

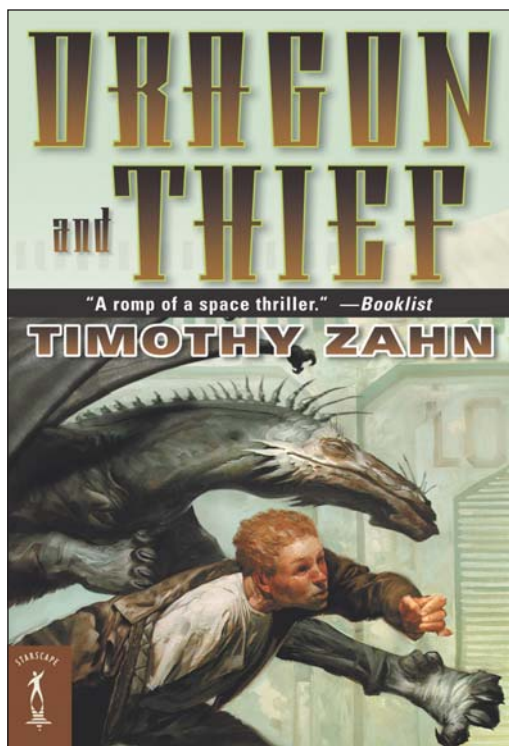
STARSCAPE

READER'S GUIDE

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Timothy Zahn Dragon and Thief



“Zahn keeps the story moving a breakneck pace.”

—PUBLISHERS WEEKLY

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



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 THIEF*

Jack Morgan is a strange kind of orphan. He lives on a spaceship with only his “Uncle Virge” for company. And though during Uncle Virge’s lifetime the pair committed their share of safe-cracks and cons, Jack is running from the law for a crime he did not commit.

While hiding out on the remote world of Iota Klestis, a stranger falls from the sky and into Jack’s life. Draycos is a K’da poet-warrior and an unusual type of alien. A symbiont, his survival depends on his routinely attaching himself to a human-like creature, literally melting onto the being’s skin like a living tattoo. With his former host, the Shontin Polphir, killed along with all of their K’da and Shontin shipmates in the crash witnessed by Jack, Draycos’s very life is in jeopardy until he attaches himself to the unwilling young renegade.

Suddenly, loner Jack has a full-time partner and companion. Draycos promises to help Jack clear his name in return for Jack’s assistance in discovering who engineered the fatal attack against the peaceful K’da and Shontine emigrants. To do so, they must try to unravel the tangled webs of corporate corruption and treacherous weapons technology that brought them together. But first, Draycos must learn to communicate with an erstwhile young thief and Jack must try to understand the strange yet noble

“dragon” he now wears on his back. For as the plot unfolds, it becomes clear that neither Jack nor Draycos can get the answers they need on their own.

Dragon and Thief is both a “romp of a space thriller” (*Booklist*) and an intriguing mystery which pits an orphaned boy against a powerful, futuristic corporation. It is also a timeless moral tale. For beneath the layers of exotic aliens, technology-laden landscapes and incredible adventure, lies an intensely human question: Is it possible to trust another as completely as you trust yourself?

ABOUT THIS GUIDE

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

WRITING AND RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

I. MAIN CHARACTERS

A. The narrative of *Dragon and Thief* follows the thoughts and actions of two key characters: Jack and Draycos. Go to your library or online to learn more about the literary term “main character” or “protagonist.” Write a short essay explaining why you believe Draycos and/or Jack qualify as main characters in the novel.

B. If friends or classmates have also read *Dragon and Thief*, survey the group to see how many consider Jack to be the main character, how many choose Draycos, and how many choose both. Compile your results and present them to your group for discussion.

C. Make a list of novels you have read which feature multiple main characters. What other attributes, if any, do the books on your list share?

D. Reread the first four chapters of *Dragon and Thief*, noting the alternating character perspectives employed by the author. With classmates or friends, examine how the structure of these chapters helps readers understand the meeting and “merging” of the characters of Jack and Draycos.

E. Imagine you are a book editor helping Timothy Zahn with the final draft of *Dragon and Thief*. With a partner, role-play the parts of author Zahn and the editor discussing alternative ways to present the information covered in the first four chapters. Be sure to include details to support your alternatives. Afterward, discuss what you learned about writing from this role-play exercise.

F. List at least four strategies the author uses to help readers understand the thoughts and actions of both Jack and Draycos at key moments throughout the novel.

II. ALIEN FORMS

A. Make a list of the diverse alien life forms encountered by Jack in *Dragon and Thief*. Use this list as the basis for a dictionary-style booklet entitled “A Guide to Timothy Zahn’s Aliens.” For each entry, include the alien name, a physical description, and other available information. If desired, include aliens from other Timothy Zahn novels. Share your completed booklet with classmates or friends.

B. Create a picture of an alien described in the story. Use pencils, paints, or a computer graphics program to create your picture. Caption your picture with the name and type of the alien. If desired, draw a cartoon strip featuring your chosen alien in action.

C. Draycos is a “symbiont.” Define this term as it is used in the novel. Then, go to the library or online to learn more about the term and its uses in science and society. Make a list of related words, or words which share roots with “symbiont.” Create an informative poster about this term based on your research.

D. Write a short nonfiction essay about a relationship you consider “symbiotic” or “mutually helpful” in your own life. Include details explaining how you help the other person in this relationship, and how they help you.

E. Write a short fiction story entitled “My Encounter with an Alien.” Include details as to how you encountered the alien; its appearance and mannerisms; what information or assistance the alien wanted from you; and what you provided.

III. BRAXTON UNIVERSIS

A. Jack believes he is being framed by an operator from the mega-corporation Braxton Universis. Imagine you are a detective on the trail of corruption at Braxton Universis. Write a series of memos or notebook entries detailing what you have figured out about this corporation based on clues from the novel.

B. Create an advertising campaign for a product or service you imagine Braxton Universis might offer. Include a poster design, slogan, and the script for a television advertisement for this product. Design your own logo for Braxton Universis.

C. Cornelius Braxton has agreed to do a television interview about his company, his youthful appearance, and rumors of trouble at Braxton Universis. Take turns playing the roles of Braxton and a television reporter. If possible, videotape this exercise to share with friends or classmates.

IV. LONERS

A. Jack is an orphan, an outlaw, and an independent kid, but he is also somewhat lonely. In the character of Jack, write a journal entry describing your loneliness and considering your new friendship with Draycos.

B. Due to his symbiotic nature, Draycos can never be alone for long. In the character of Draycos, write a journal entry describing your different symbiotic partners and considering what it would feel like to spend an entire twenty-four hours alone.

C. Create a brainstorm list of words you associate with “alone.” Incorporate these words into a small mural or other artwork. Include the text of your list, drawings, photographs, newspaper or magazine clippings, or other images that help you explore the meaning of being alone in your own life.

IV. SCIENCE FICTION AND SPACE

A. *Dragon and Thief* belongs to what might be called the fantasy and science fiction subcategory “space novels.” Make a Recommended Reading List of “space novels,” such as *Dragon and Thief*, *Dragon and Soldier*, *Star Wars* and *Ender’s Game*. Based on your list, write an outline of what you consider to be key features of “space novels.” If desired, make reading lists for other subcategories such as “magic novels” or “futuristic novels.” Can these categories overlap? What might be useful about examining such subcategories?

B. What is “space”? How might NASA scientists define space? How might Timothy Zahn define space? Write your own definition for space based on how you think about and use the term in a fiction and nonfiction context.

C. Write a short story or movie scene in which you and a friend arrive at one of the locations visited by Jack in the novel.

D. Design your own space ship. Build a model of your design with clay, craft materials, or small plastic blocks (such as Lego). On an index card, write the name of your spaceship, the fictitious year it was built, its special features, and the name(s) of its owners or occupants.

E. If getting there in one lifetime were possible, what real location in space would you like to visit? Go to the library or online to learn more about your distant destination. Then, write a letter to an imaginary government agency proposing a research project to travel to this destination. Support your proposal with facts from your research.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. In the opening paragraphs of Chapter 1, Draycos calls Polphir his “slave-driving Shontin.” How does this playful phrase help characterize the relationship between Draycos and his Shontin host? Compare this relationship to the one he forges with Jack.

2. Who was Uncle Virgil? Who is Uncle Virge? Could Jack’s relationship with Uncle Virge be described as a “symbiotic” relationship? Why or why not?

3. Jack is more unsupervised than most fourteen-year-olds. How does this affect his actions and choices? Describe a moment in your life when you felt you were really on your own. How did you act in this situation?

4. Near the end of Chapter 4, Draycos asks Jack, “Does your species require more loneliness than I understood?” What is significant about this question?

5. Describe in your own words, the appearance and abilities of Draycos. What leads Jack to sometimes think of him as a pet? How does Draycos make his true nature apparent?

6. How does Jack explain to Draycos his reasons for needing to clear his name?

7. How do the events that take place during the Wistawki bonding ceremony help to bond Jack and Draycos to each other?

8. How does his growing relationship with Draycos alter Jack’s relationship with Uncle Virge? Do you think this change is good or bad for Jack?

9. Draycos explains that he could not properly mourn the loss of Polphir as he did his previous symbiotic host. Define mourning in terms of your own life and culture. Did Jack “properly mourn” the loss of his parents or of Uncle Virgil? Explain your answer and the effect, if any, this may have on Jack’s character.

10. Who are Raven, Drabs, and the Brummga? Why are they pursuing Jack? How would you describe Raven’s value system?

11. Find at least two passages in the story where Jack uses human expressions that Draycos finds difficult to understand. How do these moments help the reader better understanding the alien character of Draycos?

12. Describe the luxurious accommodations Jack enjoys on the *Star of Wonder*. Why do you think he is given these choice quarters? What does it suggest about his enemies?

13. How does Jack break into the purser's safe on the *Star of Wonder*? How can this be viewed as a meeting of his old, Uncle-Virge-style techniques with his new partnership with Draycos?
14. How does Draycos help reveal the identity of Jack's enemy? Is it significant that he calls himself a poet-warrior and not a warrior-poet? Why or why not?
15. What is the K'da warrior ethic? Cite several instances in the story when Draycos questions the ethics of Jack's actions. Is Draycos usually right or wrong? Explain your answer.
16. When Jack finally comes face to face with Cornelius Braxton, what is revealed about his perceived enemy? What major shift does this cause in the plot of the novel? How does it affect Jack's perceptions of the good and the bad characters, the right and the wrong actions?
17. What object/substance does Jack discover he is being framed for stealing? What is significant about this discovery?
18. At the end of the story, Jack questions Draycos about killing an enemy. How does this query compare with Draycos's criticisms of Jack's value system? How does Draycos defend his action?
19. In what ways do the penultimate paragraphs of the novel show the growth of the relationship between Draycos and Jack?
20. At the close of the story, what do you think might be the greatest threat facing Jack and Draycos en route to their next adventure?
21. Why are the key terms in this novel's title—"dragon" and "thief"—both accurate and inaccurate? How does this duality help to reinforce the themes of the story?