



Growing Up Weightless

John M. Ford

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Talented, imaginative, and self-confident, Matthias Ronay has never known any life but that on the moon, and he clashes with his brilliant politician father, Albin Ronay, in an attempt to change his future. Reprint. *NYT*.

Growing Up Weightless Details

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Author : John M. Ford

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SA says

This book sticks with you long after you've first read it.

So, this was published in the mid ninties, as I recall, and the descriptions of the tech and structure of the colony don't quite hold up to what we now know about tech. But that doesn't really matter, because what Ford does so expertly is create a culture and society that is at once alien and familiar; his Lunar colony, divorced from Earth, told through the muddy third person omniscient narratives of his male characters, is different and unsettling and only comprehensible once you get small pieces of the history that brings their contemporary experience into focus.

It reminded me in that way of Lowry's *The Giver*, for creating another culture/society so effectively while still making them familiar.

I think this novel would benefit from a later re-read, though I'm not sure that I will do that. But I expect you grasp more of it when you work your way through it again. Classic, top notch hard sci-fi.

Also, the way Ford created dragons was hands-down my favorite part.

Chris says

I admire dense, no-word-wasted writing as much as anyone, but maybe Ford could have spent a few extra words on making it slightly clearer what was going on? I don't expect my SF fun reading to be harder going than my academic reading.

LOVED the trains. The trains made it all worthwhile.

Nomadman says

Another smart and carefully crafted coming of age novel from this excellent and underrated writer. Unlike his other works, this is a bit easier to follow on a first read through (all Ford's novels reward multiple rereadings). World building is impeccable as always, and the fact that he confines his action to a single setting allows him to explore things in much more depth. A very fine, mature piece of work.

bkwurm says

A coming of age tale set in an unspecified time in the future on the moon. Matthias Ronay lives in the lunar city of Copernicus. His father is responsible for the water supply for the lunar population and, at the time of the story, is faced with an aging fleet of ships that bring water back from the asteroids, a diminishing water supply relative to the growing lunar population and faced with a proposal that would ensure near unlimited

water for the moon but at the cost of the sacrifice of a human life. Matthias considers his father to be distant and cold. Worse, as there are few places in the lunar cities that are free from electronic surveillance, Matthias believes he has no freedom and yearns to be a crewmember of one of the starships that travel to the distant colonies in other systems.

The charm of the story is in the description of lunar society and their attitudes and prejudices towards earth and its inhabitants.

Ken says

A great story about father/son relationships, and also about what it might mean to live an everyday teenage life with your friends on the Moon. It's got some speculative-but-not-wild technology and environments, which is fun, and it doesn't try to assault you with any "big idea".

Jared Millet says

I read this one based on a recommendation in a book by Jo Walton, otherwise I'd have never heard of it. Nevertheless, it's the kind of thing I love: a coming of age / slice of life story set on the moon, where the characters are a bunch of kids who grew up there and take everything for granted. There are big events going on for sure, such as an impending water supply crisis that concerns the main character's father, but it's all in the background. What the lead character, Matt Ronay, is mainly concerned about is what he's going to do with his life, how he can get off the Moon and into space, whether he and his friends can successfully take a clandestine train ride to a station on the Moon's far side, and how well his RPG character does in an ongoing game he and his friends have going.

This kind of thing, where there's no heroic quest or earth-shattering action climax, is what I think of as a kind of "anthropology of the future." Ford doesn't go easy on his readers, either. The kids all talk in a futuristic slang that has to be decoded; it's never directly explained, so getting your head around the language takes a bit of work in the opening. I almost said "the first few chapters" but that's another thing that makes this book something of a challenge - there are no chapters. There aren't even any "soft breaks" between scenes. One scene just blends into the next for the entire length of the book. It's neat in a "no one's ever done that before that I've read" way, but it also makes me scratch my head the same as Cormac McCarthy's lack of punctuation, making me wonder how the author got an editor to let him get away with it.

Still, if like the rest of us "slammers" (Earth residents who have a habit of slamming into walls in Lunar gravity), you'd fancy a vacation on the moon complete with train ride, I recommend picking this one up.

Jeff Youngstrom says

(May 12, 1999)

(May 18, 2003)

Kim Zinkowski says

B.

Barry King says

Because of what seems to me to be a particularly ugly copyright dispute, this book is not available anywhere in retail, nor will it likely be available as an ebook in my lifetime. There are still good condition used copies to be found, which is good because it's a classic that shouldn't be forgotten.

In many ways it's a classic coming-of-age story, and like all good science fiction, it doesn't really represent society in the future, but today's society projected into the future. It was written in the early 90s, and predicted young adulthood of the 2010s well, in that parents and children live atomized from each other, in an isolation created by their relationship to technology. This increases the tension of the unsaid and the unshared, and the book captures that need to break out, to make a place outside of one's comfort zone in order to grow. And, as always, growing has growing pains both for the growing and those grown away from. It also captures that phenomenon that when a momentous decision is made, there is a moment teetering on the brink, where circumstances can go in any direction. In this, the book shows itself to be one of those works that was allowed to make, against market forces, to show that science fiction and literature can occupy the same space.

The world-building is very strong. Lunar society is multicultural and, ostensibly multilingual (except other than English, there is a patois of formal and idiomatic phrases bandied around the text). The schism between Earth and Lunar societies, and the Exosocieties that trace back to each follow a realistic human tribalism, and our protagonist and his parents and friends are very much creatures of this world.

A surprisingly good read. I'm glad to have had the recommendation.

Nigel says

Coming of age on the moon, when the great adventure is over and the accomplishments of the parents completely overshadow the lives of the children. Our hero feels trapped, oppressed and monitored and searches for a challenge that'll make his life worthwhile. An effective story from the late, lamented Ford.

Gaines Post says

Very inspiring and imaginative. A wonderful coming of age story, too. Six stars out of five.

Sharon says

This is a delightful story of a young man growing up on the moon. The author does a nice job of imagining what life on Luna would be like. It took me awhile to figure out what was going on because there are no chapters and the action jumps from character to character with little warning. Of course some of the references are unfamiliar as well. For example, a 'cold' place is one that is away from electronic surveillance. Earthlings are called "slammers" because, due to low gravity, they tend to slam into things as they move around.

Jeff says

Parenting without oppressive expectations

Nicholas Barone says

Winner of the 1994 Philip K Dick award, *Growing Up Weightless* is an impressive coming of age story set on the moon 4 generations after permanent settlements have been established. The story is not action packed, by any means, but it does a wonderful job of sketching out a Lunar civilization that has only recently seceded from earth to form its own nation. The setting is revealed in the background as we follow the story of Matt Ronay - teenage son of one Luna's leaders. Matt and his friends are the cusp of their adult lives, and they are planning something big to test the limit of their freedom.

Matt's story intersects some intriguing political machinations (which revolve around Matt's father), but interesting as they are, they remain unresolved at the end of the book.

The strength's of the book are John M Ford's prose and his vision of a young Lunar society. It is fair to say that it is the best story set on the moon that I have read since Heinlein's classic, *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, but it does not surpass that masterpiece.

Gsmattingly says

This book is okay but not great. I don't like that it has no chapters, no divisions of that which was written. Also there is action and not necessarily the best resolution. A number of things were left hanging.
