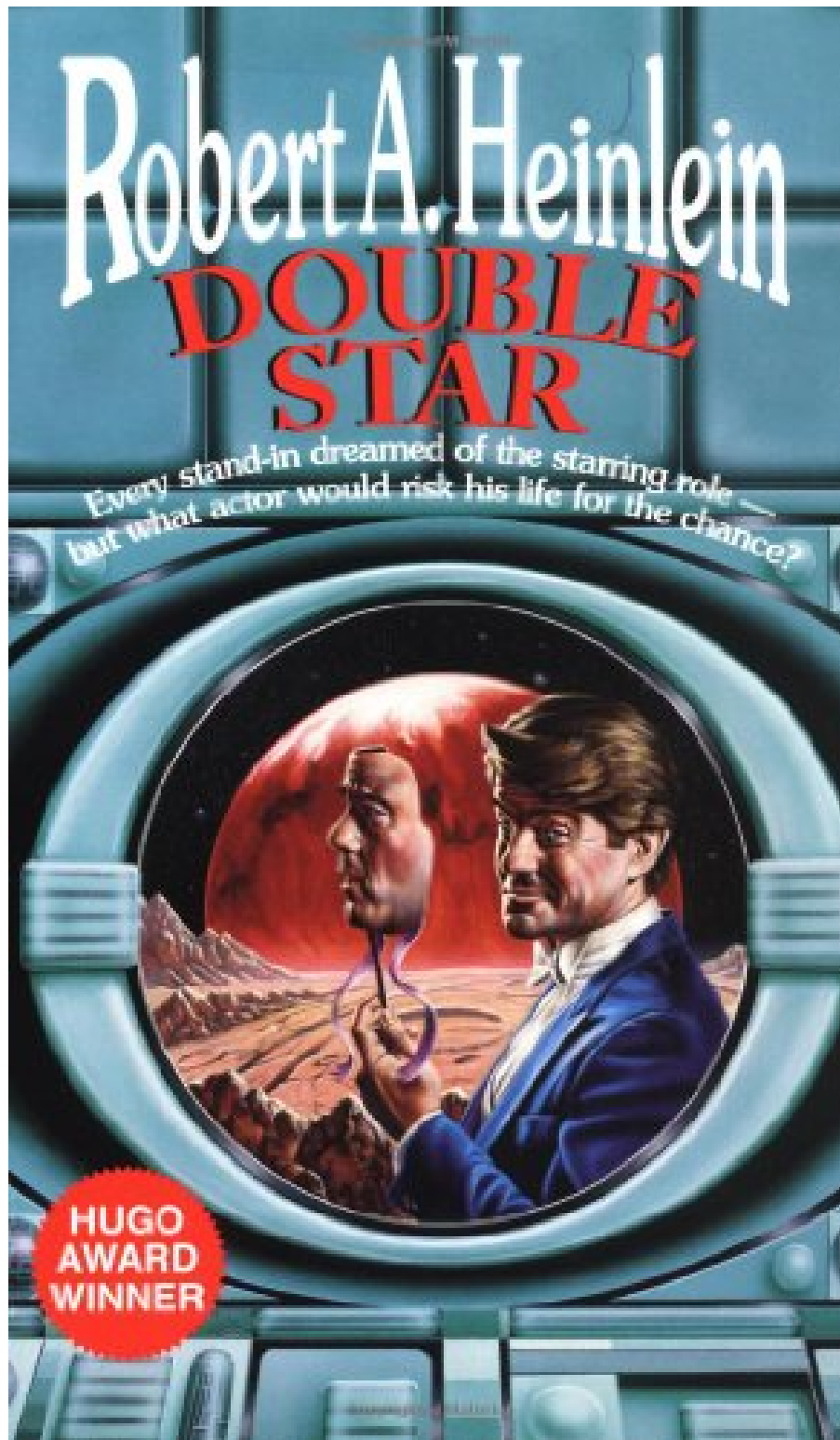


DOUBLE STAR BY ROBERT A. HEINLEIN



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From the Publisher

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handsome compensation is impossible to refuse. He soon realizes, however, that his masquerade could be permanent.

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61 of 64 people found the following review helpful.

What Price, To Play the Boards?

By Patrick Shepherd

The year is 1956. Eisenhower is in the White House, following a long line of military men to reach that post. And this slim book appears, presenting the wild idea of an actor, perhaps not even a very good actor, who manages to reach the position of head of state. Obviously an idea like this could only appear within the realm of science fiction! What a difference in perspective an additional twenty five years will make, as once more science fiction becomes fact.

The route Lorenzo Smythe takes to reach this post is, however, just a little different from that of the real-world actor. The Great Lorenzo, as he styles himself, is conceited, arrogant, out of work, and down to his last half-Imperial when he is offered the job of doubling for a well-known political figure. The job is so obviously beneath his dignity that he is ready to turn down the offer when the Martians take a hand, and Lorenzo finds himself involved in murder, kidnapping, and slicing both humans and Martians into small pieces to flush down the disposal.

Forced by these circumstances to take the job, Lorenzo is even more disturbed when he finds out the identity of the person he is supposed to double for, none other than the leader of the opposition party, Joseph Bonforte, whose politics, what little he knows of them, he despises. But his own inflated idea of his abilities allows him to steady down and start studying for the role, a role he will play for much longer than he could ever anticipate.

This book is a character study, carefully and artfully detailing how Lorenzo changes under the influence of having to pretend to be someone he is not, aided by the immediate staff of the man he impersonates. It is fascinating to watch him change from someone you probably wouldn't invite into your home, to confused and beginning to search for some moral basis to his life beyond 'the show must go on', and finally to a man doing his best not just for himself, but for all intelligent beings, truly becoming the man he is portraying.

The other characters here are pretty sketchy, mainly props to help move the plot and aid Lorenzo. This is most noticeable with Penny, Bonforte's personal secretary, who suffers from the typical Heinlein failing (at that point in his writing career) of portraying women as one-dimensional beings. However, this limited portrayal of these secondary characters does not detract from, but rather enhances by contrast the masterful portrayal of Lorenzo.

Heinlein makes good use of his own experience in running for the California State legislature, as he describes the mechanics of running a political campaign, just how decisions are reached, how dependent a politician is upon the quality of the staff he selects, so that these items ring with real-world ambience. This is also probably the first book that clearly showed his leaning towards what would now be called Libertarianism, but this exposition is fairly muted, unlike some of his later works. And it wouldn't be a Heinlein book without his side commentaries: here he covers monarchies, civil servants, patronage, media management, taxes, unions, truth and lies, prejudice and xenophobia.

Published at a time when a novel of character was practically unheard of in the science fiction world, this work, like so many others by Heinlein, expanded the boundaries of the field, another step in lifting it out of its self-imposed pulp ghetto and back to the world of literature. This is probably part of the reason this book

earned Heinlein his first of five Hugo awards for best novel of the year, a record matched by no other author. The rest of the reason? It's a fun, fast, great read; a story that hasn't lost its power to engross, entertain, and expand your view of the world.

--- Reviewed by Patrick Shepherd (hyperpat)

22 of 23 people found the following review helpful.

Richly deserved its Hugo award

By Billy Hollis

This is a crisp story, with action and intrigue from start to finish. Lorenzo Smythe is one of Heinlein's most engaging characters, and a real departure from the typical Heinlein hero. He also goes through a lot of changes, as a good protagonist should.

Heinlein generally doesn't have a lot of good things to say about politicians, but John Joseph Bonforte (another critical character) is his exception that proves the rule. He's honest, capable, caring - in short a saint among politicians.

Another reviewer complained of too much politics, but that's rather silly in my opinion. The book is about the world of politics in the future, so it has to talk about it. But there is very little of Heinlein's trademark libertarian philosophizing. The book moves so fast, there isn't time for it.

This is Heinlein's only short work to win a Hugo award, and I consider it quite worthy of the honor. It's not one of Heinlein's series of juvenile novels, but it can be read by teens as well as adults. Get it - it beats 99% of the science fiction ever written, and practically 100% of the stuff being put out these days.

15 of 15 people found the following review helpful.

Only the best rating for one of the best authors.

By eternalgreenknight

Heinlein was one of the best, and you would be missing out if you passed up the chance to read this, one of his many masterpieces. This story can still hold its own (despite being printed in 1957) against others in the genre- again, Heinlein was a master story-teller.

Enough people have given the summary of the book, but Heinlein wrote beyond the surface. The story is of an actor who truly discovers a greatness within himself that he at first only pretended to own. It's a story of humanity- in the politics the actor must represent- that humanity must not be doomed to repeat the same mistakes of seeing itself superior to other races, but instead try to learn to live in harmony. Like any good story it takes believable characters and puts them in seemingly real situations in fantasy worlds, and tells us how we could only hope to act were we in such a predicament.

I'm lucky enough to own a first edition in great shape. I happened across it at a yard sale and had to pick it up. To me it was a "new" Heinlein novel as I hadn't heard of it. It's a light read, and although short, it's deep and fun. The plot loosely reminded me of a certain movie about an actor who impersonates the president... Of course this book was written LONG before that, and is much better. Read this book because it was written by Heinlein. Love it because it was well written.

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