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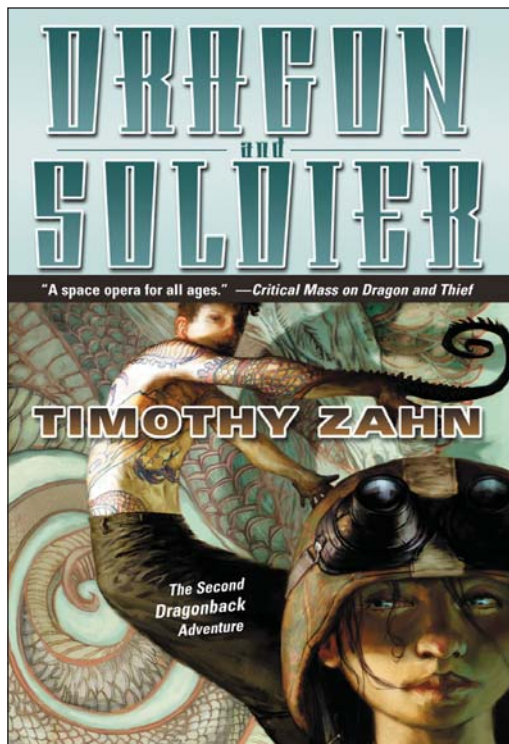
READER'S GUIDE

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Timothy Zahn

Dragon and Soldier



“Plenty of humor, and the adventure and danger levels crackle.”

—BOOKLIST

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



PHOTO: KENT ANKENSEN

Born and raised near Chicago, **Timothy Zahn** earned a B.S. and an M.S. in Physics from the University of Michigan and the University of Illinois, respectively. Known for his acclaimed Star Wars Hand of Thrawn series, the popular and prolific Zahn is the author of twenty-nine science fiction titles: including the bestselling Star Wars trilogy *Heir to the Empire*, *Dark Force Rising* and *The Last Command*; novels *Conquerors' Pride*, *Conquerors' Heritage*, and *Conquerors' Legacy*; four collections of short fiction; and the Hugo Award-winning novella *Cascade Point*. He lives with his family on the Oregon Coast.

ABOUT *DRAGON AND SOLDIER*

Teen orphan and erstwhile thief Jack Morgan was accustomed to life with a single, non-living companion: a spaceship computer programmed with the shifty personality of his deceased Uncle Virge. Then he became host to a K'da poet-warrior named Draycos. Draycos is a symbiont whose survival depends on his attaching himself like a living tattoo to a human-like creature. He joined Jack after the death of his Shontin partner, Polphir, in a mysterious attack on their K'da and Shontine ship.

In the first Dragonback Adventure, *Dragon and Thief*, Draycos helped prove Jack innocent of a crime against mega-corporation Braxton Universis. With K'da warrior ethics gradually altering his criminal ways—and against the advice of Uncle Virge—Jack decides to honor his reciprocal promise to assist Draycos in discovering who massacred his shipmates. So Jack enlists in Whinyard's Edge, a mercenary army known for recruiting the very young, to gain access to critical information in their database.

Having only begun to understand his new symbiont companion, loner Jack must now also cast his lot with a company of young soldiers, some talented, some mysterious, and some merely afraid. To make matters worse, the Whinyard's Edge computers prove more difficult to access than expected. Jack and Draycos proceed from training

camp to their first soldiering assignment, still looking for an opportunity to download data. As one perilous situation leads to another, they realize that the motives of the mercenary armies and their “clients” are as complex as their own mission—and perhaps far more malignant.

While Draycos and Uncle Virge battle for Jack’s allegiance, cruel mercenaries fight for resources belonging to neither. Struggling to stay alive amidst warring peoples and barely trained young soldiers, Jack faces a question more challenging than hacking into a shielded computer: How can you truly tell your enemies from your friends?

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

The information, activities and discussion questions which follow are intended to enhance your reading of *Dragon and Soldier*. Please feel free to adapt these materials to suit your needs and interests.

WRITING AND RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

I. LANDSCAPES AND CITYSCAPES

A. Unique descriptions of alien lands and cities enhance the plot of *Dragon and Soldier* while also reflecting key themes of the novel. Find three paragraphs which describe landscapes or cityscapes while enhancing your understanding of the story. With these paragraphs for reference, make a list of the challenges and advantages of this type of descriptive writing.

B. On a large sheet of paper, draw a map of the Whinyard’s Edge training camp on the planet Carrion. Use clues from the text to label buildings, barracks, training areas, and lookout posts. Include interior details and landscape descriptions whenever possible.

C. Imagine you are a young mercenary arriving in the embattled Parprin town of Mer’seb. Write a letter to a family member that includes a description of the unfamiliar landscape. Compare the landscape to your real home, or to an imagined home planet.

D. Write a 2–3 paragraph description of a landscape familiar to you, such as your backyard, a nearby wood, or the site of a family vacation. Create a brainstorm list of stories that might take place in this landscape.

E. Go to the library or online to learn about landscape traditions in visual arts, such as classical Chinese landscapes or the 19th century American Hudson River School. Page through art books to find landscapes that make you think of the places described in *Dragon and Soldier*. Present your findings to classmates or friends.

II. UNCLE VIRGE

A. Jack maintains his independence and safety by not revealing to anyone that his Uncle Virgil is actually dead. In the character of Jack, write a journal entry describing how you feel about keeping this secret.

B. Do you think Uncle Virge is a good influence or a bad influence on Jack? Divide into two teams of classmates or friends to debate this question. Cite examples from the text to support your positions.

C. Create a “Want Ad” for Uncle Virgil, the crook. Include a portrait (a sketch or picture cut from a magazine), a description, and a list of crimes for which he is being sought.

D. Write an additional chapter (2–5 pages) for *Dragon and Soldier* in which Uncle Virge, the computer program, tries to convince Jack to abandon Draycos. Include a note as to where you would insert this chapter into the text.

III. TRAINING CAMP

A. Write an indenture agreement form for the Whinyard’s Edge army. Provide space for an applicant to provide his or her name, home planet, and reason for enlistment. Write a paragraph describing the indenture commitment to which applicants must agree. Exchange forms with classmates or friends, then complete the forms in the character of alien or human applicants. Mount the completed forms in a group display.

B. In the character of Lieutenant Basht, write a speech “welcoming” trainees to Whinyard’s Edge and describing their upcoming days. Deliver the speech to classmates or friends.

C. Go to the library or online to learn about training for the Roman Legions, the Spartan army, the contemporary American Army (boot camp), or another military organization. Compare and contrast the information you find with Jack’s experience training for Whinyard’s Edge. Present your findings in a short report or informative poster.

D. Design your own series of “boot camp” exercises to get soldiers physically fit, such as obstacle courses, races, flexibility exercises, and other safe challenges. If possible, bring your design to life at a local park or playground. Design medals or awards to present to winning “soldiers.”

IV. ALLIES AND ENEMIES

A. Make a list of the young mercenary enlistees Jack meets at Whinyard's Edge. Beside each name, write a brief character description. Then note whether you believe each character to be a friend, an enemy, or a neutral character. If possible, compare your finished list with the lists of friends or classmates and discuss any discrepancies.

B. In the character of Rogan Mbusu, Alison Kayna, or Jommy Randolph, write a journal entry describing your impressions of "Jack Montana." Then, in the character of Jack, write a journal entry describing your impressions of one or more of your fellow Whinyard's Edge recruits.

C. Write a brief, chapter-by-chapter plot outline of *Dragon and Soldier*. Write the names of friendly characters, or allies, in blue pen. Write the names of enemies in red pen. In green pen, write the names of characters whose loyalties are unclear. What does the completed outline reveal about the nature of allies and enemies in the novel?

D. Early in the story, Jack observes that the planet Carrion was appropriately named. Find the dictionary definition for "carrion," then write a paragraph explaining this observation. Make a list of peoples, places, vehicles, or other objects in the novel whose names help to reveal their friendly or hostile nature. Then invent your own names for such things as a fast car, a beautiful city, a strict teacher, a talented singer, and an enormous skyscraper, that help to reveal their inner nature.

V. THE WARRIOR ETHIC

A. Based on information given by Draycos in the course of *Dragon and Soldier*, create a booklet entitled "The K'da Warrior Ethic." Include such information as the rules of war, the treatment of enemies, problem-solving techniques, and definitions of honesty and/or honor. Use metallic inks, foils, or other craft materials to decorate the cover of your booklet with your own drawing of a K'da.

B. On a large sheet of paper, create a chart comparing Draycos's warrior ethic to Uncle Virge's con-man-style code and/or to the conduct of Whinyard's Edge mercenaries. Note any points where these value systems are in agreement, and what you consider the most extreme differences.

C. Write the script for a movie scene in which Lieutenant Basht, Sergeant Grisko, and Colonel Elkor discuss their plan for taking over the daublite mine for Whinyard's Edge. If possible, rehearse and present your finished scene to classmates or friends. Or videotape your scene. If desired, write a proposal for turning *Dragon and Soldier*

into a motion picture focusing on the warrior ethic theme.

D. In the character of a Parprin reporter, write an article for the Mer'seb city newspaper discussing the presence of the Whinyard's Edge army in your country, their treatment of your people, and your nation's attitudes toward the Agri and their Shamshir mercenaries.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. The opening passage of *Dragon and Soldier* is a dream. What effect does this have on the story that follows?

2. What is the relationship between Draycos and Uncle Virge at the beginning of *Dragon and Soldier*? Why do they hold these attitudes toward each other?

3. How does Jack explain the Whinyard's Edge indenture process to Draycos? What is Draycos's opinion about this arrangement?

4. What does Jack find strange about the equipment the recruits are given? What training do the recruits receive? Is their training adequate? Why or why not?

5. What makes Jack suspicious of Alison Kayna? What is Draycos's opinion of Alison? Is Jack's attempt to talk to her wise or unwise? Explain your answer.

6. At the beginning of Chapter 7, Jack cannot find Draycos. What thoughts go through Jack's mind at this time? How does Jack feel about these thoughts? How do these thoughts and feelings give evidence to changes taking place in Jack?

7. In Chapter 8, Draycos observes that he is accustomed to "thinking as a warrior" and not as a thief. Is this an apology or a criticism? What is Jack's reaction to the statement? Are warriors and thieves polar opposites? Why or why not?

8. How does Sergeant Grisko explain the situation on Sunright to the recruits? Does he make clear their responsibilities on Sunright? What does he want the recruits to do?

9. Jack, Alison, and the other recruits are unceremoniously graduated from training camp and sent rapidly to Sunright. Describe an experience in your own life when you felt you were thrust into a situation unprepared. How was your experience similar to, or different from, that of the Whinyard's Edge recruits?

10. Find passages in the novel where Jack does not understand where he is going or the task he is expected to complete. How does Jack's internal transformation from con artist to warrior affect his actions in these situations?

11. What human-like trick does Draycos play with Uncle Virge in Chapter 10? How does Jack interpret this exchange? What is really going on here? Cite other instances in the story where Draycos employs some con artist techniques along with his warrior tactics.
12. What actions does Jack take during his first real battle experience in the Parprin city of Mer'seb? How do Draycos and then Alison come to his aid?
13. In Chapter 19, Draycos describes some characteristics of the Shontine people to Jack. What do Draycos's words reveal about his own nature and his attitudes toward all warring peoples?
14. In the course of the story, to what other characters is Jack's "Draycos tattoo" revealed? What are their reactions to this startling image? Is Draycos's existence—and Jack's true identity—also in danger of being exposed? Why is keeping these secrets so critical?
15. Explain how elements of nighttime—darkness, dreams, sleep—are important motifs in the novel. Cite examples from the text.
16. What does Jack come to realize about his relationship with the Whinyard's Edge army? Why are the mercenary leaders treating Jack, Alison, Li and others as prisoners?
17. What are the true relationships between Whinyard's Edge and the Shamshir, and between the Parprins and Agri? Are there other relationships in the story that are different in fact than they appear to be on the surface? Explain your answer.
18. Do you think that Jack would have come to the same decision to destroy the daublite mine had he not known Draycos? Explain your answer.
19. How do the relationships between Jack and Draycos, Jack and Uncle Virge, and Draycos and Uncle Virge change in the course of the novel? Is Jack comfortable with these changes? Why or why not?
20. At the end of the novel, do you suspect Alison Kayna is an enemy or a friend to Jack? Why is the mystery of her character important to the novel?
21. Describe at least three ways the term "soldier" can be understood in the context of *Dragon and Soldier*. Are you a "soldier" by any of these definitions? In what ways has Jack transformed from thief to soldier by the novel's end?