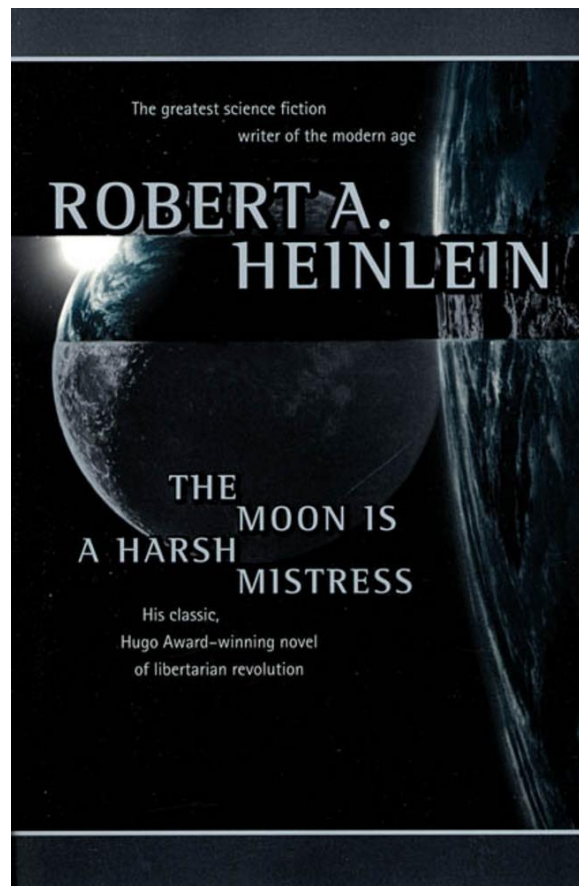


**Politics and War in Robert Anson Heinlein's
*The Moon is a Harsh Mistress***

P. Mathan Kumar and Dr. V. K. Saravanan



Courtesy: <https://us.macmillan.com/themoonisaharshmistress/robertaheinlein/9780312863555/>

Abstract

Robert Anson Heinlein is an American Science-fiction writer. Often called the dean of science fiction writers, his controversial works continue to have an influential effect on the genre. Heinlein became one of the first science fiction writers to break into mainstream magazine such as *The Saturday Evening Post* in the late 1940s. Heinlein was named the first Science Fiction Writers Grand Master in 1974. *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, with its many parallels between the lunar revolt and the American Revolution, is often sold at convention of libertarians

and other free – marketers. For both left and right, the overriding plot of the lunar colonists rebelling against Earth’s oppression purposely reflects the American Revolution against British rule. The paper reflects the Lunar Authority that keeps their locked in a mercantile system on the road to starvation and death. It depicts aggressive colonialism on the wane.

Keywords: Robert Anson Heinlein, *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress*, Revolution, libertarians, oppression, mercantile

Heinlein plays a long and significant role in the evolution of science fiction into a more sophisticated genre. He began writing in the post- depression science fiction magazine era when simplistic plots and farfetched gadgets were the norm. Heinlein’s writing style is unique in his use of speculative science fiction. He shows with his whole society, including the makes of science fiction. He has been a vivid and controversial figure for three decades, and finds science fiction that most drive, most import, most useful and most comprehensive fiction being written today. He finds its importance in its attempts to deal with the future.

Heinlein is a key figure in the development of American science fiction. What makes his contribution unique is his emphasis on philosophical speculation. Heinlein presents a carefully considered world view when is particularly exemplified in his competent heroes, and in his concern for family, morally, and aesthetics. Heinlein has received four Hugos (voted by readers for the best science fiction novel of the year) he received the first Grand Master Nebula for Life time Contribution to Science Fiction (voted by fellow writers). He is the only writer who appeared as the Grand of Honor at World Science Fiction Convention three times. He is an Encyclopedia Britannica authority.

The Moon is a Harsh Mistress depicts aggressive colonialism on the wane. Luna begins as a penal colony administered by a Warden. Inescapable, the prison needs no walls and bars and as convicts complete their sentences, they suffer no social stigma. There is no question of political rights, as the colony is administered from Terra. There are no laws, but social pressure and vigilantism keep good order. Loonies learn to act properly or are informally “eliminated.” Luna Authority has evolved into an exploitative monopoly that spawns uncoordinated and ineffectual revolutionary movements, particularly in isolated, affluent Hong Kong in Luna (HKL), which becomes de facto autonomous by using only products grown or address a rally and she calls for eliminating the Authority.

Active revolution begins when the Authority’s police “goons” break up the meeting, throwing together the organizers of the kind of cell structure that worked long ago for the Bolsheviks. Knott is a self-styled “Fifth Internationalist,” cooperative, practical, non-doctrinaire, admitting public control only where essential. Prof is “Rational Anarchist,” believing individuals cannot shift, share, or distribute blame, guilt, and responsibility to government. He takes for granted that all efforts are less than perfect. The third member, Mannie Davis, is apolitical like his father and most Loonies and reluctant to take part until he learns the odds. There he gets from the self-aware supercomputer he maintains, Mike, who becomes the Revolution’s chairman and co- ideologue with Prof. A monarchist, Stu Lajoie, joins the top echelons later.

When the Authority provokes rioting and a successful coup, the revolutionaries must develop into rulers and deal with setting up structures of government. Much debate goes into what the constitution should or should not include, with Prof pushing for prohibitions against any abridgement of freedom and no taxation. The useless operation of committees is portrayed and the role of self-appointed watchdogs of morality. Davis yearns for the good old days when Warden enjoys his women and stays out of people's private lives.

The Moon is a Harsh Mistress deals heavily with war. The Federated Nations (FN) could deliver a "Doomsday" bomb that would split rebellious Luna like a melon and monopolize space travel. Smaller H-bomb, which Loonies cannot intercept, could cave in most of the underground population centers. Because they face starvation by 2028, however, Loonies cannot give in to Terra; they are cornered rats, preferring to live in peace but certain of being attacked. They must, therefore, adopt the ancient Chinese approach of sapping their opponent's will until he surrenders without fighting. Luna has certain "pieces in the game" and many possible moves, while Terra has far more resources and a larger "spectrum of responses." The point is to get them to waste their superior strength. Luna needs a perfectly timed chain of events which favors its strategy.

"Operation Hard Rock" is Luna's only means of offensive. Barges of what can be as easily loaded with rock and thrown as being delivered peacefully into parking orbits. The impact are as destructive as H-bomb, but with no radioactive fallout. The offensive can begin only after Terra is antagonized into a "Pearl Harbor" strike. To encourage this, Luna presents as weak and easily brought back in line. Luna will then hit Terra hard enough, and precisely enough to convince the FN to let it go, while harming as few humans as possible. Thus, remote mountain, wasteland, and bodies of water are targeted and each target receives a folksy message directing people where to avoid and what aftermaths to expect. All nations having veto power in FN are to be hit. The North American Space Defense Command a hardened military communications agency, and to prove a sustained attack is possible.

At the same time, miners are taught to use their heavy-duty laser drills as "artillery" to repel space attacks. They are organization as the First and Second Volunteer Defense Gunners of Free Luna, older men and younger to encourage competition. A war scare is generated, with people urged to keep p- suits handy and test home pressure alarms. Hundreds of emergency sealing crews drill regularly. Female auxiliaries are organized to raise morale. The FN send over 2,000 crack riot troops, indoctrinated, and drugged, in an elegant surprise invasion, but loses them from going lower. The troopers lose their reflexes in 1/6th gravity, particularly fighting downwards from the upper levels. They end up "walking on air" and being picked off by the few snipers. The invasion takes at "new earth," which keeps Loonies underground except in emergencies. The action allows Luna to go on the offensive with strategy of terror that succeeds brilliantly.

The Moon is a Harsh Mistress shows Lunar colonies rising up against Terra oppression and achieving a David and Goliath victory. Mannie Davis, a computer technician, service Mike, a self-aware computer which controls most vital aspects of Luna, once an inescapable penal colony, but in 2075 home to 3 million free people. Luna Authority, however, continue to exploit them as slaves. Davis attends a political rally, meets beautiful activist Wyoh Knott and his old "Pro bring Mike into the conspiracy, form an "Emergency Committee of Free Luna," and begin organizing

sub cells. There is a need for urgency because Mike sees famine by 2082. Luna must fight Terra as David does Goliath, hurling rocks. Knott, a wanted fugitive, hides out at the Davis farm and is drawn into its line marriage.

To replace the slain police thugs, Terra dispatches “Peace Dragons,” who hate being sent and fear Loonies more than the Loonies fear them. The Revolution goes forward, optimizing its organization for security and communication, and Mike develops personality, becoming Adam Selene for Party matters and Simon Jester for political satire. The principal characters prepare to survive Earth gravity should a trip down be needed. After a meticulous build-up to Revolution, the seizure of power is sudden and unexpected. Tourist Stu LaJoie joins after surviving a faux pas and learning “Tanstaaf!” (“There ain’t no such thing as a free lunch”). He becomes the Party’s Terra coordinator. When Peace Dragons commit the unheard of crime of rape, the revolt begins. Nothing is ready, but leaders maximize confusion and control communication. Prof emerges as the tactical leader.

The revolutionaries become rulers, scrambling to perfect ad hoc defenses before the next schedule ship from Terra. The conspirators’ theoretical discussions of personal responsibility, capital punishment, and other issues, are put to practical tests. Word leaks of the coup, cutting short the preparation time. A Declaration of Independence is prepared and delivered by Prof and Davis, who negotiate recognition by the Federated Nations. The makeshift trip down is nearly fatal to elderly Prof. and working under six times normal gravity debilitates young Davis. Prof politely but firmly demands de jure recognition of the Free Luna State. Prof and Davis work the press, describing how Luna can meet all terrestrial food needs, provided Terra ships up, in return, the non-replenishable resources Luna needs. The emissaries return empty-handed, precisely as Mike and Prof Hope: otherwise, conditions would not change and Lunar famine would occur.

Terra is goaded into a first strike, justifying Free Luna’s Operation Hard Rock.” Terra is cavalier about the threat and bloodthirsty about retribution. Rocks fall down on precise targets, showing an ability to sustain damage, while a Terra attack on Luna is only partially successful. It becomes too expensive to hold the colony and too dangerous to hold out. Unity among the Federation Nations fails, victory is won, but Prof dies proclaiming it. Mike falls mysteriously silent. Nothing the amateur revolutionaries intend is accomplished, but life goes on.

Heinlein’s *The Moon is a Harsh Mistress* focusing on each novel’s depiction of a powerful and sentient artificial intelligence. The novels take a similar position, though from different perspectives, on the humanity of the knowledge, to being through shared language and integrates with its community, it acquires concern for and benevolence toward its human companions. In Heinlein’s novel, whose putative advocacy of libertarian politics is generally seen as a failure (in that the libertarianism is ultimately overwhelmed by authoritarianism), my analysis of Heinlein’s hitherto largely overlooked its preoccupation with humour and community especially—leads to a fresh perspective on the novel. In my reading,

Harsh Mistress conducts a complex critique of a libertarian society, showing its inhumanity and extreme susceptibility to authoritarianism.

For Man, the first-person narrator through whom everything in *Harsh Mistress* is filtered, Mike's sentience is a consequence of complexity and executive function:

He computed ballistics for pilotless freighters and controlled their catapult. This kept him busy less than one percent of time and Luna Authority never believed in idle hands. They kept hooking hardware into him—decision-action boxes to let him boss other computers . . . Human brain has around ten to the tenth neurons. By third year Mike had better than one and a half times that number of neuristors. And woke up . . . Psychologists assert it happens automatically whenever a brain acquires certain very high number of associational paths. Can't see it matters whether paths are protein or platinum.
("Soul?" Does a dog have a soul? How about cockroach?) (12)

There is no theology here; the very idea of the divine is dismissed between air quotes in a parenthetical aside Heinlein through Man gives readers a continuum of complexity and places Mike on that continuum, with Man explicitly scoffing at the difference between organism and machine. Mike is superior to a human by virtue of a higher level of complexity yet is explicitly on the same existential level. Notably, Mike is jury-rigged to respond to increasingly complex tasks—he evolves in response to his environment—and was not planned and built, the Loonies' revolution only succeeds because the Lunar Authority never considers that Mike might be awake.

The libertarian political content, while obvious, rarely intrusive and is much better articulated than in the two novels, which often seemed harsh or even mean-spirited. Heinlein portrays the colony as a dangerous place where only fit survives, and he acknowledges the difficulty in getting libertarians to work in correct even for a desirable goal.

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