presents such a variety of characters that most readers will find one representing their own point of view.

The novel then challenges the reader's assumptions about religion, love, and the nature of God against the experiences of two beings, one essentially alien, the other essentially human.

Valentine Michael Smith—the man from Mars—provides the alien viewpoint, while Jubal Harshaw, an almost impossibly knowledgeable and independent human, provides the human view. Their radically opposite opinions challenge the reader's beliefs about sexuality, religion, and society. Through the interplay of these differing views, the reader learns the value of the old and the new, experience and innocence.

As an alien, Valentine Smith brings a fresh perspective to age-old human questions: Why, when love is present in the world, is there also jealousy? Why, when humans seem to have an infinite capacity for creativity and justice, are they so often routine in their behavior and cruel in their treatment of others? If humanity is made in God's image, why cannot people treat one another as God wants? Smith's struggle with these questions produces new ideals for the reader to consider and shows how these ideals may be realized in the future—or present—world.

About the Author

Robert Anson Heinlein was born in Butler, Missouri, on July 7, 1907, one of seven children. His family relocated to Kansas City, where he attended public schools. After one year at the University of Missouri, Heinlein was granted an appointment to the United States Naval Academy in Annapolis, Maryland. He preferred the study of engineering to the social aspects of the Navy and was particularly interested in aircraft design. He graduated and was commissioned an ensign in June 1929.

Heinlein's naval career was cut short in 1934 when he contracted tuberculosis. He retired, but not before having experienced shipboard service and the technically demanding duties of a naval officer at sea. He married Leslyn McDonald while he was in the Navy, but this relationship was short-lived.

Heinlein briefly studied mathematics and physics at UCLA, and then held a variety of jobs in Colorado and California. He began his literary career with the publication of the short story "Life-Line" in *Astounding Science-Fiction* magazine in 1939. During World War II he was employed as an engineer by the Philadelphia Navy Yard, where he met his second wife, Virginia Gerstenfeld, a naval officer. They married in 1948.

Originally a "pulp writer" who churned out stories for low-paying science-fiction magazines, Heinlein led a movement after the war to expand the audience for science fiction. Popular magazines for readers of all ages and interests eventually published his work.

When his wartime job ended, Heinlein devoted himself exclusively to writing.

Prolific, prodigious, and professional, he has captivated and influenced generations of science-fiction writers and readers. Even the impressive number of awards he has won—including four Hugo Awards for best science-fiction novel of the year, and the first Science Fiction Writers of America Grand Master Award in 1975—fails to reflect the full scope of his vision and the complexity of his fictional worlds.

Heinlein is noted as a conservative writer, one whose work reflects traditional values. His books remain popular, however, not because of any political stance, but because they remain rooted in the concerns of ordinary people.

Science fiction is simply the genre Heinlein chose to examine human needs, desires, and patterns of behavior that, in his opinion, remain constant no matter what the level of technological development. Heinlein's themes are familiar ones, no matter what their setting in time and space. Heinlein died on May 8, 1988, in Carmel, California.



Plot Summary

During an exploration of Mars by four married couples, Mary Jane Lyle Smith gives birth to Valentine Michael Smith. The adult crewmembers mysteriously die. The Martians raise Michael, who is found and brought back to Earth by a subsequent exploratory team 25 years later.

The government wants to control Michael as he may have sole claim to Mars, according to a preceding law decision. Ben Caxton wants to scoop the story. Gillian (Jill) Boardman wants to save Michael, and she brings him to Jubal Harshaw who wants to protect the Man from Mars. Unknown to all at the beginning, Michael needs no protection or salvation. He knows he is God. He knows that waiting fills understanding. He can levitate objects and people. He can also blink anything, including threatening people, out of existence. This is what the Martians have taught him.

Jill first witnesses Michael's special abilities, then the entire Jubal household. The government tries mightily to force the issue, but Michael blinks the government police out of existence. Jubal masterfully negotiates Michael's freedom by denying his rights to Mars and offering control of his wealth to Secretary General Douglas, a man with power a notch above the President of the United States in post-Third World War politics.

Free to develop as he must, Michael and Jill strike out to be on their own. After failing as a carnival magician, Michael takes interest in religion. He forms the All Worlds Church, patterned after other religions but with a Martian twist, and begins building a religious empire. The new religion requires initiates to learn Martian in order to develop the same powers that Michael has, including the ability to blink out of existence anything with enough wrongness to it: guns, air ships, and even people. However, wrongness must be clearly identified through a process the Martians call grokking. To grok something is to understand at a profound level previously unknown on Earth.

The trouble with Michael's new religion is that it tears down a primary taboo, casual sex, and defies the principles of earthly economics. Sex is free and so is money. The changes are too much for most people, and they become very angry with Michael, calling him an anti-Christ. Michael freely accepts what must happen next—he walks to the front of an angry mob and dies by their hands.

However, not all is lost, and in fact, much is gained by Michael's martyrdom. His church continues through the people he had converted and taught to do some of his superhuman abilities, such as levitation. The Martian ceremony of sharing water, where people bond together very closely, continues. In addition, Michael enters the afterlife as the Archangel Michael, where he continues work on his project to transform the Earth into what it must become.

Robert Heinlein creates a fictional story that moves from a fantasy premise to an inevitable conclusion. Valentine Michael Smith is unique in that he knows more than any other living human being does. He can perform miracles. He knows what profound love



is and hatred as the Martians have taught him well. However, the Earth cannot tolerate such an example of human potential as Michael serves as a subversive influence. If too many people become like Michael, political and economic powers become meaningless. The Man from Mars must die, and he does, but his spirit lives on and works for inevitable change.



Part 1: His Maculate Origin, Chapter 1 - 3

Part 1: His Maculate Origin, Chapter 1 - 3 Summary

During an exploration of Mars by four married couples, Mary Jane Lyle Smith gives birth to Valentine Michael Smith. The adult crewmembers mysteriously die. The Martians raise Michael, who is found and brought back to Earth by a subsequent exploratory team 25 years later.

Captain Tromp of the Martian exploratory vessel *Champion* ensures that Michael gets a suite at the Bethesda Medical Center, a hydraulic (water) bed, insulation from the news media and a marine armed guard. Captain Tromp explains to the High Science Minister that Michael needs time to adjust to the stronger gravity of Earth and the higher air pressure. The science minister gives argument, but Tromp insists that Michael not only needs time to adjust physically but mentally and emotionally too. Michael is more a Martian than a human.

Michael has the ability to slow his metabolism down to nearly nothing, which he does in the Bethesda hospital while enjoying what he calls his nest—a waterbed, a well-known technology today but unknown at the time of Heinlein's writing. Michael controls three levels of his being—his body, an awareness of his body, and his consciousness. While in a dormant state, he can still think things over. On Mars, he learned of an intense understanding of a subject called *grokking*. The term "grok" is now considered a slang term in the English language, meaning to understand through intuition or sympathetically. However, to grok as a Martian is much deeper.

The condition of Michael's body causes alarm in one of his observers, but Doctor Nelson assures him that this is a normal state for Michael. In the morning, Michael returns his body to its usual metabolism and observes his surroundings. Another doctor checks on him and asks a few routine questions. Michael carefully answers after considering many possibilities, as he has not yet grasped the English language.

Doctors Nelson and Frame help Michael to get out of bed and move around a little, but he falls and goes back into his dormant state. The doctors move Michael to his waterbed. Michael comes back later and eats lunch, after which a movie agent disguised as an orderly tries to finagle a contract out of Michael. Doctor Frame discovers this and chases the man out.

Part 1: His Maculate Origin, Chapter 1 - 3 Analysis

Between the initial exploration of the *Envoy* and subsequent investigation by the *Champion*, World War III changes politics dramatically. Another dramatic change is the discovery of an intelligent race of Martians who have raised Valentine Michael Smith as one of their own. Little is known of Michael or his Martian parents and culture, but what is known is that he is very different from any other human on Earth. His body has not



developed the strength to cope with the higher gravity and air pressure on Earth, but more importantly, he speaks only Martian and considers himself a Martian. In his very vulnerable condition, he must be protected from all earthly influences, including the media and most other people. Absolutely no women are allowed to contact Michael for any reason, due to possible negative reflexes from his fully developed body and fully undeveloped libido.

However, Michael has abilities far beyond most humans. He may not speak English well or understand money, but he has absolute control over his body and mind. This implies that whatever reactions he may feel upon exposure to women will be more highly controlled than his caretakers can imagine.



Part 1: His Maculate Origin, Chapter 4

Part 1: His Maculate Origin, Chapter 4 Summary

Gillian (Jill) Boardman decides that she wants to see the Man from Mars, and she does this by way of an adjoining room. Michael accepts a drink of water from Jill and then insists that she drink, as this is a very important Martian ritual. Jill does not understand that she and Michael have just become water brothers. Michael expresses curiosity about her womanhood, and she misunderstands this to mean that he wants her to remove her clothing and show him. Once Michael thinks about it, he agrees that she should take off her clothes. Jill leaves the room.

Ben Caxton, a journalist and friend of Jill's, calls her and invites her to meet him. She takes an air taxi that automatically flies her to a public landing flat in Alexandria, where Ben joins her. Ben explains why the secrecy, which involves the news media spotting them together. They fly to Ben's hotel apartment. Jill sets their meal up in a short wave (microwave) oven. Over drinks, Ben suggests that he can write an article about Michael from what Jill knows. She balks at this proposal and a subsequent one for marriage. They talk more about Michael, and Ben brings up the fact that he is a rich man due to his parents' and the crew of the Envoy, the space ship that had brought his parents to Mars, stock purchases. In addition, Michael may legally own the entire planet of Mars.

Part 1: His Maculate Origin, Chapter 4 Analysis

Heinlein introduces a highly important Martian ritual, the sharing of water. This results in the creation of water brothers, people who are tightly coupled beyond the concepts of friendship and marriage. Gillian has no idea what has happened between her and Michael at this point. She only knows that he seems very innocent of the earthly world, which she and Ben do understand. However, forces have been set into motion within Michael that neither Jill nor Ben can fathom.

Ben actually wants to marry Jill, but she does not like the idea of marriage very much. Ironically, through the water-sharing ritual, she is already married to Michael but does not know it, although the earthly concept of this bond hardly does the idea of water brother justice. Professionally though, Ben wants to write a story about the Man from Mars and scoop everyone else. Jill simply does not want to play along, as this could jeopardize her nursing career.

The fact that Michael is an ultra-rich young man in a vulnerable position is intriguing and frightening. He can easily be taken for all his wealth by even an incompetent crook. The ramifications of being the owner of Mars may bring on political dangers. It may be easier to assassinate than negotiate.



Part 1: His Maculate Origin, Chapter 5 - 8

Part 1: His Maculate Origin, Chapter 5 - 8 Summary

Ben talks Jill into planting a miniature voice recorder somewhere on an exterior wall of Michael's hospital room. She finds an appropriate wall inside the closet of an occupied adjacent room and tapes the recorder to it. After a few days, she feels that the recorder may be discovered, removes it, and gives it back to Ben. He gives her a transcription of the first day of taping on which Secretary General Douglas talks with Michael and tries to convince him to give up all claims to Mars by signing a legal document. Michael goes into his dormant state and does not sign. Jill and Ben leave the apartment and fly in a taxi to a restaurant in Hagerstown, Pennsylvania.

Ben selects a table and asks for a stereo tank (television) to be brought up. He wants the noise to drown out their voices in case any government bugs have been planted nearby. An interview with the Man from Mars comes on the broadcast, but Jill detects that this is not the real Valentine Michael Smith. Ben plans to take Michael out of the hospital and bring him to Jubal Harshaw's house, a medical doctor and lawyer that Ben had befriended during a series of trials.

While on her nursing shift, Jill discovers that Michael has been moved from his room to somewhere else. Ben hires the services of James Oliver Cavendish as a Fair Witness—a person who observes events and conversations with absolute recall and truthfulness, but also without making any assumptions. Ben, Cavendish and two others go to the Director's office of the Bethesda Center and ask for a meeting with the Director, but instead must meet with Gilbert Berquist, one of Secretary Douglas' executive assistants. Ben asks to see Michael, and then demands to see him, because the Man from Mars broadcast on the stereo tank may be an imposter. Ben, Cavendish and the others are brought into a hospital room in which the supposed Man from Mars lies, but he is still the imposter. Ben cannot compare as he has never seen Michael and leaves quietly.

Ben drops off his companions and tries to return home. However, the flying cab that he rides in takes him to another location. The doors lock him in and some kind of gas makes him lose consciousness. Jill tries to contact Ben but he has left her no message, an unusual thing for him. She calls his newspaper's office, and they have no word either.

In the observation room of Michael's old hospital room, Jill covers for Doctor Brush while he goes to the restroom. During this time, Jill enters the old room and opens the door to a sitting room. She finds Michael there. He greets Jill as his water brother and wants to leave with her. Jill tells Michael to wait for her and then lets Doctor Brush back into the locked observation room. Using her key, she opens the outer door of the sitting room and disguises Michael as a nurse. They go to the roof of the hospital and take a flying taxi to Ben's apartment, where Jill opens the door with a verbal code. Two men claiming to be the police demand to be let into the apartment, and Jill cannot keep them out. One



of the men, Gilbert Berquist, draws a gun. Suddenly, he and his companion disappear. Michael goes into one of his dormant states. Jill puts him into a large piece of luggage with rollers and takes him out of Ben's apartment.

Part 1: His Maculate Origin, Chapter 5 - 8 Analysis

Ben and Jill realize that Michael is in grave danger. The attempt of Secretary General Douglas, a superior of the President of the United States in a post-Third World War coalition of nations, to swindle Michael out of his claims to Mars triggers their concern for Michael, especially after Jill points out the fake Michael on the stereo tank.

Legally Ben can do nothing but report the news and write op-ed pieces for the paper. His aggressive attempt to see the Man from Mars results in nothing conclusive and only serves to bring attention to himself from an untrustworthy government. Meanwhile, Jill's discovery that Michael has been moved somewhere builds suspense. Where have they taken him and what do they plan to do with him?

Heinlein reveals a future world where political intrigue has not only survived but becomes worse. Government bugs could be anywhere. The people one encounters are not necessarily who they say they are. The public taxis can be controlled remotely and are equipped with knockout gas. Michael is indeed in trouble and somebody must do something about this. Ben is out of the picture, so only Jill can help.

During Jill's escape from the hospital with Michael, Heinlein brings more of Michael's thoughts and experiences to the forefront. He waits patiently for Jill in the hospital, because waiting is something he does quite well. He has total trust for his water brother, Jill, and innocently thinks the windows in Ben's apartment are clever works of art. However, most astounding is Michael's display of power with the police. He can make people disappear.



Part 2: His Preposterous Heritage, Chapter 9 - 10

Part 2: His Preposterous Heritage, Chapter 9 - 10 Summary

Secretary General Douglas reluctantly talks with his wife about Michael's disappearance. She tends to browbeat and contradict him. After she leaves, Douglas goes to the Council Chamber and determines that only his office is aware of the missing Man from Mars.

Mrs. Douglas contacts Madame Alexandra Vesant, her astrologist, and insists that she do new horoscopes for both Secretary Douglas and herself. Madame Vesant asks for details on the situation, and Mrs. Douglas, after a short period of avoidance, asks that she also cast a horoscope for Michael. Madame Vesant runs into a particularly difficult situation—Michael had not been born on Earth, and so no usual calculations in astrology apply. She concocts a horoscope for him anyway and tells Mrs. Douglas that she and her husband should do nothing drastic while Michael is missing.

Jubal Hershaw writes popular fiction from his elaborate home in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania. He writes by dictating to one of his three beautiful secretaries: Anne, Miriam and Dorcas. In addition to writing, Jubal is a medical doctor and lawyer. When he wants to dictate a story, he calls the currently working secretary by shouting, "Front!" The appropriate secretary immediately responds, unless the primary is busy doing something else important, such as preparing a meal for everyone in the house.

Jill shows up at Jubal's gate with Michael, who resembles a corpse due to his dormant condition. One of Jubal's live-in guests, Larry, helps to lay Michael on the grass near the swimming pool. Jill talks to Michael and he wakes up. Jubal has them both put to bed as his patients.

After Jill wakes up, Jubal, knowing that Michael is the Man from Mars, asks her what connection she has to him. Jill claims nothing more than concern for his safety. Jubal then invites Jill and Michael to stay in his protective house indefinitely. At dinner, Jill meets Duke, the technician of the house for all the electronic gadgetry. Jill mentions the missing Ben Claxton, and Jubal adds this problem to his others as he tries unsuccessfully to get some sleep. Around midnight he rouses the house and begins setting up a plan that involves Michael and the powers-that-be.



Part 2: His Preposterous Heritage, Chapter 9 - 10 Analysis

So far, all that Secretary Douglas knows is that Michael is missing. He has no idea that the Man from Mars can cause people to disappear. To Douglas, Michael is an innocent waif in need of protection from attitudes such as his wife expresses—unconcern for a non-citizen and freak from outer space, just an added difficulty in an already burdensome world.

Mrs. Douglas uses the services of Madame Vesant, an astrologist. Heinlein makes a psychic prediction himself in this chapter. Some twenty years later, the wife of the President of the United States, Nancy Reagan, also uses the services of an astrologer. Although the advice that Madame Vesant gives Mrs. Douglas is too general to be of much use, both women believe in the advice as being the truth. Truth can be related to belief in this way, where the act of belief makes something true for most practical purposes. Madame Vesant tells Mrs. Douglas and her husband to do nothing drastic while Michael is missing, as he will soon show up again. It is a near certainty that Secretary Douglas will hear this advice from Mrs. Douglas, whether he wants to or not.

Jubal Hershaw is a savvy and cantankerous old man with a heart of gold. He definitely barks but only bites those who deserve it. When Jill shows up with Michael, Jubal does not hesitate to invite them to stay, mostly because he finds the Man from Mars a very interesting subject in a world that has not interested him for a good many years.

Surrounding himself with beauty, Jubal likes the female form. Each of his three secretaries has their unique bodies and natural hair colors: pleasingly plump and blonde Anne, medium build and redheaded Miriam, and slim and dark Dorcas. Just how these women and the two other men, Larry and Duke, relate to one another seems to be of no concern to Jubal. He runs an open household where people can come and go as they please, stay as long as they want, and with the exception of his specific demands for work, do as they will. He does prefer his houseguests to be interesting.



Part 2: His Preposterous Heritage, Chapter 11 - 12

Part 2: His Preposterous Heritage, Chapter 11 - 12 Summary

Heinlein explains the highly developed Martians that raised Michael. They begin life as nymphs that frolic on the Martian surface until they reach the next stage of nestling. During the nymph time, eight of nine nymphs die on the surface. The surviving nymphs then become fertilized by adults and produce eggs, after which the nymphs become adults. As such, the Martians must do the work needed to keep their civilization going, but most of their time they spend learning and pondering. As for the Martian sex life:

"Martians and humans were both self-aware life forms but they had gone in vastly different directions. All human behavior, all human motivations, all man's hopes and fears, were heavily colored and largely controlled by mankind's tragic and oddly beautiful pattern of reproduction. The same was true of Mars, but in mirror corollary. Mars had the efficient bipolar patten so common in that galaxy, but the Martians had it in a form so different from the Terran form that it would have been termed 'sex' only by a biologist, and it emphatically would not have been termed 'sex' to a human psychiatrist. Martian nymphs were female, all the adults were male" (p. 119).

When a Martian adult dies, he is said to discorporate, yet the consciousness goes on in the Martian culture as an Old One. The custom on Mars is for the remaining dead body to be eaten by the water brothers of the discorporate Martian.

Both the living and discorporate Martians work on art that is far beyond human understanding. When the Martians release Michael to the visiting humans, the Martians do not think one way or another about the event. They are mostly busy with a work of art regarding the fifth planet that had once occupied the orbit of the asteroid belt and the beings on it that the Martians destroyed along with their planet.

Meanwhile Michael busies himself with learning all he can about Earth and human literature. Jubal becomes another of his water brothers, while Jill coaches Michael on the proper way to behave in society. Michael demonstrates how he can put his body into the dormant state and stay indefinitely at the bottom of the swimming pool. Jill brings up the issue of the missing Ben to Jubal, who informs her that he has the best detectives in the business on the case. Then she tells him about the two men who Michael caused to disappear.

Excited about the prospects, Jubal puts Michael through the paces with Anne serving in her professional role as Fair Witness and cameras recording everything from several different angles. Jubal first talks with Michael about his ability to make people disappear. Then as an experiment, Jill throws a box at Jubal's head. Michael makes it disappear.



Anne reports that the box did not instantly disappear, but grew rapidly smaller first, which the cameras confirm. Jubal asks Michael if he can bring the box back, but he cannot.

In another experiment, Michael stops a heavy ashtray thrown toward the ceiling from falling. Not only can Michael make things disappear, he can levitate objects, several at once. Jubal then tests Michael's ability to make only a gun held by a man disappear, which he does easily. Michael considers this conserving food because, on Mars, the dead are eaten by the living. He also refers to the action of making something disappear as a conclusion of a cusp, or critical point of decision. If Michael detects enough wrongness in something, he can make it disappear.

Part 2: His Preposterous Heritage, Chapter 11 - 12 Analysis

Through straight exposition, Heinlein describes the seemingly peaceful Martian culture that can turn terribly violent once a situation is fully grokked. At one time, a fifth planet existed where the asteroid belt is currently. The Martians decide that the planet was wrong and, just like that, destroy it.

The Martians are not human, nor can they ever be due to their detached sexuality. This could mean that if they ever get around to grokking humans, the Martians may decide that the universe is better off without us, a theme sometimes thought of in our own society. On a lighter note, humanity may never be interesting enough for Martians to spend a moment on us. They seem to be busy with their own affairs regarding the fifth planet that once was.

Michael reads very quickly, and Jubal's house contains plenty of reading material, but Jill must guide him through the simple conventions of society. He has much more to learn before he can enter it. However, Michael's special abilities spark interest in Jubal precisely as Michael is not physically a Martian but seems to have picked up some of their ways that, to normal people, appear superhuman.

Heinlein fills out the story as to what might have happened to Ben through the conversation between Jill and Jubal. They decide that Ben must have been kidnapped, and until proof of his death materializes, they will go under the assumptions that he can be found, and if necessary, rescued from his captors. Jubal suspects that Ben's attempted actions at Bethesda probably caught the attention of the government.

Two of Michael's superhuman abilities are levitation and making things, including people, disappear. The levitation ability is relatively harmless and more of a convenience than a threat. However, the ability to make things disappear can be deadly, and has already been demonstrated as such. Jubal makes a wry joke about a list of people he knows that may deserve this treatment, but without Michael's trained-in Martian sense of grokking and sensing wrongness first, the human population on Earth could rapidly diminish. Michael will not make people disappear unless he understands



that this must be done to preserve the lives of his water brothers. He cannot act out of malice or capriciousness.

Heinlein builds an interesting premise. What if a human being has superhuman powers but also superhuman ethics? Could such a human be used by the government as an ultimate weapon? More than likely the superhuman ethics would disallow this outcome. Might the human declare himself dictator of the world through intimidation? Again, the ethics block this direction. Yet Michael has already killed two humans who threatened the life of Jill, his first water brother. The two men had wrongness, and Michael grokked that condition in an instant. It seems the human race has but two ways to stay on the good side of Michael—either live rightly or share water, brother.



Part 2: His Preposterous Heritage, Chapter 13 - 14

Part 2: His Preposterous Heritage, Chapter 13 - 14 Summary

Duke expresses disgust for Michael's eating of dead Martians and considers the practice cannibalism. Jubal tries to reason with him and finds the task considerably difficult due to Duke's cultural indoctrination. Duke feels that cannibalism is bad in all times, places and cultures. Jubal points out several examples of cannibalism, including the Christian practice of turning bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ.

Not aware of Michael's superpowers and seeing only the surface of the man, Duke brags that he can beat him with one hand. Jubal begs to differ, knowing that Michael can make people disappear in an instant. Using a story about a coral snake, Jubal tries to convince Duke that appearances are often deceiving. Michael may seem mild-mannered and weak, but that is just an illusion.

Duke becomes upset and threatens to leave, which Jubal does not accept and argues that he should stay. Jubal encourages Duke to become water brothers with Michael in order to gain his protection, as Jubal expects trouble soon.

Heinlein explains the difficulty of gaining access to powerful figures due to the many layers of bureaucracy surrounding them. However, Jubal tries to break through to Secretary Douglas nevertheless. At the same time, Michael watches a Fosterite broadcast. The Fosterites have grown to become a major cult-like religion.

Jubal's attempted call to Secretary Douglas is traced while he argues with what he estimates to be a police officer, and then hangs up. He expects a return call or some form of action.

Michael asks Jubal about religion, having read about the world religions in the encyclopedia and having just watched the Fosterite broadcast. Jubal discovers that Michael has no idea what religion means and that he does not understand that religious ceremonies are mostly symbolic and not literal—the bread and wine do not actually turn into human flesh and blood. The exposure to the Fosterites concerns Jubal.

Jubal ponders religion over his lunch. Over his many years, he has not come up with an answer to a fundamental question: How or what or who started the universe? He poses the question to Michael, who after considering what he has learned from the Martian Old Ones, answers that the universe never had a beginning and does not have an end. There is only now.



Many questions are posed to Michael later. Jubal proposes that mankind is the only species that laughs. Michael replies that he cannot be a man, as he cannot laugh. Jubal tells him to keep trying. Then Michael tells Jubal that he is God, the closest phrase (actually a clause) in English that express the Martian concept of deity. Jubal is God, Michael is God, the Martians are God, and virtually everyone is God.

Panic strikes as Jubal sees two large air cars approaching. He calls for everyone to jump in and out of the pool to cause confusion there, and for Michael to hide at the bottom in his dormant state. A police craft lands on Jubal's flowerbeds and an officer tries to serve a warrant, but Jubal keeps demanding that they move the craft off his flowers. He then demands for proper identification, after which he takes on a sarcastically sweet attitude. The warrants are to search the house for Gilbert Berquist, one of the men who Michael made disappear, and Gillian Boardman (Jill) on the charge of kidnapping. The officer also has warrants for Michael and Jubal. Jubal points out that the warrants for Jill and Michael conflict as Michael is charged with escaping custody and Jill with kidnapping, a lawyerly delaying tactic.

Part 2: His Preposterous Heritage, Chapter 13 - 14 Analysis

The argument between Duke and Jubal gives Heinlein a platform from which to explore the attitudes of the American culture. Duke expresses disgust with the idea of cannibalism, which he assumes is universal. Jubal points out that not too long ago some Native Americans often practiced cannibalism and also many ancient tribes. With Michael, the idea is to honor the dead by eating of their bodies. The point Heinlein makes is that just because society believes something, this does not make it true or right.

Regarding Duke's ignorance of Michael's powers, this reflects another social attitude among Americans—that size and power go together. Not only is this wrong for a small-framed martial arts master, it is especially dead wrong for Michael. Behind his mild and innocent persona lies a potential killer for which there exists no defense. Michael can think a person's life away without any more effort or delay than blinking his eyes.

Heinlein then uses Michael's learning of human ways to bring up the subject of religion. To Michael and the Martians, no religion exists. Only the truth exists, and every Martian knows what this is. Religion has no word or concept on Mars. Everyone agrees that each is God, that death does not mean the end of consciousness, and that the universe has no beginning or end, only the eternal now. This is certainly not the way things work in many earthly religions, especially those from the Middle East (Judaism, Christianity and Islam).

The Fosterites disturb Jubal. Their religion began recently with a man named Foster and smells of a cult, and it grows disturbingly fast across the nation. Then the police come and Jubal must put aside theology for the practical situation that the police want to arrest him, Jill, Michael and look for a man who no longer exists on planet Earth.



Part 2: His Preposterous Heritage, Chapter 15 - 16

Part 2: His Preposterous Heritage, Chapter 15 - 16 Summary

Michael swims to the bottom of the swimming pool and goes into his dormant state. He thinks about what is going on and tries to grok it, but the English language still confuses him. He then thinks about Jubal's directive to stay at the bottom of the pool and concludes that he meant only the body, not the consciousness. Michael leaves his body and witnesses the events around the pool in his ethereal being.

The police vehicle lands in the garden, and Michael senses a great wrongness in this act. He watches as Jubal hollers angrily at the police, something that Martians never do. He reads the moods of Dorcas, Larry, Miriam and Anne and comes to realize that they are all Jubal's water brothers, and thereby his water brothers too. Jill's mood is troubled, and this troubles Michael.

A police officer leaves the vehicle. Michael senses wrongness in the man and identifies his gun. Entering the vehicle in his ethereal being, Michael sees that it is full of police officers and he senses more wrongness. He considers making the whole thing disappear but holds back.

Outside he watches the police officer hand papers to Jubal. The police officer then compares a picture to Jill and calls for her arrest. Michael makes him and two other officers who were running toward her to disappear. The wrongness escalates, and soon Michael causes both police vehicles and all the officers to disappear. He then returns to his body, and Jill swims down to signal Michael to come out of the pool.

Jubal tries to keep some order going out of the hysterics that follow Michael's actions with the police. Thomas Mackenzie, production manager-in-chief of New World Networks, calls. Jubal had arranged for spot-coverage at his house, but the cameras failed to capture the disappearing event. He hangs up and considers what to do next. Expecting more police to show up, he prepares by locking down the house and brings everyone into interior rooms. He calls Thomas again for help in contacting Secretary Douglas. Thomas suggests calling Madame Vesant and getting to Douglas through his wife. Madame Vesant (Becky Vesey) is an old friend of Jubal's, and she succeeds in convincing Mrs. Douglas to contact her husband.



Part 2: His Preposterous Heritage, Chapter 15 - 16 Analysis

Another of Michael's superhuman powers emerges. He can take a walk in his ethereal body while his physical body remains in the dormant state, and all his other abilities take a walk with him. Invisible to others, he can inspect vehicles, read the emotions of people, and realize the wrongness of situations.

The disappearing event shocks everybody who witnesses it except Anne, who remains in her professional role as Fair Witness, and of course Michael. He has faced a cusp and taken actions that are very right within his Martian ethics, yet he needs to fully grok what just happened. Meanwhile, two vehicles full of police officers have disappeared from planet Earth, and the authorities take notice.

Jubal expects the police to storm his house in force with the outcome being disastrous for everyone. Many police may be blinked out of existence. Many shots may be fired. His only hope is to contact Secretary Douglas quickly, and that has already been shown to be nearly impossible with the bureaucracy surrounding the man.

However, Heinlein has set up one fairly direct route to Douglas through Madame Vesant and his wife's connection to the astrologer. Additionally, Mrs. Douglas dominates the marriage relationship, indicating that Secretary Douglas will respond to her demands quickly. Through Jubal's quick wit, the suggestion from Thomas MacKenzie and Jubal's friendship with Madame Vesant, the panic level moves from frenzy to high tension. Secretary Douglas must make contact with Jubal before all hell breaks loose.

The only weakness in this plot setup is the friendship between Jubal and Madame Vesant. The relationship blinks into existence without any foreshadowing to explain why the two are so chummy. Otherwise, Heinlein masterfully builds tension to the breaking point in this scene. Michael continually shocks his earthly friends and performs mass murder with aplomb—not exactly the behavior of a desirable houseguest. The damage done, now Jubal must fix the mess more quickly than seems possible. Things have gone from bad to worse.



Part 2: His Preposterous Heritage, Chapter 17 - 19

Part 2: His Preposterous Heritage, Chapter 17 - 19 Summary

Secretary Douglas calls Jubal, who claims to be the lawyer for the Man from Mars. While arguing about Michael's legal status, the Special Security forces break into Jubal's house. Secretary Douglas demands to speak to their commanding officer and orders his forces out of the house. Jubal argues about the search warrants, which have been removed from existence along with the police officer who tried to serve them. Secretary Douglas finally agrees to cancel the warrants but insists on a negotiation meeting with Michael in attendance.

Jubal ups the stakes for the meeting by insisting that Ben Caxton be present, as he claims Michael has requested. Douglas eventually agrees to have his security police look for Ben. Not very long thereafter, the security police deliver Ben. Jubal assesses his condition, determines that he had been drugged all the time he was missing, and applies counteractive medication.

Jill briefs Ben on the recent events. Ben feels jealous about Michael and presses Jill to marry him. She refuses, and after thinking it over, Ben decides to drop the issue and become water brothers with Michael.

Ben and Jubal discuss the strategies to use at the upcoming meeting with Douglas. The most important issues are Michael's wealth and how to protect it. Jubal decides to write a plan that Douglas will accept without objection.

On the day of the meeting, Michael and the rest ride out to Washington DC in a flying bus. Michael sees the Atlantic Ocean for the first time, which contains more water than he has ever imagined. The experience nearly puts him into his deep grokking dormant state, but Jill snaps him out of it.

Jubal takes control at the landing pad by rejecting an aid of Secretary Douglas and simply handing him an envelope to deliver to the Secretary. Amid questioning reporters, the group finds its way to the conference room. Mike sees Doctor Mahmoud, they converse in Martian and Mahmoud introduces himself to Jubal. Jill addresses Mahmoud in Martian and initiates a water ceremony. A protocol officer tries to seat Mahmoud away from the rest, but Jubal objects and directs the bureaucrat on how the seating should be done. After arguing over this issue for a while, Jubal threatens to take Michael away from the conference, which forces the protocol police to back down. A senator comes by and offers an invitation to Michael from Bishop Digby to attend a Fosterite service at the Archangel Foster Tabernacle. Jubal agrees to this as long as he accompanies Michael. Everyone stands as Secretary General Douglas enters the conference room.



Part 2: His Preposterous Heritage, Chapter 17 - 19 Analysis

Jubal demonstrates his enormous powers of negotiation and persuasion. He knows that he holds a highly valuable prize—Valentine Michael Smith—and he never breaks into a sweat while facing down Secretary Douglas. Jubal wins Ben Caxton's freedom in the process but must give something in return, which is the negotiation meeting between Douglas and Michael.

Michael's experience of seeing the Atlantic Ocean almost overwhelms him. The reason that water is used in ceremony on Mars is that the liquid is very scarce. Trying to fathom the immensity of an ocean is difficult for earthlings who have never experienced one, and a million times more difficult for Michael, who has not seen much more than a cup of water in his life.

Not missing a beat, Jubal takes over at the landing pad. No upwardly mobile punk is going to push him around. He is the one with the grand prize. Therefore, he gives the orders. Jubal handles the conference room seating police in a similar way. His character combines the quick logic of the lawyer, the steadfastness of the doctor and the personality of the curmudgeon.

Heinlein uses Doctor Mahmoud to bring in the Muslim take on religion. Mahmoud considers most Westerners crude and decadent. The women who surround Jubal stimulate disgust in Mahmoud for their whorish dress and arrogant ways, acting as if equal to men. If questioned, Jubal's secretaries might respond that they are far superior to men. They certainly do not let Jubal get too far into his bossman fantasy. However, Michael brings conflict to Mahmoud's Islamic faith, as he does to nearly every religion on Earth—except for some Eastern beliefs—astral projection and levitation for examples. A few Western writers and philosophers accept the idea that we are all parts of a whole when it comes to God, but most religions accept an afterlife, a continuation of the soul or consciousness, as does Michael. In fact, he knows the Old Ones as an integral part of Martian society. This puzzles Mahmoud, the idea being so different from his childhood religion.

Michael will soon meet with Bishop Digby of the Fosterites. This cannot bode well for Fosterism as Michael has still not fully grokked religion. He has also detected a great deal of wrongness within human culture, whereas the Martian culture is perfect and true. It has no need for religion, nor does it seem that Michael has any use for it at this time.



Part 2: His Preposterous Heritage, Chapter 20 - 21

Part 2: His Preposterous Heritage, Chapter 20 - 21 Summary

Jubal has Michael sit while the improvised Martian anthem plays, then stand and bow quickly. This is the way of a sovereign monarch, while the Secretary General stands with everyone else why his anthem plays, as he is not sovereign. When Michael addresses the assembly, he alternates between Martian and English versions of his speech, an idea from Jill.

Secretary Douglas sends a note to Jubal that indicates agreement with his proposition. After Michael finishes his speech, Jubal does his and announces the proposition. Michael wants Secretary Douglas to be his attorney-in-fact, a position that carries over even if Douglas retires from public life. The power of attorney goes to Ben Caxton if something should happen to Douglas or he wishes to be free of the responsibility, and the list goes on for several more names. This gives Douglas complete control over Michael's fortune as long as Douglas behaves well. If not, the power goes to Ben.

The question regarding Michael's ownership of Mars comes up. Jubal explains that the question is meaningless, as Mars is inhabited. He then declares that Michael is Mars, because the Old Ones visit the Earth through Michael. The idea is to treat Michael with dignity and respect as whatever he experiences, so do the Old Ones.

Jubal and the rest retire to their hotel suite, including Mahmoud. Everyone, including Mahmoud, relax with alcoholic beverages. They chit chat about various things, and then Jubal asks Mahmoud if he understands the Martian word "grok." He admits that he does not and states that one must think in Martian to grasp the full meaning.

Jubal and Mahmoud then discuss languages in general, especially English. Jubal feels that English is the most powerful of languages, because it borrows from every conceivable source, while the others keep to strict rules or are controlled by a central language academy. Mahmoud agrees, but maintains that some things that can be said in Arabic cannot be translated to English. Overall, the Martian language beats out all earthly tongues.

When asked, Mike equates the word "grok" with "drink." Mahmoud points out some of the other meanings:

"'It means 'fear,' it means 'love,' it means 'hate'—proper hate, for by the Martian 'map' you cannot possibly hate anything unless you grok it completely, understand it so thoroughly that you merge with it and it merges with you—then and only then can you hate it. By hating yourself. But this also implies, by necessity, that you love it, too, and



cherish it and would not have it otherwise. Then you can hate—and (I think) that Martian hate is an emotion so black that the nearest human equivalent could only be called a mild distaste" (p. 266).

Madame Vesant calls and congratulates Jubal on his successful negotiation with Douglas, a broadcasted event. Doctor Nelson examines Michael and wonders where all the new muscle mass came from, to which Jubal answers that Michael has the ability to build muscle tissue faster than normal. Jubal then lectures Doctor Nelson about the meaning of great wealth and the tremendous responsibilities this entails. Captain van Tromp of the Champion spacecraft tells a story about one of his crew disappearing on Mars, apparently blinked out of existence by a Martian.

Part 2: His Preposterous Heritage, Chapter 20 - 21 Analysis

Jubal handles the meeting with Secretary Douglas masterfully. The agreement that gives the Secretary full control over Michael's wealth carries with it a condition—Douglas must always behave himself with the money. Any shenanigans means that the money goes to Ben, then if he turns crooked, on down a long line of people. This ensures that Michael's fortune will always be secure. Part of the deal is that Michael will never declare himself the sole human owner of Mars. This takes Michael off the government hook as a dangerous man, effectively freeing him to pursue anything he desires.

Heinlein indulges himself with various observations through his characters. Mahmoud represents the liberated Muslim who freely engages in alcohol, forbidden food and possibly sexual relationships, although he claims to keep a strict reign on his appetites. Jubal loves the English language, as one can assume the author does. However, the Martian language promises to trump English as being more expressive and true.

The meaning of the term "grok" is of high importance. Michael's superhuman powers come from his understanding of this single word, and all his ideas about ethics and the nature of the universe stem from this understanding. When Jubal talks about the danger to a rich person's family, the threat disappears in the case of Michael. He can simply blink out any kidnapers from a distance and levitate his family members back to safety.



Part 3: His Eccentric Education, Chapter 22 - 24

Part 3: His Eccentric Education, Chapter 22 - 24 Summary

Jubal's house becomes a fortress guarded by Secretary Douglas' special police. Mail comes by the bagfuls, which must be sorted, and packages checked for bombs. Michael receives fan mail, and in one piece, a female fan has sent pornographic photos of herself. Jill intercepts the photos before Michael can see them and complains to Jubal. This leads to an argument on whether Michael should keep away from the world or enter into it. Jill favors protection but gives in to Jubal's side. Michael examines the photos with his usual curiosity, but nothing like lust, and gives them to Duke, a collector and connoisseur.

Michael comes to understand the powerful symbolism of money, which is something unknown on Mars. He tries to spend some of his money on gifts for his water brothers. The task becomes difficult because, as Jill coaches him, he needs to determine the proper gifts—things that his water brothers desire but would not buy for themselves. For Jubal, Mike decides on a replica sculpture of Rodin's work, *She Who Used to Be the Beautiful Heaulmiere*.

Jubal, Michael and Jill head for the Archangel Foster Tabernacle of the Church of the New Revelation. Jubal tries to warn Michael that all the Fosterites want is money and their literature is full of conceit. Jill admonishes Jubal for giving Michael too much information.

Senator Tom Boone meets them at the church and arranges for their ID badges. They enter a huge building through a long hallway lined with slot machines. Mike plays a slot game with a token that Boone gives him, and by manipulating the spinning wheels with his mind, wins a jackpot. This happens three times over until Jill whispers for him to stop. They then go to a bar and have alcoholic drinks.

The next stop is at the preserved body of the church founder, Archangel Foster. Michael does not grok him to be an Old One, and the visage makes Jill feel faint. Boone takes them to their observation box for the church service.

The church service consists of music and a snake dance. Some worshipers go into convulsions or speak in tongues. Michael interprets it all as a growing-closer situation, which warms him. Next comes hymn singing and another snake dance. Bishop Digby then gives a sermon, during which he draws attention to Michael, has him stand and welcomes him to the church. Afterward, Bishop Digby invites everyone to a room with displays of church relics. He takes Michael aside into a smaller room and closes the



door. Some minutes later, Michael walks out of the empty room, and Boone says that the Bishop probably left by another door.

On the flight back to Jubal's house, he and Jill argue about religion. Jill thinks the Fosterites are frauds, while Jubal thinks that all religions are frauds to some degree. He defends Fosterism as being as valid as any other religion and points out the parallels. Church bingo is like the slot machines; Holy Rollers dance around in their services; wine is used in Christianity. Jill remains unconvinced.

They find Ben and Mahmoud when they get home. Mahmoud notices that Michael looks sick, and Jubal explains it as a reaction to religious overexposure. The discussions continue into the Muslim religion and certain misconceptions about it.

Michael retreats to his room and enters his dormant state, in which he tries to grok the wrongness in the little room with the Bishop, whom he had caused to disappear.

"At this point the being sprung from human genes shaped by Martian thought, and who could never be either one, completed one stage of his growth, burst out and ceased to be a nestling. The solitary loneliness of predestined free will was then his and with it the Martian serenity to embrace it, cherish it, savour its bitterness, and accept its consequences. With tragic joy he knew that this cusp was his, not Jill's. His water brother could teach, admonish, guide—but choice at a cusp was not shared. Here was 'ownership' beyond any possible sale, gift, hypothecation; owner and owned grokked fully, inseparable. He eternally was the action he had taken at cusp" (p. 325).

Michael settles his mind and wants to socialize with the others. Everyone except Jill or one of the secretaries has gone to bed. They fix a late night snack and eat by the pool. Later, they make love.

Part 3: His Eccentric Education, Chapter 22 - 24 Analysis

Michael becomes of age and more human. He understands and uses money, attends a church service, kills Bishop Digby and feels guilty about it, and loses his virginity to Jill, although Heinlein does not identify her specifically. This leaves a little mystery for the reader to discover later on.

Soaked in religious philosophy and observation, Heinlein breaks down several common misconceptions about religions. Rather than many different religions in the world, most conform to a set pattern, some more closely than others and some with a few unique features. The Fosterites succeed in pulling together the most effective practices while adding unabashed commercialism. Heinlein also explains how the Muslim religion does grant souls to women and that the idea that men receive a number of virgins in Heaven is misunderstood, as the entities are similar to angels, not women. Mahmoud thinks the entities are like Jubal's secretaries and Jill—heavenly wait staff.



Jill represents a religious traditionalist. She judges the Fosterites in light of her childhood religious training, which Jubal suggests had likely been cleaned up for easier acceptance. The stories in their original versions often shock those who have not read them before. Jill objects strenuously that the Fosterite scriptures are wholly invented and make no sense. This apparently does not negatively impact the success of the church in terms of membership and wealth.

Heinlein does not reveal why Michael kills Bishop Digby, other than the Bishop displays a great wrongness to Michael. Michael may have said that he is God, which would send most bishops into a tizzy. Bishop Digby may have tried to frighten Michael into joining the church with something like a fire-and-brimstone tirade. Michael may have grokked Bishop Digby to be less than an egg and thereby unworthy of his high rank within the church. Digby may have tried to touch Michael in a sexual manner. However, Michael detects the wrongness, and it leads him into a major life cusp. He feels that he has done the right thing by taking Bishop Digby out of the world and a churchman's career.



Part 3: His Eccentric Education, Chapter 25 - 29

Part 3: His Eccentric Education, Chapter 25 - 29 Summary

The Fosterites declare that Bishop Digby has gone to Heaven and been promoted to Archangel, the church's second major miracle after Foster's death. On the other side, Foster tells Digby that he had been a stupid jackass before killing Foster with poison. Both are angels and need to perform rather than regret or take revenge.

"Foster shook his halo in negation. 'You can't touch him. You shouldn't have tried to touch him in the first place. Oh, you can submit a requisition for a miracle if you want to make a bloody fool of yourself. But, I'm telling you, it'll be turned down—you simply don't understand the System yet. The Martians have their own setup, different from ours, and as long as they heed him, we can't touch him. They run their own show their own way—the Universe has variety, something for everybody—a fact you field workers often miss'" (p. 330).

Jubal notices great changes with the secretaries and Jill while Michael retreats for a week within his dormant state. Jubal is certain that one of the women had broken Michael into sex, and when Michael comes out of his dormancy, he acts more confident and speaks with a deeper voice. Jubal notes the change and considers his patient cured—Michael is now fully a human male. A little later, Michael announces that he is leaving Jubal's house and taking Jill with him. Jubal gives his consent and promises to welcome them back.

Michael and Jill join a carnival where they do a magic act. Even though Michael flawlessly levitates Jill and makes things actually disappear, the act fails to draw money and is dropped due to the lack of showmanship from Michael. They meet the tattooed lady, Patricia (Patty) Paiwonski, who is a member of the Church of the New Revelation (Fosterites) and had been converted by Foster himself. She becomes a close friend to Michael and Jill.

Patty visits and gives advice to the magician couple on how to improve their act through humor and showing off more of Jill's skin. She then shows them her tattoos and explains how they contain images of Foster's life and career as a churchman. At one point, Michael makes Patty's underwear disappear, which reveals his real power to her. Patty thinks that he is a holy man who does miracles, possibly the Archangel Michael. Jill assures her that Michael does not know if he is a holy man or not. Michael explains that he is the Man from Mars and levitates both women. They then partake in the water ceremony. Patty accepts this all as part of her overall spirituality and Mike continues to talk with her. Eventually Patty accepts Mike's idea from Mars, that we are all God.



The author explains the structure that the Foster religion takes. An outer circle brings in seekers, some of whom convert. Advanced church members become priests and officers in a middle circle, and an inner circle contains the top church leaders.

Archangel Foster talks with Archangel Digby, who is angry that Michael seems to be starting a religion of his own. Foster suggests that Michael may be the original Archangel Michael, who has not been seen around Heaven in a while. Foster then suggests that Digby take a lower assignment, as Digby's angelic development is not moving ahead very swiftly.

Michael and Jill move out of their apartment to Las Vegas, where Michael works the casinos and Jill the shows. She finds exhibitionism to her liking and invites Michael to her performances. Michael helps her to see through the customers' eyes and experience their feelings about her body. They then travel west to Palo Alto and San Francisco. At the zoo, Michael observes the monkeys and how the social order resembles humans. He finally develops a sense of humor, which is to say a sense of the absurd human condition. In addition, he determines that all religions are the same, and this leads to a desire to be ordained.

Part 3: His Eccentric Education, Chapter 25 - 29 Analysis

Michael continues to learn his weaknesses in human society. Simply being technically good at entertainment does not bring in the money. He needs to learn the art of marketing. Bad entertainers with a good act often make better money than good entertainers with a bad act. More important for this stage of his development, he draws very close to Jill in a marriage-like partnership in which they develop a level of mental telepathy.

A lengthy discussion on carnival economics and techniques between Michael and the owner illustrates the difficulty in explaining how to put on a good show. Michael's magic has no sparkle to it. The audience expects to be dazzled, not watch a demonstration of Martian abilities.

Heinlein spends quite a bit of text on Patty. Her tattoos cover her from neck to toe with only her hands and face being unadorned. She is a true and faithful believer in the Fosterite church, and she believes without concerning herself with the complications with which Jubal enjoys grappling. Patty is also the perfect convert to Michael's way of thinking, since she is forever seeking and accepting.

Patty plays another important role in Michael's development. She understands how the Foster church works as a devout member, and what she tells Michael becomes the foundation for his grokking of religion from its practical application viewpoint.

The Heaven scene outlines an afterlife that is similar to regular life. Digby does not develop rapidly enough and resents Michael. This is also a foreshadowing of Michael



starting his own religion. Foster plays the senior angel on their level, which may not be very far up the heavenly chain. His viewpoint from above acknowledges the value he sees in Mrs. Douglas and Patty, who seem to be veteran human players.

Michael finishes up his development as a full human being by finding the absurdity in the human condition, a theme from existentialism. Everybody treats everyone beneath on the social hierarchy cruelly, and the stimulus for the cruelty is far removed from the target. With this newly found insight, Michael is ready to start his religion, which will be like every other religion except with a Martian twist to it.



Part 4: His Scandalous Career, Chapter 30 - 33

Part 4: His Scandalous Career, Chapter 30 - 33 Summary

Michael attends seminary school and succeeds in earning the wrathful hatred of every theologian. He does a military stint and proves that violence is never effective against a disciplined human being. Jubal considers his pranks while in the army, such as making weapons disappear along with commanding officers' trousers, Michael's delayed boyhood working itself out. Now Michael promotes himself as The Reverend Dr. Valentine M. Smith, A.B., D.D., Ph.D.—founder and pastor of the Church of All Worlds, which sickens Jubal. However, Michael obtains the degrees through common, if not strictly honest, means.

Ben Caxton visits and Jubal engages him in a discussion about Rodin's sculpture replicas, which Jubal has been collecting. Ben cannot understand the La Belle Heaulmiere, because he only sees its surface. The pretzel-like figure of the Caryatid Who has Fallen under the Weight of her Stone repulses Ben in a similar fashion. Jubal argues that simple symbols evoke predictable responses, but when a master sculpts, the emotions run deeper and richer. The beauty in great art requires an eye for the beauty, and that eye usually needs development.

Jubal tells Ben that he has lost Duke and that two of his secretaries are pregnant. Miriam is engaged to Mahmoud. Jubal knows that Jill indeed took Michael's virginity, and now she helps him at his new church. The two men discuss the pregnancies and who might be responsible, and they finally agree that Michael is most probably the father. Jubal expresses concern for Michael due to his church project. Ben reveals the fact that he has just returned from the church and tells Jubal the story.

Ben's visit to Michael's church starts out with a kiss from Patty, who wears nothing but her tattoos and a pet snake. She invites him to shed his clothes. Decades of modesty cause Ben to decline and just remove his shoes, but later he strips down to his shorts.

Several odd things catch Ben's attention, beside the fact that Patty wears no clothing. She uses certain phrases that seem like clichés: "share water" and "waiting is" for examples. Two large bowls hold cash at the doorway, and Patty explains that anyone can take any amount for any reason. A sign on the inside of the door reminds people that they should wear clothing before leaving the building.

Patty takes Ben to one of Michael's presentations for the All Worlds Church. He speaks from a simple lectern and has a beautiful female on stage in robes, the high priestess. Michael wears a simple white suit, and his presentation is more of a sales pitch than preaching. It involves jokes and magic tricks, which really are not tricks. When the



collection plate is passed, people can take money out as well as contribute. Most contribute.

Michael's version of church service involves strange music, people milling about and socializing, and classic symbols such as a lion lying down with lambs. Ben thinks much of the apparent miracles involve fakery. The service ends with Michael and Jill welcoming new converts with a kiss, during which the converts' clothing disappears. After the service Ben sees Jill and meets her near double, Dawn Ardent, in the living area called the inner nest where nobody wears clothes. Ben sleeps with Dawn and has sex, which is a major ritual within the church.

Ben wakes up and goes to the kitchen for breakfast, and there he encounters Duke, now a deacon in Michael's church. Duke explains to Ben that those who were Michael's initial water brothers are all known as the First Called in the church and enjoy the benefits of high rank. Ruth comes into the kitchen and tells Ben how joining the church has changed her life for the better. He notices that Duke uses a small amount of levitation while he moves around the inner circle house. Michael and Jill come into the living room where all have congregated. They shock Ben by making love in front of everyone. Ben reacts in panic and quickly leaves the building, clothed. He is convinced from this demonstration that everyone in Michael's church is in for big trouble. Jubal talks with Ben about his reactions to Michael's church, but Jubal's concern is more for Michael than the church members.

Part 4: His Scandalous Career, Chapter 30 - 33

Analysis

Michael's church resembles all the others, as does Foster's, with important twists. Rather than regulating sex into monogamous relationships, people are free to casually have sex with each other and to switch partners in a growing-together concept related to being water brothers. Instead of teaching scripture to initiates, new church members learn Martian. The church services are patterned after carnival acts but do include traditional symbolism from several theologies. The whole idea is to entertain and sell the church simultaneously, and the technique works.

Heinlein's theme involves how new churches develop. Either they are based tightly on traditional religion(s) and tend to be against the current culture, or they embrace current culture and borrow lightly from traditional forms. Michael's church embraces not only current culture but also new members in what may be considered lewd and immoral ways. Rather than trying to suppress culture, the All Worlds Church attempts to expand culture into realms that the current culture will resist vehemently—among them nudity, free money and free sex.

Ben's viewpoint takes center stage as a yet-initiated church visitor who happens to be a member of the inner circle as he is one of Michael's first water brothers. However, Ben is still in the current culture and carries with him all the taboos of that culture. Patty, Jill and Dawn have eased into the situation, whereas Ben walks into what seems to him a



very alien environment. Major societal rules have been turned around and people talk in code phrases that he does not understand. Ben does not know about Michael's special abilities and assumes that what he sees must be illusions, but he correctly identifies the church service as a sales pitch, something that the current culture accepts and expects.

Most public presentations involve sales—cars, condos, time-shares—and in this case, religion. However, the product is the truly unique Martian theology, which is not theology in the earthly sense. Rather than based upon revelation and faith, Michael's religion is based on demonstrable reality with the exception of the afterlife. He can send people there in an instant, but he cannot bring them back to testify.

Ben reacts with panic when Michael and Jill break a very powerful taboo. They engage in sex publicly and without trying to disguise the act. Although Jubal comes up with many valid reasons why Ben's reaction is not logical, logic has nothing to do with it. Emotion controls during panic—the instinct to take flight from a threat or to attack it. Since Ben cannot attack, he must run, and any logic beyond that becomes perfect hindsight. Jubal does bring up a chilling danger for Michael—Jesus was crucified for a lesser crime.



Part 5: His Happy Destiny, Chapter 34 - 39

Part 5: His Happy Destiny, Chapter 34 - 39 Summary

Michael's church attracts the disdain of the outer world as a place of sin, and he is branded an anti-Christ. Jubal receives word that Michael's church building has been burnt to the ground. Jubal immediately begins digging around for more information and finds out that Michael has been arrested and thrown in jail. Contacting Ben, Jubal hears that the fire did not injure anyone and that Mike made bail for the others who were arrested, but he remains in jail. Officially, Ben and others are listed as dead or missing.

Jubal flies to where the primary members of Michael's church have congregated—a hotel in Florida that Michael owns. Michael is out of jail and in his dormant state in one of the hotel rooms. Several of the First Called work on a Martian dictionary as per Michael's directions, and Patty has learned to teleport herself. Jubal learns that Michael had broken out of jail by making all the doors disappear and doing the same to a penitentiary, except for the vicious prisoners. When police land to storm the hotel, Michael takes away their guns and shoes.

Doctor Nelson and Ruth's husband Sam bring Jubal up to speed on Michael's church. The key to becoming more like Michael is to learn the Martian language. The English language and all other earthly languages cannot express enough, and so to move ahead, Martian is required. Some of the benefits include better relationships, healthier bodies, calmer emotions and clearer minds. For Jubal, another benefit comes in having sex with Dawn, although he resists at first. She convinces him with her tears.

The next morning Jubal awakes to a household full of accepting water brothers, as he has made the final step to join within their circle. Michael accepts him as his father and needs Jubal's wisdom to complete the church-building project—Michael's Martian-styled piece of art. While explaining how the Martian Old Ones have interest in the Earth and humans, Michael makes an approaching air car disappear. The authorities draw closer, and a crowd gathers outside the hotel. Michael seeks wisdom from Jubal and finds it. He is ready for the end.

Michael wears his white suit and a white panama hat. He leaves the hotel and walks toward the crowd, which turns out to be an angry mob. News cameras follow the events live as Michael starts talking to the mob, and the mob throws rocks at him. Then two men shoot a shotgun and pistol at him. Smiling and talking, Michael goes down, and the crowd burns him to death.

All of Michael's water brothers except Jubal admire the showmanship of the martyrdom. Jubal is shocked and starts to mourn. Michael talks to him through telepathy and assures Jubal that everything is going well, but Michael has more to do. On the other



side, Archangel Foster goes on special assignment, leaving Archangel Digby under the authority of Archangel Michael.

Part 5: His Happy Destiny, Chapter 34 - 39 Analysis

The destruction of Michael's church sets into motion events that build toward climax. The authorities approach in their conventional manners without any idea of what powers Michael has. Their prisons cannot contain him, their weapons cannot hurt him, and their police cannot intimidate him. He is by comparison so entirely superior that he could play god on Earth, but he prefers to teach that we are all God and can do what he does too if we learn Martian.

Ben has been convinced, so that leaves the one last important skeptic, Jubal. Ruth attracts his attention with her beautiful long black hair, and her husband Sam makes a set of appealing arguments in favor of Michael's church. Doctor Nelson, now converted, offers up the medical take on things along with counters to Jubal's powerful grasp of philosophy, history and religion. In the end though, the love of a woman tips Jubal to the side of Michael, as nothing softens a curmudgeon more than female tears.

Jubal's role in Michael's church project becomes acting as the church elder and advising the church leader. Michael needs to know if he has done well enough as he knows he has made many mistakes. In Jubal's way, he reassures Michael and informally hears Michael's confession. Michael is ready to finish his performance on Earth.

In carnival slang, a blowout is an ending act that leaves the crowd impressed and willing to buy. Patty, with her extensive carnival experience, correctly identifies Michael's martyrdom as the quintessential blowout. The mob hates him as an anti-Christ, an evil so black in the world that only burning the body can purge the Earth of it, a very ancient idea. However, Michael is not his body. All his water brothers have come to understand this in a profound way, except Jubal. He needs reassurance, and Michael provides it. The others admire Michael's most excellent blowout.

On the other side, in Heaven by Christian terminology, the Archangel Michael takes over the Earth project with the former Bishop Digby as his underling. Much more needs to be done. Meanwhile, the Martian Old Ones decide that Earth is not worth the bother of grokking, which if they continue could lead to hating the human race and the subsequent destruction of Earth, which is how the Old Ones had dealt with the fifth planet. Once again, Earth is safe from a deadly outer-space threat.



Characters

Valentine Michael Smith

Valentine Michael Smith arrives to Earth from Mars as the most unique human on the planet—he has been raised by Martians to his mid-twenties in Earth years. Michael faces stronger gravity, the learning of English and the understanding of human culture before he can live a normal earthly life. However, his Martian upbringing has taught him superhuman powers—Michael can make things, including people, disappear. He can levitate objects and people, read minds and teleport himself. Michael cannot live a normal human life, as he is an extraordinary man.

Gillian (Jill) Boardman breaks Michael out of the Bethesda Medical Center and brings him to Jubal Harshaw's house. Michael introduces the Martian sharing-water tradition and astounds the household with his powers. Meanwhile the government looks for Michael, as he may hold all rights to the planet Mars. Special Security police come to the house to serve warrants, and Michael blinks them out of existence. He does this when he reaches a cusp of needing to make a decision. Michael's great powers also require him to have high ethics, which the Martians have taught him.

Michael learns enough about human culture to strike out on his own with the help of Jill. He tries several career paths and decides he wants to be a preacher. This leads him to founding his own church based on his Martian knowledge and what he determines about human beings. His church grows rapidly as it provides two fundamental human needs—sex and money—along with the usual benefits of church membership. However, society views the church as an evil thing.

An angry mob kills Michael, and he goes to his death willingly and joyfully, because he knows that death is just a change in form. His body dies and his spirit lives on as the Archangel Michael. He leaves behind his All Worlds Church, which teaches the Martian language to humans, and this in turn allows humans to develop the same powers that Michael gained on Mars.

Jubal Harshaw

Jubal Harshaw is a rich curmudgeon who keeps beautiful female secretaries around him to take his dictated stories for publication and help run his household. He holds advanced degrees in law and medicine. When Jill takes Michael to him, Jubal cares for the boy/man and protects him from the government. Eventually, Michael accepts Jubal as his father.

Jubal's relationships with others range from deep love and fondness to utter contempt. He hates socio-economic climbers, bureaucrats and anyone who is phony. He loves truth and beauty, although he is not too sure about truth. He is absolutely certain about



beauty. His secretaries are beautiful to him, but so is a sculpture of a very old nude woman by Rodin.

Compassion makes up a great deal of Jubal's character. He understands that life can crush a person down, as reflected in his appreciation of another Rodin sculpture of a woman crushed by the weight of her rock. Compassion motivates Jubal to help Michael and to keep his house open to long-term guests, although loneliness motivates as well.

The father role that Jubal plays in Michael's life typifies all fathers. He loves his son but also worries tremendously when Michael starts his own church. Jubal disapproves but keeps out of Michael's affairs. Michael sometimes bothers Jubal. He tries to understand, but the differences are too great and he sometimes loses his temper, which for Jubal is not an uncommon occurrence. He channels the anger well most of the time, putting it directly into the face that deserves it.

Gillian (Jill) Boardman

Gillian Boardman unwittingly becomes Michael's first water brother on Earth. She, in her role as nurse, thinks that she is simply giving him a drink of water. Little does she know that her life becomes tightly coupled with Michael's in a manner far beyond friendship and marriage.

Jill breaks Michael out of hospital confinement, brings him to Jubal's house and cares for Michael—first as his nurse, then his lover and then his partner, during which time Michael needs no further nursing. Michael enables Jill to perceive what men think of her while she works as a showgirl in Las Vegas. She serves as one of his priestesses in the church that Michael founds. Throughout the story, Gillian Boardman draws closer, in the Martian way, to Michael.

A minor love triangle forms between Ben Caxton, Michael and Jill. She has feelings for Ben but not nearly as strong as those for Michael. Yet, Jill never treats Ben badly and always includes him in her life, should he want to be there.

Ben Caxton

Ben Caxton is a crusty journalist who would like to marry Jill, although getting the scoop on the Man from Mars works, too. He tries to force Michael out of his hospital confinement and succeeds only in drawing attention to himself. The government kidnaps Ben and keeps him drugged until Jubal negotiates his release.

Ben represents the average man when Michael begins his church. The nudity bothers Ben at first, but he becomes accustomed to it. However, when Michael and Jill have sex on a couch in front of him and others, Ben panics and runs away from the church. He tells Jubal about his experience, and how he thinks everyone is in big trouble. Jubal argues against Ben's reactions and conclusion. Later, Ben joins Michael's church and contacts Jubal after the first church building burns down.



Secretaries: Anne, Miriam and Dorcas

Jubal's three secretaries are beautiful and competent. Anne, blond and tall, performs as a Fair Witness when needed. Miriam, redheaded and medium-built, takes Jubal's dictated stories, as does Dorcas, who is dark and slim. They feel comfortable enough to throw Jubal into his pool when he becomes too bossy. When taking Michael to meet Secretary General Douglas, the secretaries keep the reporters at bay by spiking their insteps with high heels. Miriam marries Doctor Mahmoud and studies to be a good Muslim wife, or as good as he requires, not being a strict Muslim. Dorcas stays in the background, dark and mysterious.

Secretary General Douglas

Secretary General Douglas wields tremendous political power in the era following World War 3. His interest in Michael revolves around his possible ownership of Mars, a very threatening possibility. Douglas agrees to a compromise that Jubal presents, where Michael gives up any claims to Mars and makes Douglas the manager of Michael's inherited fortune. Mrs. Douglas holds sway over Secretary Douglas, and Jubal uses her indirectly through Madame Vesant in negotiations with Secretary Douglas.

Patricia (Patty) Paiwonski

Patricia Paiwonski is the tattooed lady at the carnival in which Michael and Jill perform a magic act. A devout Fosterite, Patty has tattoos that depict all the major events in Foster's life. She befriends Michael and Jill, who proceed to convert her to the Martian way of thinking. Patty becomes an influential member of Michael's All Worlds Church.

Foster

Foster founds the Church of the New Revelation, a popular cult-like religion. One of his followers, Digby, poisons Foster and takes over the church. In death, Foster lives on as the Archangel Foster and works on a project with Archangel Digby, who Michael has blinked off the Earth.

Digby

Digby starts out as Bishop Digby in the Church of the New Revelation. He tries to convert Michael, but for some reason, Michael decides to blink Digby off the Earth, effectively killing the man. Digby then becomes Archangel Digby under Archangel Foster.



Doctor Mahmoud

Doctor Mahmoud is a linguist who communicates with Michael in Martian. Mahmoud and Jubal enjoy talking about Mars, Martians, religion, science and society, and he becomes one of Jubal's houseguests. Miriam marries Mahmoud and studies to be a good Muslim wife, although her husband does not require strict adherence.

Madam Vesant

Madam Vesant is Mrs. Douglas' astrologer and Jubal's friend. She works with Jubal to influence Secretary Douglas through Mrs. Douglas. Madam Vesant becomes a member of Michael's church and adjusts her astrology to fit with the new ideas.

Oliver Cavendish

Oliver Cavendish serves as Fair Witness when Ben Caxton confronts the authorities at the Bethesda Medical Center in an attempt to free Michael. In his role as Fair Witness, Cavendish must observe without judgment or interference. He also must recall fine details without making any assumptions.

Duke

Duke takes care of Jubal's many electronic gadgets in his house and stays there as a guest. When Michael starts his church, Duke joins up and thoroughly enjoys the experience. He tries to convince Ben Claxton to join, but Ben has his reservations.

Martian Old Ones

The Martian Old Ones control all of society on Mars. They had once been living in Martian bodies but have died, or "discorporated" in Martian parlance. The Old Ones have great knowledge and wisdom. They live only in the mind and work at grokking various things. If they fully grok something and hate it, they may destroy the hated thing.

Humans

The humans on planet Earth live very different lives than the Martians. Humans struggle daily for survival, power, wealth and happiness. We feel a broad range of emotions and grapple with sexual passions and desires. Michael demonstrates by his very existence that humans can do better, and this becomes his artistic project as the Archangel Michael.



Objects/Places

Jubal's House

Jubal's house in Pennsylvania is a large mansion with a swimming pool and gardens. He keeps an open-house policy, as long as his guests are useful or interesting.

Bethesda Medical Center

The government puts Michael into the Bethesda Medical Center where he is closely guarded. Ben Caxton attempts to free Michael and fails. Gillian Boardman succeeds.

Foster's Church

Foster's church provides many of the things that humans need from religion and is a large structure with restricted zones.

Michael's Church

Michael's church is a large structure with restricted zones, but moves away from an institutional quality to luxurious comfort.

Hotel in Florida

The hotel in Florida, owned by Michael, is where he and his followers gather after the main church burns down. Michael's martyrdom happens at the hotel.

Mars

Mars, the fourth planet from the Sun, is where Michael grows up and learns his superhuman powers. Humans explore Mars and begin to colonize. The Martians do not seem to take notice.

Water

Martians, including Michael, consider water to be a highly important thing. Mars has little water, and so it becomes a potent symbol for growing closer to one another.



Jubal's Swimming Pool

Michael first experiences the abundance of water on Earth in Jubal's swimming pool. He also hides on the bottom when police come to Jubal's house.

Atlantic Ocean

The Atlantic Ocean greatly impresses Michael. It contains more water than he has ever imagined possible.

Guns

Michael considers guns to be wrong no matter what. He makes many of them disappear due to their wrongness.

Setting

The novel takes place on Earth, sometime in the future, when government is vastly different, and technology has given humanity both new conveniences and complications. Into this complex political and social environment comes Valentine Michael Smith, a human being who was left alone on Mars by a failed exploratory expedition. He was raised, educated, and socialized by Martians, not humans, and does not understand most human behavior and motivation. He is befriended by Jill Boardman, a nurse, and Ben Caxton, a journalist, who enlist the help of Jubal Harshaw, a powerful writer. Their efforts to protect Michael from exploitation by the political and religious forces of the day provide the interest and adventure of the plot. Michael's determination to take his own place in the world and his desire to demonstrate the value of his unique abilities and perceptions provide the resolution of the problems that Michael and others face every day.



Social Sensitivity

In *Stranger in a Strange Land* Heinlein frankly discusses issues that are always emotionally charged. Since the novel deals without shame or preconceived ideas with American culture's attitudes about religion and sexuality, parents and teachers should be aware that this is not a typical "juvenile" science-fiction novel. In fact, it is one of Heinlein's more mature and provocative works, suitable for young adults who are able to appreciate social structures and institutions as well as question them.

Stranger in a Strange Land quickly earned a reputation far outside the boundaries of science fiction. It became associated with the youth movement of the 1960s and was considered an element of the ideology of rebellion against authority and traditional ideas.

Valentine Michael Smith, after examining the habits and values of humans, decides that they are hypocritical and that sexuality is an expression of love that should be essentially unrestricted in its enjoyment. He decides that nakedness is a kind of purity. He believes in the power of the body to heal itself and that all people are God.

He is not, however, presented as a messiah for all people. He possesses abilities that ordinary humans do not have. His opinions and attitudes—the tenets of his "church"—are arrived at as much from confusion and misunderstanding of humans as they are from logical thought. Most importantly, they are not arrived at without philosophical resistance, primarily from the characters of Jubal Hershaw and Ben Caxton.

Mike's way is not the only way.

The treatment Heinlein gives organized religion may upset some readers and parents. He presents organized religion as demagogic, shameful, and corrupt. This is, however, no more pessimistic a view than that Heinlein gives of other social institutions. In his view, government is morally bankrupt; the press is nosy and superficial; entertainment, especially television, is mindless and dependent on spectacle. Heinlein is evenhanded in his critical view of society, and he presents his views rationally through the character of Jubal Harshaw.

The book will undoubtedly spark debate, which is probably what Heinlein intended. If young adults are mature enough to handle a discussion of these topics, they are mature enough to read and enjoy the novel.



Literary Qualities

Stranger in a Strange Land initially seems to be an allegory of human religious belief, one that consciously uses an aspect of traditional religious literature, such as the Bible. Heinlein provides support for this approach in the way he presents the character of Michael. He is a "new" man, innocent and unspoiled by human society. He offers a different form of the promise of salvation. After examining the entire spectrum of human religious endeavor, he invents a new religion that, to him, will realize the potential he sees in humanity.

He is guided in this process by the character who he considers his "father," Jubal Harshaw. He tries to correct those religions he considers false and, finally, succumbs to the lack of understanding found in the very people he hopes to instruct. These facets of the book suggest a conscious effort by Heinlein to create a modern religious story, one paralleling the story of Christ's life.

The danger of this assumption, however, is that the parallels are not exact, and the sympathies of the author do not necessarily lie exclusively with Mike, the Christ-figure. Instead, Heinlein's sympathies seem to lie with Jubal, who is a "devout agnostic," who does not accept the "random chance" theory of creation.

Jubal sees a humble admission that people do not know the source of creation as more honest than any contentions that people do know. For Jubal, the ultimate "unreligious" attitude attempts to convert others to one's own version of religious knowledge.

This is the point at which the strictly allegorical reading of the novel as a "new" Christ story breaks down. Jubal, the "father," is not by nature or temperament happy with the professions of faith made by Mike. Heinlein actually reverses the New Testament story: in Christian terms, Christ must maintain a faith in the Father; in *Stranger in a Strange Land*, the doubter, Jubal, must have faith in his "son."

Other aspects of the novel support the suggestion of allegorical intent. Heinlein uses biblical names for some characters in the story but leaves it to the reader to decide whether the names are being used ironically.

Heinlein also offers a wide variety of human religions for comparison with Mike's new vision. Besides traditional Christianity, he presents Islam, evangelicalism, atheism, astrology, and even irreligion—the situation of those who live on the fringes of society, who are "marked" in various ways, who find no hope in traditional religion, and who consider themselves abandoned.

Though *Stranger in a Strange Land* emphasizes theme, Heinlein remains true to his craft as a writer by including the excitement, novelty, and crisp characterization that mark all of his fiction.

This novel may be the least "scientific" of his science-fiction works, but it is not a dry dissertation on religion; it maintains the level of suspense and adventure that Heinlein readers expect. The wealth of ideas that *Stranger in a Strange Land* offers for a discussion of social, philosophical, and religious issues is delivered through the vehicle of a fascinating narrative.



Themes

The Nature of God

Heinlein implies that the nature of God is a corporate structure with a suggestion box. Archangels can work on projects and propose other projects, but the laws of nature within a specific region of the Universe must be followed. However, human beings do not understand the laws of nature as much as the Martians, who take the time to grok things in their fullness.

The Martians have no concept of religion. Their understanding of life and its meaning cannot be questioned, as the very act of questioning has no meaning. Grokking is to know everything that can be known about a subject, and when all is known, there can be no doubt and no conflict. The Martians understand the afterlife so well that their dead continue to participate in the Martian culture as easily as human elders participate in earthly religions. Ethics is not a branch of philosophy on Mars—either something is right or wrong. All things are right until determined wrong, and if wrong enough, can be destroyed.

Valentine Michael Smith comes to Earth with these Martian ideas about the nature of God. Earthly ideas on the subject only confuse him until he fully groks the situation, and then he runs into trouble. On Earth, there is contention and conflict, and one common method of resolution is violence. The prophet Smith, an anti-Christ, must be killed. Michael allows this to happen, as it is part of his art project, which is the advancement of the human race into another level.

The Beginning of Religion

Humans need religion. Somehow, all the mysterious things in existence must be explained, and in ways that make enough sense. The Universe must have a beginning and end. Life must have a force not of this world to exist. Something must have designed things so sublime as a snowflake or an infant. Love must have a source. Humans have worked hard to come up with the answers, and we have developed quite a variety of them for any one question.

To avoid confusion, humans invented religion. People gather and share the same answers to specific questions, which brings order to chaos. This god is the right one; this morality the proper one; this behavior the only good one. The religions take on similar structures as the organization works. Heinlein describes the common structure of religions as concentric circles, where the Fosterites have three and the All World Church has nine. The outer circle recruits members and the most inner circle contains church elders and the highly advanced members. Sometimes the inner circle contains privileged members who have not done much of anything but be in the right place at the right time, such as Ben Caxton.



Competing churches vie for membership in various ways, but effective methods involve entertainment and food. Participatory entertainment works best and the food must at least be tasty, preferably extra special. The Fosterites stretch this idea into current tastes and desires, while Michael's church fully steps into another level. The entertainment in Michael's church is magic and new members get to have sex, which beats the church luncheon every time. Additionally, the Michael's church is not only free but members can take money out of the collection plate.

Social Change

Michael brings to Earth a whole new social order, where all are God (including every living being, not just humans) and all should be water brothers. Nationalism has no meaning in this order, nor does religious or racial superiority. These attitudes became foci during the social changes during the 1960s, but as history has shown, the changes are limited by a reality that does not include Heinlein's Martians. However, some of Heinlein's proposed changes have, to various degrees, taken hold.

The so-called sexual revolution led to a better understanding of human sexuality, if not the consequences of casual sex. STD (Sexually Transmitted Disease) is unknown in Michael's church, due to members being able to control their bodies or Michael's ability to blink disease out of existence. For a period of time, people tried to come closer together in the real world, but this could not be sustained. People had no water-brother concept, nor did they understand what grokking something truly means in Martian, as the language is fictional.

In Heinlein's story, social change inevitably comes from a new understanding of the Universe and the realization of human potential. In the real world, social change moves slowly and not always for the better. Some changes may be impossible, such as the elimination of jealousy, anger and violence. Poverty may be an unavoidable life condition. Political and religious conflicts may be characteristics of any society on any planet in the Universe. Heinlein's story is fantasy with a touch of science fiction, a what-if scenario that if nothing else, reveals the absurdities of life. Social change may or may not arise from these observations.

Human Relationships

Heinlein addresses two major human relationships—woman/man and parent/child. Gillian Boardman and Valentine Michael Smith represent a near-perfect woman/man relationship, while Jubal Harshaw and Michael represent a strong parent/child relationship.

Jill's first relationship with Ben Caxton goes nowhere. Both have put their professions into higher priorities. Then Jill stumbles into Michael's absolute commitment through the sharing-water ceremony that, had she understood the meaning, she likely would have avoided. Then Michael displays his super-human powers and becomes the perfect boyfriend—protective, patient, interesting and ambitious. He also appeals to her



nurturing instincts until he fully develops as a man and she becomes a high priestess in his church. Codependency evaporates.

Jubal immediately takes the Man from Mars underneath his formidable wing. Michael needs protection until he understands humanity better, and Jubal is the man to effectively protect such an innocent and seemingly vulnerable young man. Very quickly though, Jubal realizes that humanity needs protection from Michael too, due to the boy/man's ability to blink an entire air craft full of police officers out of existence. Jubal allows Michael leave the house and strike out on his own, as any good parent would do, and lets him know that he is welcome to return at any time. Additionally, Jubal worries about Michael when he starts his church and mourns at his death, typical fatherly traits.

Michael accepts Jubal as his father toward the end of his life. He needs Jubal's advice and blessing, although Jubal would rather his son not throw his life away.

Power Manipulation

Ben Caxton attempts to manipulate power and ends up a drugged prisoner of the government. Jill does not manipulate power but sneaks around it. Jubal slaps power in the face, kicks it in the shin and demands an apology for his trouble. Michael trumps Jubal and simply makes power disappear.

The scene where Jill tells Jubal about Michael's ability to blink people out of existence at first shocks him, then makes him jealous—Jubal has a long list of people who deserve the same treatment. However, if looks could kill, few people would be left on planet Earth. When Jubal uses his power manipulation abilities, he does so for specific purposes that seem ethical in the long run, not necessarily at the time. He has no qualms about using an old friend to get at Secretary Douglas, and the old friend (Madame Vesant) not only cooperates but also enjoys helping out. Exactly what Michael would do with Jubal's list of undesirables is up to speculation, but his ethical sense runs far deeper than Jubal's. The blinking away of guns, shoes and trousers are more to Michael's taste.

Jubal manipulates power through negotiation and by presenting a fierce response when confronted with misused authority. He has nothing but contempt for mindless bureaucrats, lackeys and thugs. On the other hand, Michael simply removes power when it is wrong enough or when doing so would make a good joke while serving a purpose. Removing trousers effectively knocks authority down.

Human Nature

Michael does not suffer from an earthly childhood. He has no religious training to muddle his thinking, no early schooling to close his mind, no bullies to teach him the value of dominance, no concern about money and no rejections to scar his heart. He comes to Earth with only the pure intellectuality of the Martians and the emotional certainty of water brotherhood.



Yet, Michael is a human being, a young man in his prime years. He makes a perfect control for determining how much of human nature involves learned behavior versus inherent qualities and faults. The English language confounds him, as it does most students of the tongue. This can be put on the nature side. The chaos of earthly life sometimes makes him withdraw, so this goes on the nature side as well. Anger does not exist for Michael, but love does and at an extreme depth. Martians also love, with the flip side of the coin being hate. Both emotions go on the nature side. Michael learns to kiss and make love—nurture. He kills when somebody is wrong enough—nature. He wants to help humanity, naturally. He learns to invent religion, which provides a basic human need. This one is half-and-half.

Humanity can be astoundingly evil or surprisingly good. Whether human nature is fundamentally good or evil depends upon knowing our natural tendencies, our learned behaviors and taking into account viewpoint. For example, blinking out the police is good for Jubal and his household, evil for the police officers, their families and the government. Heinlein modifies the usual thinking about human nature by adding Martian ethics to Michael's character, which justify the blinking out of wrongness in the Universe. The idea that all living things are God puts another wrinkle into human nature, in that it is also God's nature—perhaps just a part of God's nature.



Themes/Characters

Stranger in a Strange Land offers two views of human society, each inextricably linked to a main character in the story. Valentine Michael Smith is "the man from Mars." He is enormously powerful, educated in a fundamentally different way from humans, and generally innocent of the complexities of life on Earth. He provides the outsider's view of human society. He approaches every experience with no preconceived notions or attitudes.

Jubal Harshaw, "bon vivant, gourmet, sybarite, popular author extraordinary, and neo-pessimist philosopher," offers the insider's view. Jubal is a character that seems to have done everything and has found almost everything unfulfilling. He is the ultimate curmudgeon with a heart of gold, the quintessential skeptic and pessimist who can still take advantage of society's weaknesses by writing fiction that appeals to the most tawdry emotional desires. Jubal has seen a great deal of human society and has very little hope for its future. Mike has seen very little of humanity and has an infinite capacity to see the potential in humans.

The first part of the book establishes this opposition and puts these views in conflict. Mike, with the help of Jill and Ben, escapes from a hospital where he is being held and goes into hiding with Jubal. There he finds protection and the time to acclimate to his new earthly society.

In an astounding fashion, the seeming opposite personalities of Jubal and Mike find themselves intellectually drawn to each other. Mike's innocence leads him to ask Jubal a great many questions about human society, which, in their simplicity, are among the most essential questions about what it means to be human. In his attempts to answer Mike, Jubal elaborates on his pessimistic view of humanity.

This intellectual relationship undergoes a severe test when Mike, after a visit to an evangelical church service, becomes convinced that his perceptions of the human-Martian world he now inhabits can provide the basis of a new human religion.

One by one, the friends and acquaintances surrounding Jubal are converted to Mike's new religion, until only Jubal himself remains unconverted. It is here that the opposite viewpoints of Jubal and Mike are most dramatic.

The other characters move between the extremes represented by Mike and Jubal. Jill, the first to become involved with Mike, is the most susceptible to his theories and plans. Heinlein leaves it to the reader to decide whether Jill is an intelligent follower of a new kind of philosophy, or whether she is an emotional victim of a cult that promises happiness without sacrifice.

After Jubal, Ben Caxton is most skeptical of Mike's religious crusade. But while Jubal's doubts are philosophical and social, Ben's misgivings are personal. He is jealous of Jill's



devotion to Mike and reluctant to convert to a religion that does not acknowledge his personal affection for Jill.

The reactions of Jill and Ben to the new world of love and personal relationships that Mike offers can perhaps be seen as typically gender based. Ben and Jill represent the most common problems that men and women have in the realm of love and desire. Their emotional turmoil may seem stereotypical, but Heinlein believes that their encounter with a completely different way of life reveals and shakes their social and emotional assumptions.

In demonstrating the emotional dilemma of these characters, Heinlein suggests that the freedom to love completely does not come without cost. Some of the most basic human emotions, the emotions that surround desire and love, must be discarded or modified significantly if people are to open themselves completely to the "perfect" world of the future.

Heinlein's final question is whether humans have the capacity to take these steps. His answer is expressed through Mike at the end of the book: people can be whatever they want to be, but they need help from both human and extrahuman sources.



Style

Point of View

Heinlein writes from the omniscient narrator point of view and concentrates on two characters—Valentine Michael Smith and Jubal Harshaw. He allows for supporting characters' points of view as well, such as Gillian Boardman and Ben Caxton. He uses point of view to bring out various ideas through dialog and narrative that reveal the attitudes and feelings of the characters, while expounding through the omniscient narrator.

Michael sees the world as a confusing place during his development phase on Earth. He often needs to go into his dormant state to figure things out, but his goal is to become water brothers with as many people as he can.

Jubal sees the world as a nasty place full of dangerous or uninteresting people. He trusts few and admires fewer, but once on his good side he defends with vigor and relish against the nasty world.

Ben Caxton shares Jubal's cynicism with the world, a requirement for a journalist. Gillian Boardman contrasts with the idealism of a nurse. The two viewpoints attract as Ben admires idealism that can survive the world, while Jill needs cynicism to avoid disasters.

Heinlein provides grand contrasting viewpoints of the Martians versus the Earthlings. Martians see the Universe as something to figure out and control. Earthlings want to explore, observe and have a good time. Michael blends the two with an amount of control for Earthlings.

Setting

The Bethesda Medical Center setting where the government keeps Michael restricts access to him, but not so much that Jill cannot find a way into his room or manage his escape. Jubal's house provides a much better environment for Michael's development and a pleasant atmosphere until the police arrive.

After Michael and Jill leave Jubal's house, the settings turn dark. The carnival exposes the larcenous side of humanity while Las Vegas crawls with sexually repressed men. Nevertheless, Michael and Jill have the ability to change their settings by changing their perceptions of them. The carnival becomes a lesson in showmanship and Las Vegas an experiment in sharing minds.

Michael's All Worlds Church building makes Jubal's house seem like a slumlord's. Not only are beautiful women and men about, they nonchalantly wear their birthday suits. Engaging in sex is as easy as tapping a shoulder. Money bowls set near the door, the



lucre free for the taking. The luxury hotel in Florida, although not a bad hideout, fails to compete.

Heinlein describes a Mars environment that supports life but has little attraction other than to natives, explorers and pioneers. His afterlife Heaven resembles a corporate research and development laboratory. Of all the settings, Michael's church approaches paradise on Earth, except the government burns it down. People are not ready for that kind of setting.

Language and Meaning

Heinlein's utilitarian prose tells the story in a straightforward manner, although he invents words and uses descriptive phrasing in place of curse words, which keeps the story polite yet earthy. He fully defines major word inventions, such as "grok" but takes a few liberties with standard word forms. However, the English language develops this way. His liberties are not strictly correct, but maybe they should be.

Character names have special significance, most obviously Valentine Michael Smith, which associates Michael with love, the archangel Michael and the common human. Ben Caxton's name can be associated with Big Ben in London and a klaxon alarm, which journalists do—sound the alarm that something is not right. Jubal is an Old Testament name of a man who is given credit for inspiring music. The name Dorcas comes from Acts, a queen of England had been named Anne, and Miriam was the sister of Moses. Exactly what Heinlein intended these names to mean is less important than being aware that he had selected them carefully, according to his widow.

The uncut version of *Stranger in a Strange Land* includes an extra 60,000 words that the original publication did not, but that Heinlein's widow affirms he intended to publish. Most of this extra material seems to be exposition and back-story that most modern editors would cut to the detriment of understanding the author's thinking on various subjects. Both versions of the book carry the primary meanings clearly, which are to expose and satirize modern life, and to propose a few possibilities for improvement. Unfortunately, the improvements depend upon the Martian language, which is fictional. Michael's utopia continues to lie beyond human reach.

Structure

The book consists of five parts and thirty-nine chapters numbered sequentially through the parts. The parts follow Michael's development from origin to definition, education, career and finally destiny or death. Some chapters flash back and others start with a grand overview before focusing on the plot. The plotline moves straight ahead with subplots intersecting quickly. A vague parallel plot involves the Martian Old Ones and their grokking of Earth, a project that they drop at the end of the story, a fortunate turn for the survival of Earth.



Dialog and narrative intersperse in a familiar way, although Heinlein often uses dialog as a substitution for narrative. This gives the book a heavy feeling, especially the uncut version, and can lead to the reader missing key story points. On the other hand, dialog pacing in significant scenes zips right along to tension, resolution or climax.

The buildup to the final big climax—Michael's martyrdom—follows along logically and with sufficient foreshadowing. The progression is step-wise, where Michael attains a level of both development and notoriety before moving quickly on to the next effort for the next level. The connection of water brotherhood draws other characters upward too, although their destinies do not match Michael's.



Quotes

"At the hour in the morning when human nurses slap patient's faces with cold, wet cloths under the pretense of washing them, Smith returned from his journey. He speeded up his heart, increased his respiration, and again took note of his surroundings, viewing them with serenity. He looked the room over, noting without discrimination and with praise all its details, both important and unimportant. He was, in fact, seeing it for the first time, as he had been incapable of enfolding it when he had been brought there the day before. This commonplace room was not commonplace to him; there was nothing remotely like it on all Mars, nor did it resemble the wedge-shaped, metal-walled compartments of the Champion. But, having relived the events linking his nest to this place, he was now prepared to accept it, commend it, and in some degree to cherish it" (pp. 24-25).

"She felt better when she saw Ben and better yet when she kissed him and snuggled into his arms. Ben was such a dear—maybe she really should marry him. But when she tried to speak he put a hand over her mouth, then whispered close against her ear, 'Don't talk. No names and nothing but trivialities. I may be wired by now'" (p. 48).

"He had no clear idea how long it had been since he had first shared water with this brother; not only was this place curiously distorted in time and shape, with sequences of sights and sounds and experiences new to him and not yet grokked, but also the culture of his nest took a different grasp of time from that which is human. The difference lay not in their much longer lifetimes as counted in Earth years, but in a basically different attitude. The sentence, 'It is later than you think,' could not have been expressed in Martian—nor could 'Haste makes waste,' though for a different reason: the first notion was inconceivable while the latter was an unexpressed Martian basic, as unnecessary as telling a fish to bathe. But the quotation, 'As it was in the Beginning, is now and ever shall be,' was so Martian in mood that it could be translated more easily than 'two plus two makes four'—which was not a truism on Mars" (p. 80).

"Agnes Douglas' personal saint, by choice, was Evita Peron, whom she fancied she resembled. Her own persona, the mask that she held out to the world, was that of helper and satellite to the great man she was privileged to call husband. She even held this mask up to herself, for she had the Red Queen's convenient ability to believe anything she wished to believe. Nevertheless, her own political philosophy could have been stated baldly (which it never was) as a belief that men should rule the world and women should rule men" (p. 100).

"Around a minor G-type star fairly far out toward the edge of a medium-sized galaxy the planets of that star swung as usual, just as they had for billions of years, under the influence of a slightly modified inverse square law that shaped the space around them. Three of them were big enough, as planets go, to be noticeable; the rest were mere pebbles, concealed in the fiery skirts of the primary or lost in the black outer reaches of space. All of them, as is always the case, were infected with the oddity of distorted entropy called life; in the cases of the third and fourth planets their surface temperatures



cycled around the freezing point of hydrogen monoxide—in consequence they had developed life forms similar enough to permit a degree of social contact.

"On the fourth pebble out the ancient Martians were not in any important sense disturbed by the contact with Earth. The nymphs of the race still bounded joyously around the surface of Mars, learning to live, and eight out of nine of them dying in the process. The adult Martians, enormously different in body and mind from the nymphs, still huddled in or under faerie, graceful cities, and were as quiet in their behavior as the nymphs were boisterous—yet were even busier than the nymphs, busy with a complex and rich life of the mind" (pp. 118-119).

"Harshaw stopped long enough to remind himself that this baby innocent was neither babyish nor innocent—was in fact sophisticated in a culture which he was beginning to realize, however dimly, was far in advance of human culture in some mysterious ways . . . and that these naïve remarks came from a superman—or what would do in place of a 'superman' for the time being. Then he answered Smith, choosing his words most carefully as he had in mind a dangerous experiment and did not want disaster to follow from semantic mishap" (p. 152).

"If God existed (a question concerning which Jubal maintained a meticulous intellectual neutrality) and if He desired to be worshipped (a proposition which Jubal found inherently improbable but conceivably possible in the dim light of his own ignorance), then (stipulating affirmatively both the above) it nevertheless seemed wildly unlikely to Jubal to the point of *reductio ad absurdum* that a God potent to shape galaxies would be titillated and swayed by the whoop-te-do nonsense the Fosterites offered Him as 'worship.'

"But with bleak honesty Jubal admitted to himself that the Universe (correction: that piece of the Universe he himself had seen) might very well be in toto an example of reduction to absurdity. In which case the Fosterites might be possessed of the Truth, the exact Truth, and nothing but the Truth. The Universe was a damned silly place at best . . . but the least likely explanation for its existence was the no-explanation of random chance, the conceit that some abstract somethings 'just happened' to be some atoms that 'just happened' to get together in configurations which 'just happened' to look like consistent laws and then some of these configurations 'just happened' to possess self-awareness and the two such 'just happened' to be the Man from Mars and the other a bald-headed old coot with Jubal himself inside.

"No, Jubal would not buy the 'just happened' theory, popular as it was with men who called themselves scientists. Random chance was not a sufficient explanation of the Universe—in fact, random chance was not sufficient to explain random chance; the pot could not hold itself.

"What then? 'Least hypothesis' held no place of preference; Occam's razor could not slice the prime problem, the Nature of the Mind of God (might as well call it that to yourself, you old scoundrel; it's a short, simple, Anglo-Saxon monosyllable, not banned by having four letters—and as good a tag for what you don't understand as any).

"Was there any basis for preferring any one sufficient hypothesis over another? When you simply did not understand a thing: No! And Jubal readily admitted to himself that a long lifetime had left him completely and totally not understanding the basic problems of



the Universe.

"So the Fosterites might be right. Jubal could not even show that they were probably wrong" (pp. 178-179).

"I feel certain that he would. Duke, almost the only human characteristic Mike seems to possess is an overwhelming desire to be liked. But I want to make sure that you know how serious it is to him. Much more serious than getting married. I myself accepted water brotherhood with Mike before I understood it—and I've become more and more deeply entangled with its responsibilities the more I've grokked it. You'll be committing yourself never to lie to him, never to mislead or deceive him in any way, to stick by him come what may—because that is just what he will do with you. Better think about it" (p. 222).

"In one limb of a spiral galaxy, close to a star known as 'Sol' to some of its dependents, another star of the same type underwent catastrophic readjustment and became nova. Its glory would be seen on Mars in another three-replenished (729) years, or 1370 Terran years. The Old Ones noted the coming event as being useful On Earth the exploding neighbor star was not noticed at all, human astronomers still being limited by speed of light" (p. 283).

"Digby then proceeded to act as if he meant it. Jubal was forced to admit that the glib fraud was a charming host, and his coffee and liquor and food were all excellent. Jubal noticed that Mike seemed decidedly jumpy, especially when Digby deftly cut him out of the herd and spoke with him alone—but, confound it, the boy was simply going to have to get used to meeting people and talking to them on his own, without Jubal or Jill or somebody to feed him his lines" (p. 313).

"They drove into town with Mike at the controls. It was a fairly small town, without automatic traffic control even downtown. Mike drove with careful precision, exactly at zone maximum and sliding the little ground car into holes Jill could not see until they were through them. He did it without effort in the same fashion in which he juggled. Jill knew how it was done, had even learned to do it a bit herself; Mike stretched his time sense until the problem of juggling eggs or speeding through traffic was an easy one with everything in slow motion. Nevertheless she reflected that it was an odd accomplishment for a man who, only months earlier, had been baffled by tying shoelaces" (pp. 340-341).

"Foster turned back to where he had been interrupted. Oh, yes, a poor soul temporarily designated as 'Alice Douglas'—to be a goad was a hard assignment at best and she had met it unflinching. But her job was complete and now she would need rest and rehabilitation from the inescapable battle fatigue . . . she'd be kicking and screaming and foaming ectoplasm at all orifices" (p. 370).

"It had not troubled Jubal when Mike was run out of Union Theological Seminary, hotly pursued in spirit by a pack of enraged theologians, some of whom were angry because they believed in God and others because they did not—but all united in detesting the



Man from Mars. Jubal honestly evaluated anything that happened to a theologian short of breaking him on the wheel was no more than meet—and the experience was good for the boy; he'd know better next time" (p. 392).

"He turned and had Jill in his arms and her mouth warm and greedy against his—and was very glad that he had not quite finished stripping. For she was no longer 'Mother Eve'; she was wearing one of the long, all-enveloping priestess robes. Nevertheless he was happily aware that he had a double armful of live, warm, and gently squirming girl; her priestly vestment was no greater impediment that would have been a thin gown, and both kinesthetic and tactile sense told him that the rest was Jill" (p. 426).

"Jubal thought about it, admitted that he was damnably eager to hear from Mike himself just that the score was—and chew him out for having gotten into such a mess—but admitted, too, that disturbing Mike while he as in a trance was almost certainly much worse than disturbing Jubal himself when he was dictating a story—the boy always came out of his self-hypnosis when he had 'grokked the fullness,' whatever that was—and if he hadn't, then he always needed to go back into it. As pointless as disturbing a hibernating bear" (p. 469).

"Smith grinned happily. 'A Jew boy. Thanks for mentioning Him. He's the outstanding success story of my tribe—and we all know it, even though many of us don't talk about Him. But He was a Jew boy that made good and I'm proud of Him, being a Jew boy myself. Please to note that Jesus didn't try to get it all done by next Wednesday. He was patient. He set up a sound organization and let it grow. Mike is patient too. Patience is so much part of the discipline that it isn't even patience; it's automatic. No sweat. Never any sweat" (p. 492).

"Mike grinned with unashamed cheerfulness. 'I am God. Thou art God . . . and any jerk I remove is God, too. Jubal, it is said that God notes each sparrow that falls. And so He does. But the proper closest statement of it that can be made in English is that God cannot avoid noting the sparrow because the Sparrow is God. And when a cat stalks a sparrow, both of them are God, carrying out God's thoughts" (p. 509).



Topics for Discussion

Define Martian ethics.

What are the main concepts in the theology of the All Worlds Church?

How do Fosterites worship?

Write a short essay on the meaning of the Martian term, "grok."

Why does Michael fail as a magician in the carnival?

Profile Jubal Harshaw's character.

How does Michael become an orphan, and why do the Martians take him in?

Construct a timeline of Michael's life from his birth to his death.

Why do Jill and the secretaries find Michael to be such a good kisser?

What is the significance of Michael's martyrdom?



Essay Topics

1. Michael does not fear death. In fact, he believes it to be a change that should be under our control. Is this how we should all view death?
2. Jill's first encounter with Michael involves immersing him in water. What religious ritual does this suggest? Discuss the reasons Heinlein may have had for inserting this scene.
3. Jubal uses his astrologer friend to help him help Mike. What does Heinlein suggest by the presence of an astrologer in a society that is so technologically advanced?
4. Jubal tells Jill that he once thought he was serving humanity, but that he "discovered that humanity does not want to be served; on the contrary it resents any attempt to serve it." How does this observation apply to Michael later in the book?
5. At one point the astrologer Madame Vesant lies to her advisee about the "facts" of her forecast. She provides a justification for the deception. Is it sufficient? Is religious deception ever justifiable?
6. What features of the Fosterite religion does Jubal object to? Do you share these objections?
7. What aspects of the Fosterite religion does Michael adopt for his own religion? Do you agree that they are worthy of consideration?
8. In what areas of religious thought do the opinions of Jubal and Mike become similar as the story progresses? What is the significance of this agreement?
9. Mike makes a "confession" to Jubal near the end of the story. How does that confession affect your opinion of Mike's philosophy and religion?
10. Mike tells Jubal that he charges his followers for religious indoctrination because, "The marks won't pay attention if it's free." What does this policy say about Mike's opinion of humans? Do you agree with it?



Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Jubal says of Mike: "Mike has never tasted the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil ... so we don't understand what makes him tick." Relate Mike's position in the book to that of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden.
2. Jubal, in a conversation with Duke, states that he "will not compare one form of ritual cannibalism with another." To what ritual does he refer? To what degree do the beliefs of Michael regarding "who is God" agree with those of traditional religion?
3. Jubal also says, in defense of his right to associate with whom he pleases: "I dine with publicans and sinners, that is my business. I do not break bread with Pharisees." Report on who the Pharisees were, and why Jubal brings them up in this context.
4. Late in the story, Mike tells Jubal that his commonly-used statement, "Thou art God," is "not a message of cheer and hope . . . It's a defiance—and an unafraid unabashed assumption of personal responsibility." How does this relate to the opinions of religious prophets you are familiar with?
5. Using recent newspapers and magazines in the library, try to find descriptions of religions that appear to be similar to Mike's or the Fosterites'.
6. Compare the presentation of the Martian way of life in this novel with that presented in Heinlein's *Red Planet*. Is the description consistent? How does knowledge of the *Red Planet* accounts affect your opinion of Mike?
7. The title of the book comes from the Old Testament of the Bible. Find the passage in which the phrase occurs, and report on the story in which it is found. Does the story have any relation to the novel? Why do you think Heinlein chose the title?
8. Research the topic of astrology to find out about its influence on political leaders in history. Have any famous leaders relied on astrology, as the government leaders do in the novel?

Further Study

Panshin, Alexei. *Heinlein in Dimension: A Critical Analysis*. Chicago: Advent Publishers, 1968. An overview of Heinlein's works to the time of publication. An accessible critique for young readers.

Patrouch, Joseph. "Robert A. Heinlein." In *Twentieth-Century American Science Fiction Writers*, edited by David Cowart and Thomas L. Wymer. Detroit: Gale Research, 1981. A good introduction to the range and scope of Heinlein's work.

Slusser, George Edgar. *The Classic Years of Robert A. Heinlein*. San Bernardino, CA: Borgo Press, 1977. A good source of some of Heinlein's most enduring themes, particularly applicable to *Red Planet* and *Stranger in a Strange Land*.

Robert A. Heinlein: Stranger in His Own Land. San Bernardino, CA: Borgo Press, 1976. A slightly scholarly but very good assessment of Heinlein's more modern works.

Williamson, Jack. "Youth Against Space: Heinlein's Juveniles Revisited."

In *Robert A. Heinlein*, edited by Joseph D. Olander and Martin Harry Greenberg. New York: Taplinger, 1978. A very good summary of most of Heinlein's books for young adults. The collection itself is a good introduction to major aspects of Heinlein's writing.

Does not directly address *Stranger in a Strange Land*.

Related Titles

Stranger in a Strange Land is similar to many other Heinlein books in the central character of Jubal Harshaw. His gruff manner and insistence on independent living are a staple feature of the main characters of many later Heinlein books, such as Time Enough for Love (1973). In an earlier book, Red Planet, Heinlein provides a look at the Martian way of life.



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