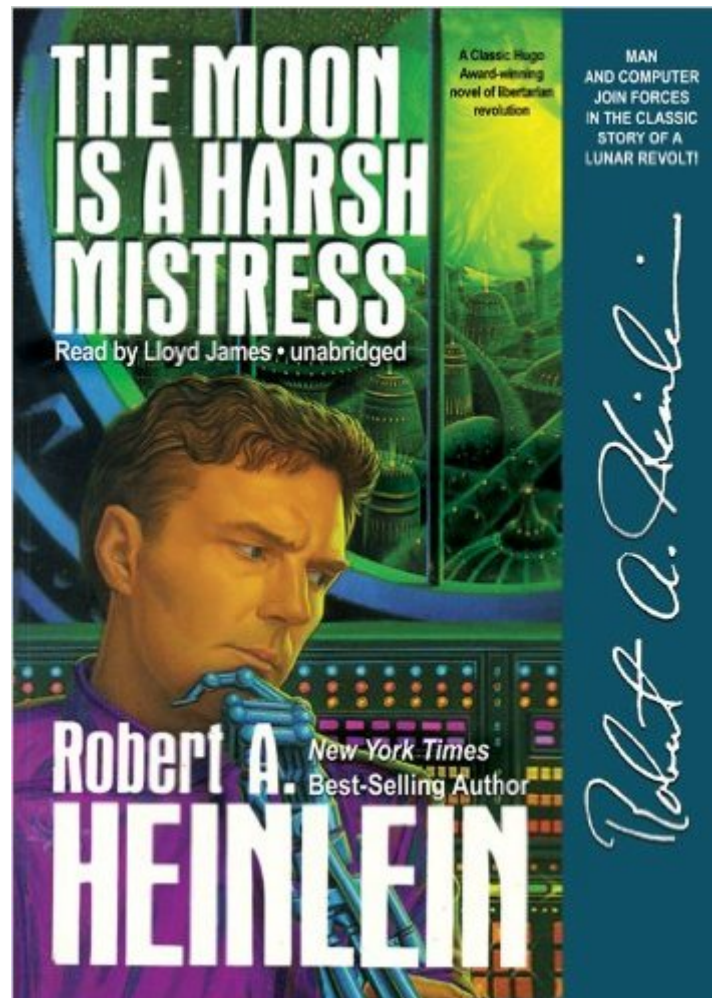


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The Moon Is A Harsh Mistress



Synopsis

Robert A. Heinlein was the most influential science-fiction writer of his era, winning the Hugo Award for best novel a record four times. *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress* was the last of these Hugo-winning novels and is widely considered his finest work. Revolution is brewing on twenty-first-century Luna, a moon-based penal colony where oppressed "Loonies" are being exploited by a harsh Authority that controls it from Earth. Against all odds, a ragtag collection of dissidents has banded together in revolt, including a young female radical, an elderly academic, a one-armed computer jock, and a nearly omnipotent supercomputer named Mike, whose sentience is known only to this inner circle and who is committed to the revolution for reasons of his own. Drawing many historical parallels with the War of Independence, Heinlein's fourth Hugo Award-winning novel is a gripping tale bursting with politics, humanity, passion, innovative technical speculation, and a firm belief in the pursuit of human freedom.

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Customer Reviews

Written at the peak of Robert A. Heinlein's creative powers in the mid-sixties, "The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress" ranks with "Stranger in a Strange Land" as his most popular and acclaimed novel. Heinlein was furiously ingenious at this stage in his career, and this novel is an incredible feat of imagination, intellect, and writing talent. It is, however, a difficult and heavy novel (much like "Stranger in a Strange Land"), loaded with hard science and even harder politics: Heinlein at his best is a writer who attracts and repels the reader at the same time, and no one could read "The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress" without forming some very strong opinions about it. The story follows a

revolution on the lunar colonies against Earth authority. The lunar colony was originally a penal colony, but even though the lunar residents ("Loonies" as they call themselves) are no longer technically prisoners, they have become economic slaves of the Earth. Also, because of their adaptation to the Moon's lower gravity, they cannot safely return to live on Earth, so their exile is a permanent one. Amidst growing but unorganized discontent amongst the Loonies, four remarkable individuals begin the meticulous planning of a revolution to free the Moon: Mannie, an engineer and our narrator; Prof. de la Paz; fiery Wyoming "Wyoh" Knott; and a newly sentient supercomputer named Mike. Starting from this small group, the resistance spreads across the Moon. But how can the nearly defenseless colonists and miners face down the juggernaut of the nations of Earth? Mike has an ingenious solution: "Throw rocks at `em"...literally!

This is my favorite Heinlein novel, and I've read all of Heinlein's works. It is a great mixture of adventure, humor, politics, technology, some thought provoking looks at alternate types of marriages, and the most lovable sentient computer ever to grace the pages of a novel. Mike (the computer) is really the star of this book, from loving to tell jokes, to deciding to help a group of revolutionary-minded Luna 'citizens' actually accomplish their dreams of freedom because the human interaction would keep him from being lonely. Along the path to revolution, Heinlein, (as usual), inserts thoughts and ideas that challenge your basic assumptions about what is right, normal, necessary, or appropriate. Is a representative democracy the only 'good' form of government? What's so sacred about a 'majority'? How should a government finance itself? (Maybe make the representatives pay for their pet projects out of their own pocket - taxes not allowed!). Are polygamy, polyandry, or other forms of multiple marriage wrong or can they be used to help preserve the stability of a child-rearing environment? How do you most efficiently organize a revolutionary group that must be kept secret from the authorities (given the assumption that there will always be 'stool pigeons')? Some have quite correctly noted that this book should not be read by ultra-grammarians, as it is told in first person Luna-speak, an odd pidgin mixture of English and Russian, with occasional items thrown in from Chinese, Finnish, and several other languages. Far from being a detriment, I consider this to be a great accomplishment. Most writers have trouble accurately portraying the dialect, say, of the Deep South in a convincing manner.

I just re-read *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* after not having read it since I was a teenager. (Well, that was in the 60's, oof.) I must say, this book holds up well against science fiction written far after it, and also after the technological surges of the 90's that made computers a household item and not

just a device at work that spewed out yellow punchtape. Heinlein attended Annapolis and was in the Navy; his experiences feed into many of his books (most famously, *Starship Troopers*.) And the theme of liberty, alternate marriage styles, animate computers also turn up in many of his works (*Time Enough for Love*.) Heinlein was kind of a libertarian; his ideas about society show up in many of his novels. The endearing part of this book is the wonderful relationship between Mannie, jack-of-all-trades and computer technician, and Mike, the self-aware computer that runs everything on the Moon from the air systems and transport to accounting and telephones. The moon has been settled by various countries (Russia, US, China) and has been turned into a penal-colony and excess population dumping zone. The government is lead by the Warden, who views the post as a sinecure, and aside from keeping general order, does nothing. Since escape is pretty much impossible, the convicts and transportees have been left to set up a semi-anarchic society ruled mainly by common sense. (As long as you leave your neighbors in peace, they'll do the same for you.) However, when Manny attends a Free Luna rally, he learns that the resources of the moon are being depleted and that without halting the one-way export of resources to the earth, the moon and its inhabitants will be soon be doomed to starvation. Manny joins an ad-hoc revolutionary cabal with his friend the Professor and blonde hot-head Wyoming Knott.

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