



Double Star

Robert A. Heinlein

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One minute, down and out actor Lorenzo Smythe was — as usual — in a bar, drinking away his troubles as he watched his career go down the tubes. Then a space pilot bought him a drink, and the next thing Smythe knew, he was shanghaied to Mars.

Suddenly he found himself agreeing to the most difficult role of his career: impersonating an important politician who had been kidnapped. Peace with the Martians was at stake — failure to pull off the act could result in interplanetary war. And Smythe's own life was on the line — for if he wasn't assassinated, there was always the possibility that he might be trapped in his new role forever!

Double Star Details

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From Reader Review Double Star for online ebook

Lubinka Dimitrova says

"If there were ethical basics that transcended time and place, then they were true both for Martians and for men. They were true on any planet around any star—and if the human race did not behave accordingly they weren't ever going to win to the stars because some better race would slap them down for double-dealing."

4,5 stars. One couldn't not love the good, old sci-fi, especially when sprinkled with some political Libertarianism. I really liked all the characters, but I was also deeply troubled by the parallels with the white supremacist ideology that seems to rise again these days...

Maria Dobos says

O lectura facil? ?i amuzant?, *Stea dubl?* este povestea lui Lawrence Smith, un actor ?omer care accept? s? joace rolul unei mari personalit??i politice timp de c?teva zile ?i se treze?te f?r? voia sa ?n miezul unei ?ntregi conspira?ii oculte...

Cu toate c? nu este o capodoper? a originalit??ii sau a r?sturn?rilor de situa?ie, cartea asta mi-a pl?cut destul de mult datorit? stilului ironic ?i personalit??ii personajului principal - folosirea persoanei ?ntâi ?i felul ?n care Smith (Smith cel ?ngâmfat - ?mi vine ?n minte c?nd m? g?ndesc la el) ?i?i pl?nge uneori de mil?, modul hot?rât ?n care declam? c? nu va mai continua ?arada ca apoi s? se lase ?nduplecat - toate acestea ?i?i creeaz? senza?ia unei complicit??i ?i te fac sa ?i?i dore?ti un final fericit al ?ntregii situa?ii.

Printre ideile interesante: egalitatea dintre rase (umane ?i non-umane ?n acest caz), importan?a men?inerii imaginii politice publice ?n detrimentul esen?ei ?i implica?iile pe care le are abordarea unui rol pentru fiecare actor.

Lumea accept? o anumit? cantitate de reform?, dup? care se mai odihne?te. Dar reforma r?mâne. Lumea nu vrea cu adev?rat schimbare, nici un fel de schimbare – iar xenofobia are r?d?cini adânci. Dar progres?m, dac? trebuie – dac? vrem s? ajungem la stele.

Ed [Redacted] says

I have a soft spot for Heinlein. Often I think that a Heinlein book that I really enjoy will not be for everyone, however, in this case, I think nearly everyone would enjoy this light, entertaining romp of a book.

The narrative is from the POV of the protagonist Lawrence Smythe (hack actor "The Great Lorenzo"). Smythe is a narcissistic, self delusional asshat who is suddenly, more or less without his informed consent, thrust into what turns out to be the life changing role of a lifetime. It is fun to see Smythe's interaction with the strange world Heinlein built, and the development of Smythe's character throughout.

This was one of my favorite Heinlein books yet and I would recommend it to anyone who wants to read a good story that doesn't take itself too seriously.

Stephen says

4.0 to 4.5 stars. Of the Heinlein novels I have read, this one is my second favorite after *The Moon Is a Harsh Mistress*. I have always been a fan of the "idea" portions of Heinlein's stories but sometimes have found the actual plots a bit dry. Not so with this one which I really liked from both an idea and plot perspective.

In brief, the story revolves around a talented, but unemployed, actor named Lawrence Smith recruited to portray a popular politician after he has been kidnapped by political rivals. I really like both Smith and politician he impersonates named John Joseph Bonforte. Both characters come across as true heroes in the classic sense of the word. This plot dealt quite a bit with politics which I really enjoyed as well maintaining excellent pacing and tension throughout. I also thought the very last line of the book was classic. Highly Recommended!!

Winner: Hugo Award Best Science Fiction Novel (1956).

David says

This is a story about a down-in-his-luck actor, Lorenzo Smythe. He was approached with a job; to impersonate someone for about an hour. It would be a quick job, and he would be well paid for his efforts.

Lorenzo was not told who he would be impersonating, or the reason why. He had to take the job--or leave it. He eventually was talked into taking the job, but little did he know that the job was to impersonate someone on Mars. And Lorenzo got physically sick at the sight and smell of Martians!

This is a fun story, well told, by the great science fiction author, Robert Heinlein. While it takes place with the solar system as the stage, the story could just as well have taken place strictly on Earth, as a normal story. There isn't much science here, but the story doesn't really need any. There are a few technological innovations, but none really out of line from today's technology.

The story flows almost like a mystery novel. I've looked at some of the other reviews here; don't read them, as I believe they give away many of the mysteries.

Bryan says

A fun and quick book, and another example of why the most consistently enjoyable Heinlein writings were the early ones.

There's nothing amazingly noteworthy, and it's certainly not a must-read-before-you-die type of book. But it does have a message, and it does have an exuberant style, and (probably its greatest attribute) the book is concise enough to know precisely how to avoid overstaying its welcome.

You won't regret giving this a read, whether you've never read science fiction or whether you read nothing but... This is perhaps another strength of the novel, and although based on an untested assumption, I do think it may be the one of the more broadly accessible Heinlein works beyond the typical SF readership.

A well-deserved early Hugo winner, and a solid 4-star rating from me.

Tadiana ☆Night Owl? says

Review also posted at Fantasy Literature.

In *Double Star*, a 1956 Robert Heinlein novella, Lawrence Smith (aka Lorenzo Smythe or "Lorenzo the Great"), an out-of-work actor, accepts a job to impersonate a man for a few days, without, perhaps, asking as many questions about the job as he should have. He promptly finds himself whisked off to the planet Mars, standing in for one of the most important political figures in the solar system, who has been kidnapped. Larry's first task: fool the Martians during a vitally important Martian adoption ceremony. But somehow one appearance as a double leads to another, and another...

My (self-imposed) mission was to find a Robert Heinlein story where the enjoyment of the tale isn't swamped by the offensive content for which Heinlein is, unfortunately, well known. *Double Star*, I think, does the job pretty well. There are a couple of instances of eyebrow-raising dialogue, and the women mostly have secretarial-type jobs, but it's par for what you'd normally expect to see in 1950's books (even science fiction; the imaginations of mid-century SF authors had their limits), and nothing was too far out of line.

Heinlein gets on his soapbox a little about personal freedoms and politics, but it's all good since the main message is equality for all races, including Martians and Venerians (aliens from Venus). A few outdated technologies like microfilm and slide rules appear alongside the spaceships and ray guns, but it doesn't ruin the fun. It's actually pretty amusing in a retro kind of way.

This is a quick and humorous read, not terribly challenging, but enjoyable, and there are some interesting ideas about how acting a role can change you as a person, the importance of the political process, and the impact one person can have.

Manny says

Brian Aldiss, in *Trillion Year Spree*, says this is Heinlein's most enjoyable novel. Who am I to fault his judgment? It is, indeed, a lot of fun: pathetic, failed actor Laurence Smith (stage name, "Lorenzo Smythe") is hired to impersonate John Joseph Bonforte, leader of the Expansionist party, and the Solar System's most important politician. Bonforte has been kidnapped, and for complicated reasons there is an appointment he must attend; no excuse will be acceptable if he fails to turn up on time.

So Smythe is drafted in, proceeds to learn Bonforte's mannerisms and background story, and starts his unusual new job. The first public appearance goes fine, and no one suspects a thing. Then he has to do another one, and then yet another. Pretty soon he's living Bonforte's life for him. I don't want to give away too much of a fun plot, but the basic message is that politicians, even good ones like Bonforte, are fakes. Any halfway competent actor with a few weeks of prep time could step into their shoes, and they would do just as

well.

I think Heinlein was unusually prescient here. When he wrote it, remember that there was no Reagan or Schwarzenegger. And even now, the book has some punch left. Politics is less and less about ideas, more and more about appearances; you need a good script, and the ability to project your character in a convincing way. For a couple of weeks in 2008, it looked like Sarah Palin had a decent shot at becoming Vice President (and maybe, later, President), largely on the strength of her "hockey mom" persona. It now seems that that was largely a construct, but I believed it at the time, even though I didn't like it.

In England, it appears that we're going to get David Cameron as our next Prime Minister. He's a Conservative, and he's campaigning on a platform of helping the poor and the environment; it's difficult to believe it's any more honest than Dubya's "compassionate conservatism". But that's not the important thing. He interprets the role imaginatively, and he looks convincing; if this were the Oscars, I'd be tipping him for a statuette, and most voters are viewing the election in pretty much that way. Heinlein had a point.

Özgür says

Bilimkurgu okurlar? daha fazla keyif alacaklardır. Benim okuduğum edisyon 104 sayfaydı (OKAT Yayınlar? - Kindle'da okudum), Metis baskısı? 180 sayfa görünüyor. Sanırım benim okuduğum biraz farklıdır? tercümesi.

Sarah says

A couple of years ago I attended an event at which Connie Willis spoke about her research for *Blackout* and *All Clear*. She referenced numerous romantic comedies and several war movies in addition to her factual historic research. I don't recall that she brought up many works of fiction, but *Double Star* was one of them, and it stuck in my mind as something I wanted to read. Between the Hugo win and the subject matter, I thought it would be worth a try.

Willis said that *Double Star* was inspired by the story of M.E. Clifton James, who was sent to North Africa and Gibraltar in Field Marshal Montgomery's place in order to confuse the Germans. She borrowed these events in her own depiction of the intelligence war. Heinlein's version is less madcap than the Willis version, and possibly less madcap than the true story, given that James was an alcoholic and a smoker (and was missing a finger!) and Montgomery was not.

Double Star is fast paced and somehow manages a light tone despite the serious subject matter. The Great Lorenzo (nee Lawrence Smith) is an out of work actor when he is plucked out of a bar to perform the role of a lifetime: impersonating the kidnapped Expansionist leader John Joseph Bonforte.

At the beginning, the actor's character is painted somewhat broadly. He spends a lot of time talking about his own acting chops, and it takes the reader a while to trust that he is actually as good as he says. This journey mimics that of Bonforte's inner circle, who agree to the deception out of desperation, but have little confidence that it will work.

Most of this shortish novel takes place over the span of a few weeks. It manages to flesh out the political situation fairly quickly, and with enough depth that there is a sense of what is at stake in the impersonation gambit. The character development of the support players is a little lacking, but Smith is fully realized, as is Bonforte in a more oblique fashion. It's interesting to see Smith's own fears and prejudice and strong personality twist to conform with the role he is forced to play.

On the whole, I think this book has aged well, but as usual with mid-century SF, I had some issues with the characterization of women. Smith learned his profession from his father, but doesn't seem to have had a mother to speak of. Bonforte's assistant, Penny, is intelligent, but also moody and petulant and subject to fainting spells. She is also deep in unrequited love for Bonforte. Thankfully, she is only threatened with a spanking once by a co-worker. If it had been twice I would have been tempted to put the book down.

I'm glad I didn't put it down. I was impressed by the taut plotting and the contained timeline. I'd be very curious to find out where the breaks were in the original Astounding serialization. The will-he-be-found-out moments dripped with suspense, and Smith's personal journey was well depicted. This is a worthy Hugo winner, and I'd place it near the top of my personal best-of-Heinlein list.

Michael says

Before I begin, I'd like to thank you all for choosing to read this review today. It is you who actively participate in the Goodreads community that are the pulsating heart of this great country, _____. (Insert your country name here.) Without your efforts, intellectual life everywhere would be sure to stagnate. This has always been my position, and I am a man with firm convictions, never changing my mind about anything.

Just yesterday, a young, impoverished child asked me how I was going to help improve this country if I am elected Czar. And I said...*checks notes on palm*...lower taxes by wagging war--wagging war? Oh, uh, sorry--WAGING war...on evil countries full of terrorists. I also prioritize putting children first, and also putting the environment and our future first.

It is my pleasure to discuss Double Star this afternoon. Double Star is a terrific book of mine, and I've known it for several weeks. Honestly, I can only say nice things about it. Having won the Hugo in...some year...it is a book with the greatest of accolades to its name.

It's the story of an actor asked to play the most challenging and dangerous role of his life: representing a politician during a ceremony that, if it isn't conducted exactly right, could mean death. But after the ceremony, the politician isn't yet ready to return to his duties, and the actor is hired for another job.

Witty and fast-paced, Double Star is very fun, and I can't honestly say whether I liked this or Starship Troopers better. Yes, I can. I liked this one better because at the end of the day, the message here was, "Politicians can be replaced by decent actors without anyone noticing," whereas the message in Starship Troopers was "Woo Haa! Go team!" While I give full credit to those willing to serve in the armed forces of _____, and I'm aware that they are the pulsating heart of this great country, and without them, nobody would protect our borders from those dangerous terrorists and immigrants, I relate more with the former message.

It is truly a shame that so many of our representatives seem to simply say what they think people want to hear, but unfortunately, some people are stupid enough that they can get away with it. Not you people,

though, you people are the foundation that this country is built upon. It's time we take back this country from bland, insipid politicians, and put someone with real positions on the issues back in office! And I have positions! On the issues!

I believe that our children shouldn't take drugs, and education is important! Unlike you-know-who, who wants to undermine all the values that you hold dear! Say no to socialism and fascism! And vote like a patriot! Vote for our future! Vote for me! Click "yes" below, and take a stand for values! You like values, right?

Stuart says

Double Star: No second-rate actor could ever become president, right?

Originally posted at Fantasy Literature

Double Star is one of Robert Heinlein's most enjoyable early period SF novels, a short and tightly-plotted story of out-of-work actor Lawrence Smith (aka "The Great Lorenzo"), who is unexpectedly tapped for a very important acting job, to impersonate an important politician named John Bonforte who has been kidnapped. Initially the job is supposed to be just short-term until the real guy can be rescued, but as things drag out, this becomes more difficult. Even more surprisingly, Lorenzo finds he is actually getting quite good at impersonating Bonforte, and has started to understand and sympathize with his politics as well. But how far can this situation go before somebody blows his cover...

Published in 1956 and winner of the Hugo Award, this book is perfectly paced, with great supporting characters and plenty of twists and turns. The characteristic Heinlein wit is effortless, and even when he discusses politics, it doesn't get tiresome. More than anything, what amazing foresight he had. I mean, that would be unthinkable that an action star or second-rate actor could be a governor, or even, God forbid, President of the United States, right?

While Double Star is a great novel, I have mixed feelings about the works of Dean and Grand Master of Science Fiction, Robert Heinlein. I couldn't stand Starship Troopers and Stranger in a Strange Land, but loved The Door Into Summer and Double Star. I found much to admire in The Moon is a Harsh Mistress but also got tired of some of the lecturing. You couldn't find a more opinionated person on the subjects of politics (liberal and conservative), personal responsibility to society, the military, criticism of organized religion, sexual freedom, libertarianism, very mixed attitudes (both admiring and condescending) towards women, and of course a great enthusiasm for depicting realistic future societies of all kinds.

His early books (haven't read the juveniles, though I'm sure they were great for young folks growing up in the early 1950s) are really fun, with exciting plots, snarky dialogue, plucky characters, and interesting ideas. His middle stuff gets much further into exploring his ideas about politics, sex and religion, and his later stuff is almost unreadable, bloated, self-indulgent explorations of his own inner obsessions, with a healthy dollop of incest and kinky sex. I'm sure those books would never have been published if they were written by anyone other than Heinlein.

In the end, the SF genre has been enriched immeasurably by the presence of Robert Heinlein, along with his fellow giants Arthur C. Clarke and Isaac Asimov, and the genre will probably never see his like again.

Celise says

Washed-up actor Lorenzo Smythe accepts the role of his lifetime- to impersonate a politician who has been kidnapped, right before both an important meeting meant to unite Humans and Martians. Failure to show up could result in a war between planets.

This book was originally published in 1956 and it certainly felt dated to me. Despite human existence now being on an interplanetary level, this is very much an American story with a limited scope. Lorenzo often doesn't refer to Humankind as being from Earth, but simply as "America". Along with the anti-British sentiment which seems so small once you bring space into the matter, and the bigotry between humankind and the martians, the viewpoints in this book are really rather boring and outdated.

I was hoping for something a little bit more fun and not so heavily reliant on the reader's understanding of the American political system, but perhaps it's my own fault for not expecting as much.

David says

This is one of Heinlein's early novels, which you can tell by the brevity and the lack of wankery. Also the fact that he just jumps straight into the story and never wastes much time on exposition.

This is in fact one of Heinlein's greatest strengths, and I think a major reason for his grandmaster status — he may be a bit out of fashion nowadays, and he often lost the plot in his later works, but he was first and foremost a storyteller. A spinner of yarns, a teller of tales, and if readers frequently read too much into the author's id because of what his characters did, that was their own lookout.

Double Star is typical of Heinlein SF. We get a fully sketched out (but barely described) interplanetary society, in which the United States still exists as a sovereign state, in cooperation with an Empire that governs across the solar system. Mars is its own planet, and the alien Martians coexist with humanity, with some on both sides wanting the two races to join together, while others are violent separatists. All of this plus the spacefaring technology, which is on the slightly soft side of hard SF, but presents nothing particularly outlandish for this rocket ships and BEM era story.

What makes Heinlein a master of his craft is that he drops us into this universe and makes it all perfectly understandable (the parts that aren't really explained don't matter), without devoting a single chapter, in fact barely a paragraph, to exposition. What exposition there is is all through character dialog, and it all happens through action rather than "As You Know Bob" conversations. Hence, our main character, Lorenzo Smythe, who is a Martianphobe who winds up having to impersonate a politician who is involved in an important formal ritual to become an honorary Martian, tells us everything we need to know about Martians between dodging murder attempts by a renegade faction of Martians (this happens in the first few pages of the book) and whining about how much he dislikes Martians on his hasty trip to go make friends with them.

Heinlein characters are always a bit freakishly competent, which is why we're supposed to believe that Lorenzo is such a great actor that even though he was grabbed seemingly at the last moment by a couple of a shady men needing him to impersonate a famous politician at a moment's notice, he manages to fool almost everyone around his subject, from the Martians to the Emperor.

There are even some space politics in this book, though Heinlein is blamed for soapboxing more than he actually did, and while there are hints of his usual rugged self-reliance and free trade philosophy, nothing is too obviously on the nose with regards to real-world politics. Are the Martians a metaphor for some Earthly Other? Maybe - you could read them that way, but sometimes a Martian is just a Martian. Likewise, the politician he is impersonating, one of those rare honest sorts who honestly is trying to do the right thing for his nation and his constituents, could easily be read as a liberal or a conservative or any other sort of party member.

This was in fact a pretty fast-paced yarn about political conspiracies and diplomatic maneuvers that could have easily been told without the sci-fi trappings. Heinlein added spaceships and Martians because that's the kind of story he wrote, but I'll bet non-SF readers would enjoy this story just as much if it had been written as a "mundane" conspiracy thriller.

This is not his most exciting or imaginative work, but it is a good showcase of Heinlein's early style, and his talents as a writer.

Petertpc says

This may be my favorite Robert Heinlein novel, at least of the few I've read so far. I enjoy political intrigue in SF novels and Heinlein does a great job creating a detailed, believable plot full of twists and turns, that still never seems to drag. Lorenzo Smythe is a great character who grows during the course of the book to become a better person. I like that. I also like that there was none of the weird Heinlein sex stuff that made me dislike "Stranger in a Strange Land."

This was just a fun, well thought out science fiction story.

Jim says

Again, I was really tickled by this old tale in audio format. The reader was excellent & his voices occasionally had me in stitches. The King sounded like JFK & it worked. LOL!

Politics is the greatest game, but sometimes has dirty players, is Heinlein's assertion. The basic idea is that of team play. Interesting idea & I loved the way the character evolved. Again, he managed to fit a lot of his own ideas into the story without being preachy & keeping the action moving the entire time.

Mohsen M.B says

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Manuel Antão says

If you're into stuff like this, you can read the full review.

Pax Americana: "Double Star" by Robert A. Heinlein

Implausible and impossible to put down- like all of Heinlein's books I've read its hero is a man of action and boundless self confidence, a wisecracking all-American cowboy figure who brushes obstacles aside, a genial dictator figure who knows that as long as he's left in charge everything will be o.k. The voice is always the same – and I can see why the new wave of science fiction writers reacted against Heinlein: Aldiss, Moorcock, Ballard, Dick. Heinlein's Pax Americana and paternalism vision of the future certainly does have fascist overtones. But he's still a great storyteller, his books filled with mind-bending concepts presumably achieved without the help of the consciousness expanding substances that inspired some of his successors.

Yes, the Bonforte character was a very macho autocrat...Who cares? Nevertheless, "The Great Lorenzo" doesn't quite conform to the macho 'tit man' narrator as Heinlein... although the authorial voice does creep through in interesting ways in his stereotyped descriptions of Lorenzo's camp-actor personality and co...Heinlein enjoyed challenging established ways of thinking, and for most of his great period of writing liberal politics was on the rise, so he took great pleasure in poking holes in political sacred figures.

If you're into SF, read on.

Lyn says

Really enjoyed this.

Heinlein's first but least recognized Hugo Award winner. Like many of his better works, this is a science fiction vehicle that he uses to discuss other issues, here he spends time with politics, maybe even adding some subtle, and not too subtle ideas about what he thinks is right and wrong in politics.

Not consistent with other novels about Martians, or his future fiction in other books, but excellent characterization and a fun story. Borrows heavily from the Prisoner of Zenda theme.

Sharon Barrow Wilfong says

I like vintage Science Fiction novels and this fit the bill in every way. In many ways the science fiction of the 1950s were adventure stories that just happened to take place in outer space. The characters were even called

"Space Cowboys" because the heroes did not act much differently then the romanticized versions of, in reality, a boring job herding cattle.

Digression:

How such a tedious job as taking care of cows metamorphosed into a glamorous, "good guys conquering the villains" persona is a mystery to me. Why did not skilled artisans ever develop such a reputation? "Bif, the brick layer smelled trouble. Slowly he pulled out his trowel, and stealthily advanced toward the fast disappearing shadow just around the corner..."

Back to the review:

Double Star is a fun adventure story that had me wondering what was going to happen to the very end and, unlike some stories, resolves in a satisfying, convincing and also poignant way.

"If a man walks in dressed like a hick and acting as if he owned the place, he's a spaceman."

This is the first sentence of the story and the observation is made by our main character, Lawrence Smith, aka "the Great Lorenzo."

He might have been great but now he is an out of work actor trying to avoid creditors. He is sitting inside a bar when he sees the aforementioned man walk in. He strikes up a conversation with him and soon finds himself sucked into the vortex of an adventure.

I do not want to give anything away, but briefly, the spaceman Dak Broadbent needs the great Lorenzo to perform his greatest act ever: impersonate an intergalactic political figure for the future of the universe. If that sounds like a tall order, it is.

John Joseph Bonforte has made great strides in diplomatic dealings with Martians. So much so that the Martians want to make him one of them and have him perform a "nesting rite". Don't ask what that is. The upshot is that it will make Bonforte a fellow Martian and family. This will go far in bringing Martians into the Empire because they will see themselves as having a voice in the intergalactic government, something they don't have now, even though Earth has colonized the planet, although they apparently have not overpowered the Martians, which would make them a formidable foe if uncooperative with the empire's plans.

There is a faction, both human and Martian that are against this kind of union. They have therefore kidnapped Bonforte so he will be unable to attend the Martian rite.

Now, one thinks, so what? Surely the Martians will understand that he has been kidnapped and contrary to his own will, will not attend the ceremony.

No, they won't. Their idea of honor is that one deserves to die if they for any reason, even those beyond their control, do not follow through on their word. They are willing to die themselves for failing to follow through and would expect no less from a human.

The kidnappers know this and hope to destroy all diplomatic relations with Mars and the Empire as a result.

The solution? Hire an actor to impersonate Bonforte for the ceremony. The kidnappers won't dare reveal

what they have done because it would turn everyone against them.

At first Lorenzo balks, but he soon grows attached to the idea of not only the challenge of what would undoubtedly be his greatest performance but of achieving something not just for himself but something greater for man (and Martian) kind.

The story is told in first person narrator by Lorenzo. He is a very likeable person and very human as he struggles with the part he is to play in this adventure and also how he thinks and calculates to pull everything off. We see his transformation as he "becomes" Bonforte. Heinlein succeeded in creating a character worth following around on this rather suspenseful story.

Things, naturally don't go smoothly, or it would be a much shorter story, so we get to ride along bumps and twists as unexpected plot turns arise.

This might be called an "old fashioned" science fiction story, but it is my favorite kind and they are mostly be the kind I read.
