



Two Moons

Thomas Mallon

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A galvanizing story of earthly heartbreak and otherworldly triumph, by the writer John Updike called "one of the most interesting American novelists at work".

It's the spring of 1877 in Washington, D.C., and at the U.S. Naval Observatory, Hugh Allison's plan to project an image through time and space takes on urgent life when the mathematically gifted Cynthia May enters his orbit as one of the observatory's human "computers." But the fate of Hugh's heavenly vision-and of his love affair with Cynthia, a Civil War widow whose beauty has been shadowed by worry and poverty-may be out of his hands, decided instead by an astrologer and by the actions of a dangerously magnetic politician.

Thomas Mallon's moving romance mixes actual historical figures with fictional ones. By combining earthly matters-such as politics and money-with heavenly ones of love and immortality, Mallon evokes a distant time and place with astonishing immediacy and confirms his place as one of our most original and delightful writers.

Two Moons Details

Date : Published April 19th 2001 by Mariner Books (first published 2000)

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Author : Thomas Mallon

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From Reader Review Two Moons for online ebook

Melissa says

This is a sort of period romance with some non-traditional aspects. I love that the heroine of this book is an 'older' woman (okay, she is only 35). She has not had an easy life and immediately gains my sympathy. It starts pretty promising as a story about how she regains hope and love in her life... but that is not apparently the story the author planned. Overall the story suggests the futility of pitting our human lives against the heavens, whether astrologically or astronomically.

Taking place in Washington DC, there is a lot of politics in the book, and as it takes place during the Hayes administration, an era I am not very familiar with, I can't say I could easily follow all the maneuverings of the politicians. It's a sad book, which is not what I expected, or would have hoped for, but it was well-written. I really appreciated the way Mrs. May was written... her tragedies gave her something of an edge; she is a 'modern' woman made from her circumstances, not in spite of them. I was disappointed by most of the other characters however; I wished Mr Allison had more of a spine, and Conkling came very close to being a mere caricature - as did Mary Costello. Several other Observatory workers were sadly underdeveloped as well.

liz says

So this was by the author of our last book club book, a work of historical fiction, that I wasn't able to get out from the library. And it draaaaaaggged. It was about... Astronomy? In Washington, DC? Romance? Malaria? And political corruption? After the Civil War? Unngh.

I finished it three days ago.

Two decades before meeting Hugh Allison and Mr. Michelson, she had underlined the sentence that came just after the numerical estimate: "It follows that, if the sun was annihilated, we should see him for eight minutes afterward..."

She continued to lie beneath the counterpane, watching the Sun and wondering if somehow, so far from here, the planet Mercury had just gone dark; and then Venus; and soon, any minute, unaware it was about to be scuppered, Earth. She lay still, one eye on the Sun and the other on her clock, until eight minutes had passed, at which time she sighed and got up to dress.

Jim says

The title refers to the two moons of Mars, Phobos and Deimos, discovered by American astronomer Asaph Hall in 1877 at the US Naval Observatory in Washington, DC. While this significant scientific discovery occurs in the story, the focus is on a Civil War widow named Cynthia May who gets a job as one of the observatory's "computers." Due to her mathematical abilities, she is able to help the astronomers with their calculations. An attractive woman in her thirties, she falls in love with a younger man, who is one of the astronomers, a young man with an ambition to project an image into the sky to contact beings in space. However, this relationship is threatened by the powerful Senator from New York, Roscoe Conkling. A

corrupt and ruthless politician, he will stop at nothing to get what he wants, whether it's the presidency or Cynthia.

An interesting historical novel set in a time of great American invention and expansion, but also corruption. Mallon is an excellent writer who brings the time period and his characters vividly to life.

Barbara Brannon says

Mallon combines history and romance (in both the love and literary senses) with expert research and stylistic aplomb -- rare in historical fiction these days. I loved the way he used a strange-but-true incident from political biography (Roscoe Conkling in the freak NY blizzard of 1888). Terrific political insights and intelligent writing, in the vein of William Kennedy.

Sharon says

saved review - sequel? to a previous novel?

Larry says

A junky story used to illustrate an interesting city (Washington, DC) at an intesting time. But only worth the effort if you really want to know about DC during its malaria-infested, swampy days.

Thom says

I've read several of Mallon's novels and this one was the first which was unable to hold my interest. Neither the setting nor the characters seemed fully formed on the page. A disappointment, but surely an aberration. At least, I hope so, as I have Henry and Clara and Aurora 7 sitting here next to me on my "to read" pile of books.

Autumn Doughton says

I bought this book a couple of years ago at The Friends of the Library sale because I liked the cover, but for some reason I never actually picked it up to read. I'm in between series right now and waiting for a book to be released tomorrow so I decided to give it a try.

The story has an interesting platform--a woman work with astronomers at the D.C. observatory post civil war. There are a lot of issues here that are interesting and workable--reconstruction, women's suffrage, science, invention, etc. but the novel never really capitalizes on any of these properly. That was truly a disappointment because I thought the author did a brilliant job of setting up the action and preparing the reader for a wonderful journey.

As the story progressed, the interesting issues were bypassed one by one to focus on on a love triangle. The problem was that it was one that I could neither relate to nor relish as I was irritated with the protagonist by

that point. The writing was engaging in many places, but Mallon fails as "selling" the characters to me. I didn't understand some of their motivations and I wasn't buying the relationships that he tried to develop. The biggest fault of this book was that this thought kept passing through my mind: what's the point? I don't need to have a revelation or fall in love, or learn about the universe with every story, but I do like for books to be purposeful and this one meandered.

Overall: the book has "something" but never reaches its own promise.

Bob Nolin says

Mallon seems to be a plot-challenged author. There was little or no sense of suspense, nothing pulling me along. The same scenes between the protagonists repeating over and over, oh so slowly advancing towards some kind of resolution that I just could not bring myself to give a hoot about. Despite my love of history and astronomy, I tossed it halfway through. "Henry and Clara" was better.

Kathi says

Picked this up because someone recommended it. After I read it, didn't completely enjoy it I realized the book that was recommended to me was "Walk Two Moons." I'll try that. Maybe some of the problem for me isn't I'm not super interested in astronomy, and the three main characters were unsympathetic and at times I rolled my eyes. Maybe I just wasn't in the mood.

Art says

Slow and boring

Karla Helvie says

I thought I would really like this book but I soon realized it would be only mediocre. The plot was a little difficult to follow, partly because I don't know enough about politics in that era, and partly because I didn't feel the characters and their backgrounds were completely developed (Cynthia being the exception). None of the characters were really likeable, and the whole story felt a little forced and unnatural.

Lis says

Well done

Excellent historical novel with well developed characters, fascinating history, keeps you guessing. Early Washington D.C. , politics and astronomy featured.

Sherry says

Much of this book was quite interesting, but as a whole I found it confusing. I never did understand what Hugh Allison was trying to accomplish by beaming an image of himself up into the sky. I liked that Cynthia May was a fierce independent woman, and the bits about politics were informative. But all the parts, the astronomy, the astrology, the politics, the boarding rooms, didn't add up to a very satisfying read. It seems as if Mallon had done lots of research and didn't want to waste any of it.

Christina Maria says

As cliche as it is to say it, this book was a breath of fresh air. Astronomers in the wake of the civil war, struggling under D.C. malaria outbreaks and the inference of a powerful senator, trying to grasp at something semi-divine. Although it was overall fairly slow, the novelty makes it worth the read.
