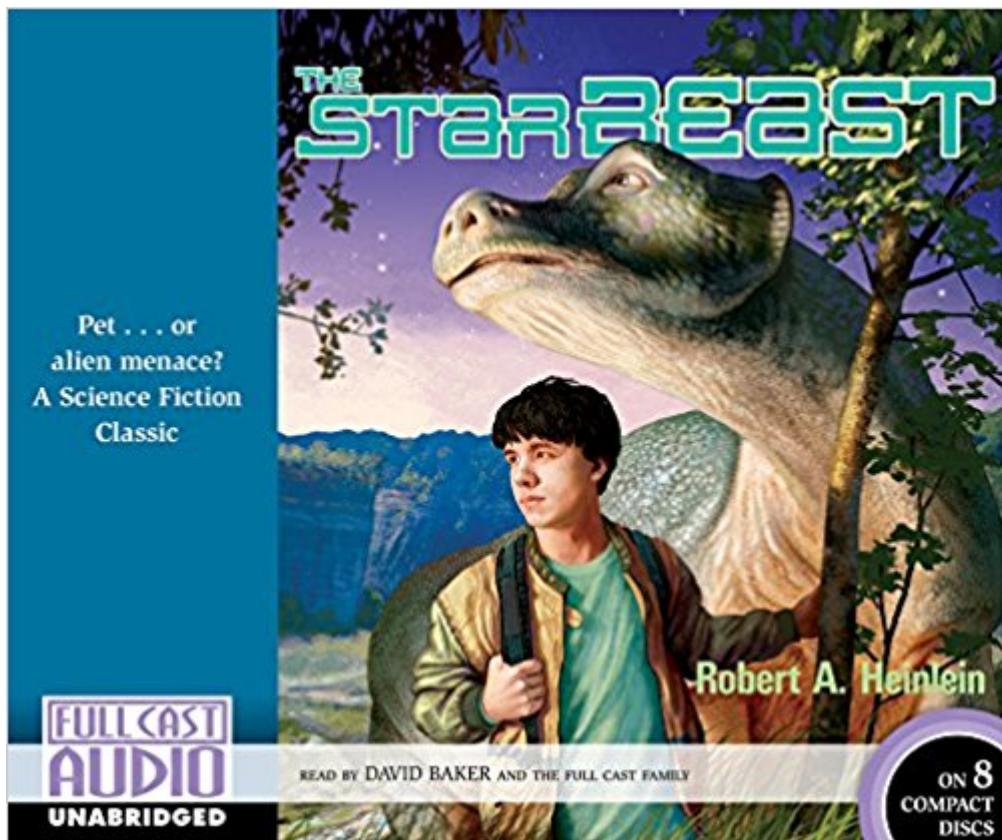


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The Star Beast



Synopsis

Lummox is not exactly the family dog. Big as a triceratops but more exotic in appetiteâ "he once ate a used Buickâ "Lummy" has a decided penchant for trouble. Still, heâ ™s been part of the Thomas clan for generations, and his current owner, John Thomas Stuart, XI, cares for him deeply. Just how deeply will be tested when Lummoxâ ™s restless appetite starts a chain of events that turn his relationship with John Thomas upside downâ "and puts first John Thomas and then the Earth itself in peril. Scorchingly funny, politically acute, yet deeply human, The Star Beast remains one of Robert Heinleinâ ™s most beloved novels.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

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

Lummox had been the Stuart family pet for years. Though far from cuddly and rather large, it had always been obedient and docile. Except, that is, for the time it had eaten the secondhand Buick . . . But now, all of a sudden and without explanation, Lummox had begun chomping down on a variety

of things -- not least, a very mean dog and a cage of virtually indestructible steel. Incredible! John Thomas and Lummox were soon in awfully hot water, and they didn't know how to get out. And neither one really understood just how bad things were -- or how bad the situation could get -- until some space voyagers appeared and turned a far-from-ordinary family problem into an extraordinary confrontation. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Heinlein dramatizes two age old questions with this work - What does the individual owe his group, family, friends, nation, etc.? What does the group, family, friends, nation, etc. owe the individual? These contrasting rights/duties create a marvelous story! For example- the wise old man says; "Your son is a man; you have no moral right to keep him an infant. " What a wicked thing to say! It's not true; I am merely trying to help him and guide him. " Mr. Kiku smiled grimly. " Madam, the commonest weakness of our race is our ability to rationalize our most selfish purposes. I repeat, you have no right to force him into your mold. " " I'm his mother. " " A parent is the same as an owner? " No matter, we are poles apart; you are trying to thwart him, I am helping him to do what he wants to do. " From the basest motives! " Great! Then the wise man must wrestle with the need to save earth. Should he explain danger to public? Just use his best judgement? Submit to vote? " . . . but if the risk is that great, aren't the people entitled to know? " Yes. But we can't tell them. " How's that again? " Mr. Kiku frowned. " Sergei, " he said slowly, " this society has been in crisis ever since the first rocket reached our Moon. For three centuries scientists and engineers and explorers have repeatedly broken through to new areas, new dangers, new situations; each time the political managers have had to scramble to hold things together, like a juggler with too much in the air. It's unavoidable. " But we have managed to keep a jury-rigged republican form of government and to maintain democratic customs. We can be proud of that. But it is not now a real democracy and it can't be. I conceive it to be our duty to hold this society together while it adjusts to a strange and terrifying world. It would be pleasant to discuss each problem, take a vote, then repeal it later if the collective judgment proved faulty. But it's rarely that easy. We find ourselves oftener like pilots of a ship in a life-and-death emergency. Is it the pilot's duty to hold powwows with passengers? Or is it his job to use his skill and experience to try to bring them home safely? " You make it sound convincing, boss. I wonder if you are right? " I wonder also. Heinlein presents this decision as the best a man of sincere integrity can find. Heinlein might not present this same view later in

life. (See also "Propaganda" by Bernays for a scholar's an analysis of this question)

Heinlein's "The Star Beast" remains one of my all-time favorites. Ostensibly a juvenile novel at the time it was published--what we'd call a "young adult" novel these days--there is very little violence; likewise for the sexual content, which is all typically by reference and non-lascivious innuendo where it gets mentioned at all. Some of Heinlein's other young adult novels haven't aged well--"Rocketship Galileo" comes to mind--but 60+ years later, "The Star Beast" still holds up. Very little of the technology references feel anachronistic by today's standards, so your 11-year old niece or nephew shouldn't have too many complaints that a futuristic story has scientists using slide rules on starships (e.g. "Starman Jones"). The basic plotline involves a young man, John Thomas Stuart XI, in his late teens and his pet alien, Lummox, which his starfaring ancestor brought back on one of his trips. After several generations of "John Thomases," one day a bored Lummox, now grown to roughly to the size of an elephant, slips out and innocently rampages through the neighborhood. I won't spoil the details--it's a fun story--but at its heart is Heinlein's prototypical ultra-competent man, exemplified by Mr. Kiku, Permanent Undersecretary for Spacial Affairs. Mr. Kiku knows how things work, how to manipulate situations and people to best advantage, and how to manage in a crisis. Throughout all the plot twists and crisis events, it's a pleasure to watch Mr. Kiku operate. If you are looking to introduce Heinlein to a young person, you couldn't do much better than "The Star Beast."

This was one of my favorites of Heinlein's juveniles as I was growing up, and I still enjoy re-reading it as an adult. I introduced it to my son, who has told me it is his favorite Heinlein novel. He plans to introduce it to his daughter, who will be ready for it in the next few years. Like almost all of Heinlein's works, the writing is timeless. While some of the ideas of technology are obviously not in line with subsequent advances (such as interoffice mail delivered through pneumatic tubes instead of electronically), Heinlein's ability to breathe life into the people is the focus, and makes all the difference. Warning to anyone buying this on Kindle if you haven't read this before: Patterson's preface, which has been added to this edition, contains a richly detailed spoiler of the entire plot. I have no idea why the publishers felt the need to include this at the beginning of the book instead of the end. Many similar books have had this done, but they're normally at the end, where it won't interfere with the reader's enjoyment of the actual story. (The Kindle edition of many of Isaac Asimov's early novels have had essays added at the end, for example.)

This has always been my favorite Heinlein, and I've read most if not all of his work. Unlike the cover

art, I always visualized Lummox as looking something like an appealing alligator with lots of legs and a high squeaky little girl voice rather than appearing as a dangerous dragon-like creature. Whatever the case may be, I wish I had "owned" a pet like Lummox. (Well, who owned whom?)

This book teaches politics, negotiation, ethics, the sameness of the cycle of life. History repeating itself and without much regard to new technology that will come. Maybe you might think it is a children's book by the marketing. Don't be fooled. Enjoy the book.

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