GOOD-BYE to the MOON

by Monica Hughes illustrated by Mick Coulas

Science fiction is fantasy based on science that takes the reader into an imaginary time and environment, often the future. As you read, look for the clues that indicate this story is science fiction.
Kepler Masterman is fifteen: he was born on the Moon, of which his father is the Governor. And now, for the first time, he is about to fly from that familiar place, the Moon, to that place excitingly unknown, the Earth.

I sat in the darkened room of the space station and looked out at Earth. It was strangely familiar to me. The photograph of the blue globe with its whip-cream swirls of cloud hung in the Control Center of Lunar Lab 21. There was a small copy of the same famous picture in our own living unit. To my mother and father, it had meant home.

What was this Earth to me? It was a shining silver disk, waxing from crescent to full, and waning back again to crescent, that traversed the skies of our long lunar nights. It was the song my mother sang to me, the first child born on Moon:

*Earth-shine, Earth-bright,*
*Grant the wish I wish tonight.*

But that was long, long ago. Mother had been dead for five years, and I, Kepler Masterman, son of Moon Governor, was actually going to Earth myself. Already I was over the first hurdle, the wearisome three-day journey on the old beat-up Moon ferry to the space station.

It was great to stretch my legs again and enjoy the low-gravity of the station’s slow spin after the weight of the moonrocket’s acceleration. I looked down at Earth, so close I felt I could reach out and touch it. What was down there? . . . The Sphinx . . . the Taj Mahal . . . skyscrapers. All the fantastic things I’d read about. I looked at my watch. Fifteen minutes to wait.

Restlessly I left the viewing room and glided down the long passageway to the hub of the space station. In the VIP lounge I could see Father, surrounded by reporters. Tired for one last good-bye to Moon.

Down the passage to the right here. The view room was empty, and I slid into a couch in the center front row. The room was dark, and the window was set in an angle that fooled the eye. It was as if nothing separated me from the black infinity of space and from Moon. It was so small now, my Moon, no bigger than the silver identidisk on the chain around my neck.

My eyes picked out the familiar features. The terminator, that razor-edge between night and day, arced down through the Ocean of Storms. The oblique sunlight etched clearly in black shadow the huge circle of Copernicus, and to its left, right on the edge of the terminator, I could see Kepler, the crater in which Lunar Lab was built. Home! Down there, a new Moon-day was just starting. The viewing ports of the labs and the living units would automatically darken as the brilliant rays of the sun stabbed down white-hard against the rocks of the crater. The heat-exchange units would slowly adjust from two weeks of warming up the buildings to cooling them, as for the next fifteen days the sun would shine down on Lunar Lab 21.

Down there at home the kids would be getting ready for the party. There’d always been a party at sunrise, ever since I could remember, and I was the oldest kid on Moon. The adults used to tease us sometimes . . . “Imagine having a party every day!” But it was only twelve or thirteen times a year, and there was something special about the sunlight creeping so slowly across the surface of Moon, striking the peaks of the Apennines, sending shadows chasing across the Sinus
Aestuum, each Earth-day a little closer, until finally the two long weeks of night were over, and we were bathed in sunlight again. The astronomers hated daytime, except for the solar experts. They couldn’t see the stars and had to stay in their rooms catching up on their paperwork. But everyone else loved it, especially the kids.

I sighed and thought of Ann. Wonder who'd be taking her to the party? We'd stood at the air lock to say goodbye. Ann had been crying, and her eyes were red. But she was as beautiful as ever. There had been an awful lump in my throat as I blurted out the words.

“I’ll be seeing you, Ann.”

“Oh, Kepler, take care of yourself.”


It was a terrible farewell. I'd worked out ahead of time exactly what I was going to say. It was terrific. It'd have bowled her over. But standing there by the air lock, I'd forgotten it all.

I squirmed at the memory and hoped that Ann wouldn't remember and laugh. Well, at least I could write. I knew I couldn't expect letters from Ann. Letter rates to Earth were crippling—so was the cost of everything that had to make the 240,000-mile haul. But I could write to Ann. That was one advantage of having the Lunar Governor as Father. I could slip my letters into the diplomatic bag, and they would go rocketing to Moon with no questions asked. But six months away from home... I was going to miss her. That was the disadvantage of having a Governor for Father.

The door swung open behind me, letting in a shaft of light and a babble of excited voices. There was a waft of exotic perfume. Real French perfume! The ferry from Earth must have arrived. These would be passengers on Moon Safari. This was a trip only for the very, very, wealthy. In fact, the tourist complex on the Sea of Serenity helped pay for some of the research expenses that the Moon administration was unable to wring from the reluctant cashbox of Earth.

I slipped out of the suddenly crowded room and down the passage to the central concourse. Father was standing there. There were last minute good-byes.

“Good luck, George.”

“We're counting on you, Governor!”

“See you in six months, at the latest.”

I walked beside him, trying to copy his casual stroll. I wasn't about to look like some-country Rube, even if it was my first Earth trip. But my first sight of the Earth-ferry threw me, and my jaw
stippled with gold, instead of the standard-issue green vinyl floor and plastic-coated steel walls. When I was a kid, I was always roaming into the wrong unit. They were all identical, and there just wasn’t the money to ferry up from Earth the sort of things that would have made them look homey. . . 

. . . The ferry shivered delicately and then moved slowly out of its holding dock. I could feel my body pressing gently against the padded couch as the ferry surrendered itself to Earth-grav. It was amazingly quiet and comfortable. I’d hardly slept on the trip down from Moon, and now, in spite of myself, I found my eyes shutting.

It seemed only a few minutes before Father’s voice woke me. “You’re a pretty blasé traveler, Kepler! But you mustn’t miss this sight. We’re just turning into Earth orbit. Look!”

I craned my neck eagerly and looked through the port. I recognized the narrow spine of Central America, and then the steely shimmer of the Atlantic lay beneath us. It went on and on.

“The planet’s all water!” I gasped. “Seven-tenths of it is,” Father agreed. “But . . . but. Oh, wow!” It was feeble, but what words could I have for it? A world that was seven-tenths water! Why, on Moon, water was harder to get than oxygen, much harder. Breathing was free. You could breathe as deeply and as often as you wished. Now that the hydroponic gardens were going, we didn’t have to pay for our oxygen any more. But water was something else.

Every ounce of it was worth its weight in Moon minerals. Dirt was removed by electrostatic filters in the labs and living units. Washing was a luxury and drinking a special delight.

There was no free water on the Moon. Every ounce we used was extracted in the refinement of the ores we sent down to Earth. And the mining companies charged us for it—every drop! I had grown up thinking water was the most precious stuff in the Universe. Now, with my own eyes I could see that Earth was covered with the stuff—slopping over with it.

We orbited across North Africa and Arabia. From my port I could see the island-spangled blueness of the Indian Ocean. Then the Pacific. I felt suddenly tired and a little sick. What sort of a place was this Earth, and what were its people like? Half a world made of water, and yet they had charged us for every single cup. I shut my eyes and turned away from the port.

“You feeling groggy?” Father’s voice was sympathetic. “They’re starting their braking orbit, and I guess you’ll really notice the weight difference. Don’t worry. It’ll get worse before it gets better. But it will get better. Just hang on!”
To the Earth passengers from the space station, I suppose the discomforts were minimal. Their apparent weight increased to double and momentarily three times their normal weight. I had not realized until this moment what my birthright of one-sixth Earth weight was going to mean when I tried to return “home.” It was like a barrier separating me from all these other people. Already I weighed six times my normal weight. As the braking continued, it increased to twelve times, to . . . The weight on my chest . . . I couldn’t breathe. I felt as if my brain was going to burst.

When I came back to my senses, the enormous pressure had lifted. I felt heavy and very tired. I lifted my head and looked blurrily around. We had landed! There was a bustle of unstrapping harnesses, collecting belongings. I struggled with my own safety straps, and Father leaned over to help me. The expression on his face told me I didn’t look good.

“Lie still, Kepler. You’ve had a nosebleed. I’ll get a stewardess to help.”

“I’m okay, Father.” My tongue felt thick, and the words were blurry. The stewardess hurried over. She bent down to wash my face.

“I can do it.” I muttered thickly, trying to take the cloth away from her.

“You just lie still, sonny. I’m just going to get you an ice pack. You really took the ‘Gs’ badly. You’ll have two beautiful shiners in the morning.”

“Sonny! How old did she think I was, anyway? Two black eyes . . . oh, brother! That was really starting out on the right foot. Look out, Earth. Here comes Kepler Masterman—on a banana skin!”

She glided back with the ice pack. How could she move so lightly on the heavy planet, I wondered. She looked no heavier than a grain of moondust.

She spoke to my father. “Governor, the press and TV are waiting for you. Are you ready to leave the ferry yet?”

“Oh, sure. I’ll come right away.” He swung himself up from his couch and stretched. He was a big man, my father, and muscular. I wondered if I’d ever catch up. I was at the weedy stage, and in spite of secret body-building in my own room, I wasn’t making much headway.

“Strange feeling going up to 170 pounds again. Don’t think I like it much. Kepler, lie still and take your time. I’m sure this young lady will look after you.”

I watched his broad back down the aisle and through the hatch, and then I took off the ice pack and swung my legs down to the floor. My head throbbed a bit, but it wasn’t too bad. Standing was tougher, and walking was a nightmare of
wading through glue, I gritted my teeth and practiced, one foot and then the other, up and down the aisle, holding on to the seat backs for support.

Six months on this planet. How was I ever going to make out? I saw the stewardess watching me from the galley door. I wished she’d go away, but when she saw I’d seen her, she came down the aisle toward me.

“I could get you a wheelchair,” she volunteered. “This low-grav syndrome can be a problem. It’s happened before, you know, though I guess you’re the first person who’s never experienced Earth-weight in his life.”

“I’m going to be fine, thanks. It just takes a little practice, that’s all.”

“Of course. Perhaps you’d like to clean up before you leave?” I took her hint and plodded back down the aisle to the washroom. Good grief, I was a disaster area! I took off my jacket—how cruelly cut it looked in comparison with the Earth fashions I’d seen on the ferry, and what rough material. Then I washed the rest of the blood off my face and combed my hair, what there was of it. It looked like a convict cut by Earth standards, but it would grow. There were red smudges under my eyes, but the shiners the stewardess had promised hadn’t shown up yet.

I put on my jacket and plodded down to the exit hatch. I hesitated, my hand on the ramp rail, looking at the crowd of exotically dressed reporters, cameramen, and casual bystanders milling around my father. It really was a new world down there at the end of the ramp.

“Good luck,” the stewardess said softly. She wasn’t a bad sort, really, only a bit old to understand. I managed a smile, swallowed, and walked down the ramp to join my father. I was drowned in a storm of voices. How loudly these Earth people talked, as if they were constantly trying to shout each other down.

“Governor, would you say the differences between Earth and Moon people are irreconcilable?”

“I certainly would not. On the contrary, I am convinced that with a clearer understanding of our problems, the differences between us will be settled amicably.”

“What do you intend to do if the U.N. vote goes against you?”

“I’m not even considering that possibility at the moment.”

“Governor, how long do you intend to spend on Earth this trip?”

“I anticipate that it may take as long as six months to settle our differences, though of course we could strike lucky . . . ”

“One last question, Governor. Now you are back on Earth again, will you tell our listeners—which is really home to you, Earth or Moon?”

“That’s a difficult question to answer. All my cultural ties are with Earth. But, like all immigrants who flocked to the New World and shaped it into a nation, I guess I must say that it is in this Newer World, Moon, that my present and future lie. My son was born there. My wife was buried there. My work is there. Yes, gentlemen, it is good to be back on Earth. But Moon is home!”

He saw me standing jammed among the reporters and casually gave me his arm. We walked together across the sun-splashed concrete of the landing pad. The sun was gently warm on my body and our shadows ran out ahead of us, soft, muzzy-edged. I looked up. The sky was a delicate blue with fluffy cumulus
clouds, just like the ones in my old video tapes. They sailed gracefully across the sky, unbelievably beautiful. A sudden white shape plunged and screeched. I jumped and clutched Father’s arm.

“What was that? . . . a bird?”

“Yes, Kepler. A seagull.”

I walked along, breathing real air, not the canned stuff. It was strange being outdoors without a spacesuit, scary but exciting. It looked as if Earth was going to be fun. If only my legs didn’t ache so.

“Is it far to the magnetrain, Father?”

“Hang on, son. It’s right ahead.”

Once aboard with my feet up, I didn’t feel so much of a country cousin. The magnetrain had been developed on Moon, where the absence of any atmosphere had precluded the use of conventional jet, hovercraft, or internal-combustion engines. Up there, we had perfected the magnetic lift system of propulsion, and our trains networked the lunar surface with silent pollution-free speeds of 500 miles an hour.

The idea had been enthusiastically adopted by an ecology-conscious Earth, and one of the items on my father’s agenda was to negotiate an acknowledgment in terms of royalties of the Lunar discovery.

I lay back and thought of the pyramids and the Taj Mahal, the temples of Angkor Wat, and the mysterious jungle buildings of the Incas. Would six months be time enough to see it all?
Think Critically

1. Kepler had a new experience when he felt the impact of Earth’s gravity on his weight. When have you had a totally new experience that surprised you? Text to Self

2. The story is fiction (make-believe) plus science (natural world and technology). Cite examples to show how the author combines the two elements of fiction and science. Think Like an Author

3. Kepler mentions many similarities and differences between life on the Moon and life on Earth. Name at least two similarities and two differences he mentions. Then choose which difference you would have the most trouble adjusting to. Explain why. Compare and Contrast

4. Briefly summarize the main story problem, key events, climax, and resolution. Story Structure

5. Look Back and Write What does “the reluctant cashbox of Earth” (p. 276) tell you about the relations between Earth and the Moon in this futuristic story? Write the answer and explain why this phrase is important to the story. Provide evidence to support your answer. Extended Response