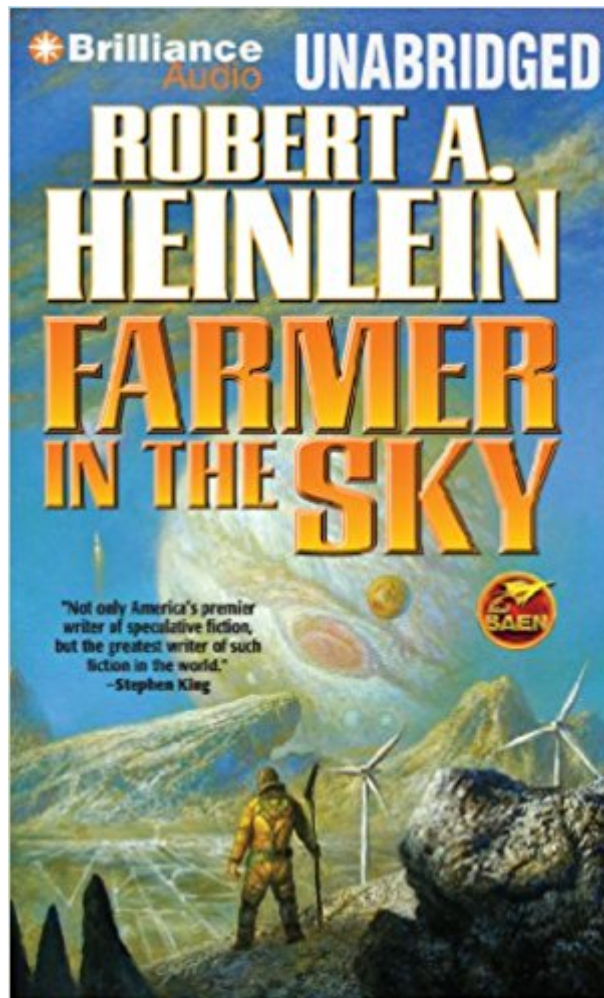


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Farmer In The Sky



Synopsis

The Earth is crowded and food is rationed, but a colony on Ganymede, one of the moons of Jupiter, offers an escape for teenager Bill Lerner and his family. Back on Earth, the move sounded like a grand adventure, but Bill soon realizes that life on the frontier is dangerous, and in an alien world with no safety nets nature is cruelly unforgiving of even small mistakes. Bill's new home is a world of unearthly wonders and heartbreaking tragedy. He will have to face hardships, survive dangers, and grow up fast to meet the challenge of opening up a new world for humanity. Praise for Robert A. Heinlein: "If there is any single author who defines science fiction, it is Robert Heinlein . . . there is no other writer whose work has exhilarated me as often and to such an extent as Heinlein." —Dean Koontz "One of the most influential writers in American literature." —The New York Times Book Review "Robert Heinlein is America's acknowledged master of science fiction." —Chicago Tribune

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Customer Reviews

A short hop into the future, on an Earth almost as real as the corner store, teenager Bill Lerner lives with his widower father in the Diego Borough of the sprawling City of Southern California. His is a fast new world in which grammar school geography classes take field trips to Antarctica and study their regular lessons from versatile "studying machines." But while Bill can pilot a helicopter and follow the news from the developing offworld colonies, his world is not perfect: he seldom gets enough to eat. He and his father must limit their diets according to a strict caloric ration book, and although a new yeast plant has just begun production in Montana, the caloric ration has been

reduced yet another time. Rather than tighten their belts, the Lermers decide to emigrate to Ganymede, where terraforming is underway and good food abounds. Written in 1950, *Farmer in the Sky* is one of Heinlein's first boys' books, and also one of the most muscular and optimistic. It deals with nothing less than the future of mankind; what, after all, must humans do to survive, civilization intact, when Earth becomes too crowded, famished and bellicose? Emigration to other colonized worlds is one solution, and that is what Heinlein illustrates so well in *Farmer*. He presents his readers with a Ganymede already partially modified to support life from Earth, and makes it all seem plausible--even commonplace (at least within the bounds of late 1940's scientific theory). A reader can see Jupiter hanging up there in the greenish sky, and hear the tremendous din of rock-crushing machinery. Against this vivid backdrop, a variety of characters win or lose as they try to wrest a living from Ganymede's newly created soil.

How does this man turn what has to be one of the sillier titles I've ever seen (and probably wouldn't even sell at all today) and an almost absurdly basic concept and turn it into one of his most entertaining books? It must have been depressing try to match him in the fifties, he pulls off everything there here effortlessly, working comfortably within his own style without coming across as formulaic. Here we've got yet another vision of a future earth, where there's too many people and food is scarce . . . people are going to a colony on one of the moons orbiting Jupiter and Bill and his father decide that it's the place for them. Heinlein captures the pioneering spirit and drive brilliantly, subjecting his characters to all sorts of hardships, to the point where you can very easily relate to them even though they're somewhere way out in space and Jupiter keeps hanging in the sky (some of the most beautiful scenes in the novel have to do with that image, I wonder if it really looks like that) . . . even better, whenever one of the characters notes how hard it is to survive there, someone else always points out that most of the early colonies on earth were wiped out to a man. Bill remains a fairly consistent character in the Heinlein mode, always willing to learn, resourceful in the right moments, rarely giving up, he has his own appeal but it's not limited to just him, his father (if you can get past he and his father calling each other by their first names) is cut from the same mold, his friend Hank remains the biggest surprise, and while some of the characters are needlessly whiny only to contrast how hard working the rest of the cast is, those are only minor complaints.

Worried that life on Earth isn't going to make it? Ready to leave the rat race behind and head off to a virgin territory where a man can be a man and live off the land in peace? Science fiction grandmaster Robert Heinlein points to the new frontier and invites those of us who've really got the

guts to leave our comfortable planet, to become Farmers in the Sky. Among the best of Heinlein's juveniles, this fascinating novel tells the story of young Bill Lerner, whose family chooses to leave an increasingly overcrowded earth for the ostensibly greener pastures of a growing colony on Ganymede, the largest moon of Jupiter. Through Bill's eyes, readers get to see the selection process, the thoughtful preparations, the wearying journey, the chaotic arrival, and finally settlement in a new home on a new world. And then things really get exciting... This book was originally serialized in "Boy's Life", the Boy Scouts of America magazine, which is why scouting finds its way into each chapter, but Heinlein makes excellent use of the concept, not only in terms of character building (which is an essential feature of this coming-of-age novel), but also as an important part of a practical education. While Bill studies for his merit badges, the reader gets to look over his shoulder and learn everything a greenhorn needs to know to survive on this untamed world, from physics to ecology. Best of all, Heinlein makes his explanations seem so reasonable that one almost wonders why we aren't out there building colonies right this minute. But despite his gung ho pioneer spirit, Heinlein isn't a Pollyanna - he isn't trying to hide the more unpleasant facts of colonial life. During the selection process and the long voyage out, Bill has ample time to observe the uglier side of human nature.

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