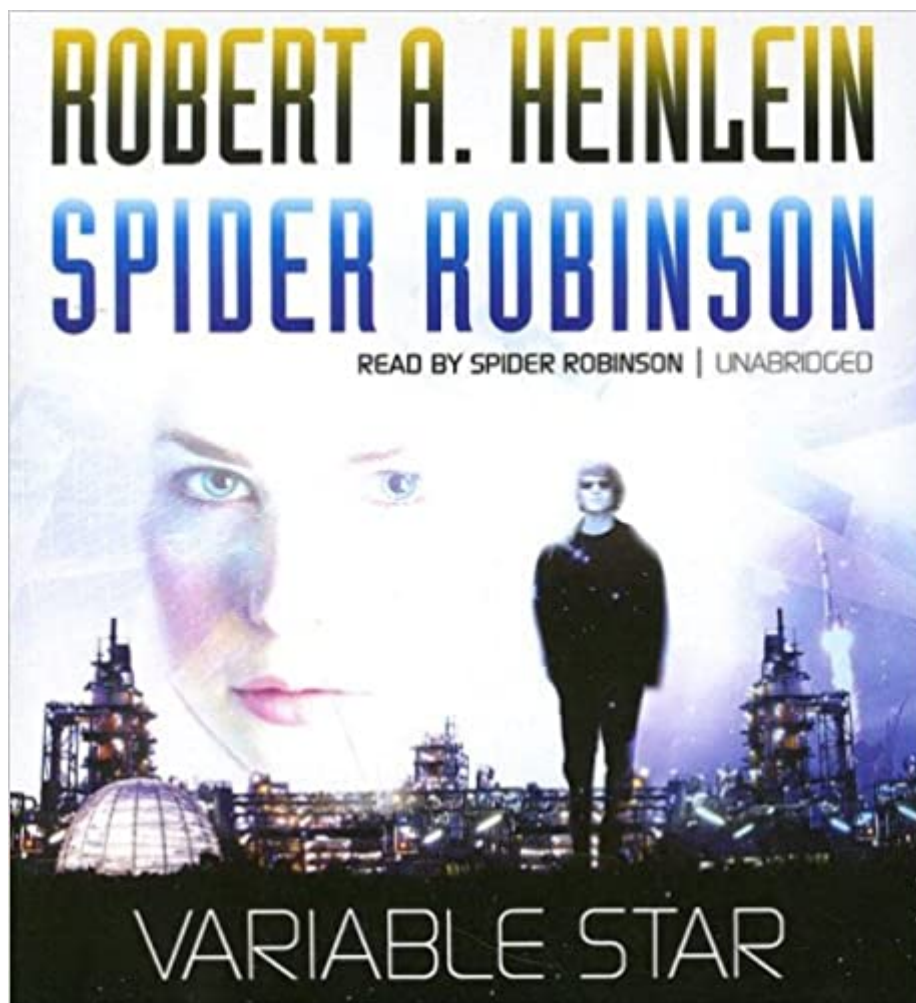


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# Variable Star



## Synopsis

At his death in 1988, Robert A. Heinlein left a legacy of novels and short stories that almost single-handedly defined modern science fiction. But one of Heinlein's masterpieces was never finished. In 1955, he began work on *Variable Star*, a powerful and passionate tale of two young lovers driven apart by pride, power, and the vastness of interstellar time and space. Then he set it aside to focus on other novellas. The detailed outline and notes he created for this project lay forgotten for decades, only to be rediscovered almost a half century later. Now the Heinlein estate has authorized award-winning author Spider Robinson to expand that outline into a full-length novel. The result is vintage Heinlein, faithful in style and spirit to the Grand Master's original vision.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Like a good Ganymedean farmer in the sky, Robinson (*Callahan's Key*) plants both feet firmly in Heinlein territory with this mostly credible pastiche of a Heinlein young adult novel circa 1955. Working from an unfinished outline and notes, Robinson tells the coming-of-age tale of Joel Johnston, who flees a broken romance to the new colony planet Brasil Novo 85 light-years away. Joel and his companions demonstrate the odd mixture of innocence and sexual experimentation that Heinlein employed, as Robinson captures the naïve yet advanced tone of Heinlein's future history. But the strain of a contemporary author trying to fit his sensibility about the future (in which nonaggression is a way of life, for example) into Heinlein's more notably militaristic mindset leaves its traces on the characters and plot, with some unexplained role reversals. Nostalgia for Heinlein's

early work may pique interest in this posthumous collaboration, but old Heinlein hands may be disappointed that the book is incomplete, being all journey and no arrival. (Sept.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A mere glimpse at the legendary byline and Heinleinesque astronomical title may make at least older sf fans salivate. Alas, the source material is neither a lost or unfinished masterpiece but only a fifties-era outline made whole by journeyman sf scribe Robinson. No slouch at space opera himself, Robinson weaves Heinlein's guidelines into a serviceably entertaining tale of a young space explorer colonizing a new world. After discovering his fiancée and supposed fellow orphan is really a wealthy mogul's granddaughter, struggling musician Joel Johnston gets cold feet and grabs the next outbound starship. With his formative agricultural training on Ganymede, Joel has skills that come in handy tending goats and crops in preparation for landfall on Brasil Novo. Yet his vow to abandon love in favor of farming meets some surprising--and romantically intriguing--challenges. The trademark Heinlein quips, space-travel motifs, and obligatory schmaltzy romance are all here in a faithful, if technologically updated, pastiche of the late master's style and storytelling genius. Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

It started out like a Heinlein Juvie much as I grew up on. He quickly ran out of the master's plot material and the book dragged on forever on an interminable interstellar flight scheduled for 20 years, truncated to less than half that and retaining the feel of 20 years. I couldn't be bothered to keep the characters straight and was glad for the Deus Ex Machina ending only because thanks heavens it was an ending and I could stop. One positive. From the future history standpoint he had a very succinct 1 page synopsis of the "War on Terror" and it's likely aftermath. It was thoughtful and I fear accurate but not worth reading the entire book for.

I loved heinlein's juvies. This started out seeming like a nice hybrid of a few of them. But the longer I try to read it I feel like that guy in A Clockwork Orange with his head in a vise and his eyes propped open. I so want to look away. Some Spoilers probably below Issues: 1. Heinlein's main characters in his juvies are often nice, gee whiz guys, not terribly smart but earnest and self effacing. I gather this guy was supposed to be that -- the commonor tapped for greatness, etc, who proves himself. This guy is not that. Rather he's a lackadaisical whiner who drags everything out until you feel like you're

on a 20 year spaceship journey with someone who can't shut up. Ever. This book is terribly wordy. Practically nothing happens through most of it. Heinlein's juveniles were always short, as novels go. Putting umpteen more words in this one to drag it out to current length just drags.... it.... out....2. It's one thing for an author to use his wife's name as the love interest. It's another for Robinson to use Heinlein's wife's name. And I'm sure Heinlein's main character would not have whined Jinny, Jinny, Jinny to the point where you want to bash him over the head with his sax and put you both out of your misery. Way way too much whining.Plus for Robinson to go on and on about "Jinny" (for any fan who knows the reference) feels 1. a little creepy given he isn't Heinlein, and 2. way too obsequious. Kissing up to the boss, cubed. No self respecting women would tolerate that drivel. I rather doubt V. Heinlein would appreciate it from Robinson.3. It's one thing for Jinny Conrad to love this character. Love, after all, is blind (and boy does it have to be in this case). But for her "Conrad of Conrad" father to see any merit in this dork, and to go on and on about how he's needed (when the reader can barely stand him) and to pursue him for even five minutes when he ought to be counting his lucky stars (all Conrad owned) that the guy actually ran away and solved his problem for him calls for more suspension of disbelief than any reader can muster.4. Having Einstein's Relativity make it possible for the little girl to grow up "relatively" fast enough to marry the older guy might have worked in 1957. Now it is just creepy. Plus the older guy is a creep who should not be inflicted on anyone, much less an innocent kid, however grown.5. Heinlein's views on women were an interesting combination of liberal thinking and sexism understandable for a man of his generation. In other words, Heinleinian statements about women in the text of a book are forgivable from Heinlein, particularly Heinlein writing when he did.The same statements are really, really out of place coming from anyone more contemporary. Plus, some of those statements are quaint coming from a 15 year old character written about in 1957. Coming from a 24 year old character written in 20XX they are crass. It also bears mentioning that you could more easily forgive or understand this stuff coming from one of Heinlein's "gee whiz" juvie characters. But again, this guy is not one of those. Robinson tries to start him off that way, but his ego can't leave him there. The character affects humility but actually thinks so much of himself (Robinson and the character) that the guy rapidly proves to be insufferable. And being insufferable and crass and occasionally affecting gee whiz naivete is just an unbearable combination. This guy's statements about women are offensive, plain and simple. And this from a girl who was reading Heinlein in elementary school.I could go on, but why bother?Stick with rereading Heinlein. This book is a so horrendous you will find it hard to believe anyone could create such a frankenstein monster out of Heinlein's good bones.

Variable Star, as you probably know, was originally an unfinished set of papers and notes that Heinlein never completed. The novel was completed by Spider Robinson. The book itself is excellent. It reminds me a lot of "Tunnel in the Sky" and "Time for the Stars" two of Heinlein's well done novels. For me, early Heinlein is far better than his later works. The Heinlein influences are strong and the book has the feel of a Heinlein juvenile, but only to a point. Robinson's contributions are evident throughout and the story, plot, and details are all well crafted. The genesis for the novel came from Heinlein, but the gestation and birth of the novel is from Robinson. My grade is a solid A work.

...A Passable Forgery...By which I mean to cast no aspersions. As noted by others - there are departures from the touch of the master. Somewhere in Russia (last I heard) there is a copy of The Mona Lisa likely produced in France quite some time after the death of Leonardo DaVinci that differs from the the original in ways discernible only to students of the art deeply steeped in the craft, methods and materials of that art form. Here too is an artfully wrought work spun from the imaginations of two minds - differing from either individual's past works. But it works like maple on bacon. I am pretty sure I have read all of Heinlein from three to eight times - and a good deal of Robinson's works, as well. If I were a couple of decades younger I might feel about SR the way I feel about RAH. This story reminds me of my teens and twenties while reading RAH for the first time. There is a young fellow in my family I hope to introduce to RAH. I will include this work as a part.

RAH captured my soul when I borrowed "Have..." from my 1st grade Catholic school library Some 50+ years ago. I could not put it down! The library only had one other RAH novel, "The Rolling Stones". So, I stole (not borrowed) both novels from the library and have them yet today. (Years later I sent \$100 to the parish as guilty payment although I will surely spend time in Purgatory for my sin. It was worth it!) Spider's writing of this RAH novel returned me to my youth unlike any other book by any other author. I so miss those days of waiting for another RAH novel to be published and hit the book store shelves. Such pleasant torture. I cried when I learned RAH passed away. Spider, thank you.

This is written by two authors, more than 50 years apart. The grand master of science fiction, Robert Heinlein, wrote an outline for this plot in the 1950s, but never produced a book, having prolifically written others as he turned his work from juvenile works to adult oriented ones after publication of

his classic "Stranger in a Strange Land." Following Heinlein's death, the notes of this book were discovered and then completed by Spider Robertson, a heavyweight science fiction author in his own right who has constantly expressed admiration for Heinlein in his "Callahan" series of books to the point of making Heinlein's cat, Pixel an ongoing character. This is clearly a juvenile novel, very much in tone with Heinlein's other juveniles and a great pleasure to read. I have it on both Kindle and as a paperback.

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