



The Moon's a Balloon

David Niven

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One of the bestselling memoirs of all time, David Niven's *The Moon's a Balloon* is an account of one of the most remarkable lives Hollywood has ever seen.

Beginning with the tragic early loss of his aristocratic father, then regaling us with tales of school, army and wartime hi-jinx, Niven shows how, even as an unknown young man, he knew how to live the good life.

But it is his astonishing stories of life in Hollywood and his accounts of working and partying with the legends of the silver screen - Lawrence Oliver, Vivien Leigh, Cary Grant, Elizabeth Taylor, James Stewart, Lauren Bacall, Marlene Dietrich, Noel Coward and dozens of others, while making some of the most acclaimed films of the last century - which turn David Niven's memoir into an outright masterpiece.

An intimate, gossipy, heartfelt and above all charming account of life inside Hollywood's dream factory, *The Moon is a Balloon* is a classic to be read and enjoyed time and again..

The Moon's a Balloon Details

Date : Published October 27th 1994 by Penguin (first published 1971)

ISBN : 9780140239249

Author : David Niven

Format : Paperback 327 pages

Genre : Biography, Nonfiction, Autobiography, Memoir, Humor, Culture, Film

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From Reader Review The Moon's a Balloon for online ebook

Robyn says

This is the greatest autobiography I've ever picked off the shelf. Rather than have me go on and on about it's awesomeness, I'll give you some highlights from the first two chapters:

the FIRST paragraph:

"Nessie, when I first saw her, was seventeen years old, honey-blonde, pretty rather than beautiful, the owner of a voluptuous but somehow innocent body and a pair of legs that went on forever. She was a Piccadilly whore."

"Grizel [my sister], who was two years older than me, became very interested in the shape and form of my private parts; but when after a particularly painful inspection, I claimed my right to see hers too, she covered up sharply and dodged the issue by saying, 'Well, it's a sort of flat arrangement.'"

"For the most part, the masters [at school] were even more frightening. It would be charitable to think that they were shell-shocked heroes returned from the hell of Mons and Vimy, but it seems more probable that they were sadistic perverts who had been dredged up from the bottom of the educational barrel at a time of acute manpower shortage."

"After the sudden descent of my testicles, I was removed from the choir..."

I'm not even half-way done yet, but so far it is a touching memoir of the years post-WWI.

I'll continue my review as I read!

Ruth says

David Niven tells his life story (or at the least the first part of it) in this book, and he does it in wonderfully entertaining, genuinely amusing and often quite touching fashion. From his early life with a distant stepfather, through his life in the Highland Light Infantry, before deciding to give up a military career to try his luck in Hollywood (although he returned to Britain to fight in World War II), Niven takes the reader on a journey packed with anecdotes and funny interludes.

As he explains in the introduction, he drops names all over the place, particularly while talking about his film career, but he remains respectful throughout, and his genuine affection and respect for many of his contemporaries comes through. His stories – both of his Hollywood life, and his military career – are peppered with laugh-out-loud one-liners; several times I would burst out laughing and then insist on reading bits out to my husband. Niven is truly a wonderful storyteller and raconteur – he is also self-effacing and honest about his own shortcomings, and modest about his talents as an actor.

Details of his film career also reveal some of Hollywood's machinations, and by the end of the book – which was published in 1972 – it's clear that he is unhappy about a changing film industry.

Unlike many such memoirs, Niven did not use a ghostwriter – the writing is his own – and he has a lovely turn of phrase, but is also capable of showing genuine emotion, such as when he describes the tragic death of his first wife, which had me struggling to hold back tears.

If you are at all interested in David Niven, or Hollywood in the 40s – 60s, I would definitely recommend this book.

MAP says

An amusing memoir of the first half of David Niven's life. However, there is WAY too much military stuff, that I admit I really really quickly skimmed through. Also, one gets the sense that behind the gentlemanly air and self-deprecating humor, David Niven was not a nice person, with little respect for women and definitely someone who used others to rise to the top. Articles I've read about him since his death seem to confirm this.

I've also found his second book, "Bring on the Empty Horses," which focuses more on his movie career, and I've been told that it's a much funnier book that drags less.

Wsm says

David Niven's friend Roger Moore wrote that he told splendid stories, but he also embellished them. I had earlier read his other book, *Bring on the Empty Horses*, and found it very enjoyable. *The Moon's a Balloon* is the story of his life, which saw him serve in the army, become a bootlegger, work as a movie extra, fight in World War II and become a major international movie star. It has its share of laughs, also highlighted are the hardships of his life.

Cathy (cathepsut) says

I read this at some point in the '90s. I don't recall any details, just a general sense of having read something pleasant and somewhat entertaining, befitting of the biography of a true, English gentleman.

BrokenTune says

Charming. Absolutely charming.

This isn't the greatest of memoirs I have read but Niven's rather down to earth narration makes it worthwhile. For someone so well known, he could have been much more arrogant but it is one of the aspects that makes this book so readable that he does not mind telling of his failures.

And, yet, I would have hoped for more insights and opinions rather than a more or less straight run-down of his life and career.

Rob Adey says

Niven pretty much presents himself as an R-rated *Beano* character, and this collection of scrapes and practical jokes would arguably be better off in 'annual' format.

I found the first half of the book, which deals with his schooling and the military, good fun. But the second half is a cavalcade of movie stars I know nothing about - I barely know who David Niven is, to be honest - so I lost interest. I expect if you *have* seen more than three films made before 1970 you will have a different experience.

I enjoyed his metaphor - motif, even - of a wind (a Chinese wind, I think, you could say that then) blowing weeds into his garden whenever things go wrong.

Edward Higgins says

"Mmm. Trubshawe...Niven..."

"Goats? Bad show..."

Jonathan says

This is one of those books that I had been meaning to read for years, especially after a trusted recommendation, but I was only a kind-of-fan of David Niven on screen. Then I saw him a week or so ago in *Bluebeard's 8th Wife* in a very funny supporting role to Gary Cooper and Claudette Colbert, and fell a little in love with him.

Once I had got over the surprise at the rather fruity language and schoolboy humour of the book, I settled into a quick and entertaining read. Most of the book concentrates on Niven's pre-Hollywood time at school and in the army. He isn't exactly a scoundrel, but you can see why his mother despaired of him. Written in 1971, the book does encompass his whole life, and while it is generally light-hearted, with laugh out loud moments scattered liberally throughout, it is also peppered with tragedy. I know it is on quite a few friends to-read lists, and can only encourage you to go ahead and pick up a copy.

Steven Ryan says

I just love the man

Ruth says

C1971: I have always felt that this is the best “Hollywood” autobiography. It helped that I always liked David Niven in films and the relatively early days of cinema are so interesting. However, his early life and career during the Second World War were, dare I say it, even more captivating. I am certain that, as with everyone’s memories, there were a few less than accurate details due to his reputation as being a raconteur of note. This is a laugh out loud funny book! I have re-read this book on so many occasions and this is the one of the few books that even The Non-bibliophile read and enjoyed. “ Benchley was one of the wittiest men alive, but unlike most people full of funny things to say, he was rather retiring. … Benchley disappeared to Europe. I made him promise to go to Venice, which he had never before visited. One day he cabled me, and in view of the address he used, the fact that it was delivered was flattering enough:

VENICE

NIVENTRAVEL
HOLLYWOOD

STREETS FULL OF WATER. ADVISE
BENCHLEY”

David Hull says

A most enjoyable autobiographical read which clearly conveys the delightfully charming, mischievous, colorful, and witty, antics, experiences, and life, of one of Britain's best-known and much-loved actors - the archetypal English gentleman, David Niven; from his childhood in London where he was born in 1910, through the wartime years as a commissioned officer with the Highland Light Infantry, and his acceptance in the US as an accomplished actor during Hollywood's 'heydays', initially in the mid-1930's, and then following the 2nd World War, from the late 1940's and for the next 20+ years. Niven's own accounts are funny, self-deprecating, honest, humble, and 'real'. No celebrity narcissism here - just an absolute love of life, and others; someone (generally) making the best of things. I would have loved to have met him - I'm sure he would make anyone feel most welcome and at home. A true gentleman, and a terrific read!

Dave Powell says

Its easy to see why this is considered one of the greatest Hollywood biographies. Through a combination of good fortune and good contacts Niven made his way to the top during Hollywood's golden era, maybe not the greatest actor , as John Mortimer commented - "I don't think his acting ever quite achieved the brilliance or the polish of his dinner-party conversations." he still managed to win an Oscar for Separate Tables in 1958. Friends with the rich and famous from Marilyn Monroe (who he slept with) to JFK (who his wife slept with and caught chlamydia) Niven came to epitomise the suave and sophisticated Englishmen - words that seem like they were invented for him, Serial adulterer he may have been but then you wouldn't want to read the book if he'd lived the life of a monk. Although he doesn't really go in to detail about his adultery (others have filled in those details for us) you get a real sense of a life lived to the full, a mix of tragedy and comedy that will leave you wanting to find out more about this Hollywood legend.

Kathy says

I remember David Niven from the 1970s when he was a regular tv chat show guest. His anecdotes often had Michael Parkinson crying with laughter and he played the part of urbane raconteur with a polished ease.

So this book seems like very much a part of that performance. Niven strikes me as the kind of person who worked very hard at being the perfect dinner party guest, honing his humorous anecdotes over so many years that he sort of forgot which had actually happened to him and which he had heard from someone else. For I don't believe for one second that this book is actually an autobiography, any more than today's stand-up comedians are autobiographical in their routines.

Niven came from that class of cocksure twits who used to run this country and it certainly shows. He never quite explains how he came to spend the weekend with people like Winston Churchill, or how he always managed to find someone who would put him up, get him a job, or lend him money. He also overlooks to mention the names of any of the ordinary men that he knew in the army - the Jocks, or the Cockneys, as he refers to them en masse. But every officer is apparently an old pal or a friend of the family and he bumps into them all over Europe and America. It makes you realise what a small and insulated world it was for the privileged few.

But in spite of this, Niven was fundamentally an entertainer. His stage persona was charming, upper class, roguish and self deprecating and this book is the performance of that persona. He was one of the Hollywood glitterati for quite a few years and was pals with the likes of Errol Flynn, Lawrence Olivier and Humphrey Bogart, but if you are looking for film history, this is not the book for you... Niven was above all a socialite and I feel sure that there is no part of this book that was not a dinner party anecdote a hundred times before it got written down on the page.

Terence M says

I read this book nearly fifty years ago and again about twenty years ago. As one who almost never can find the *humour* or cause for *side-splitting laughter* in books that are supposed to be funny, I can cite "The Moon's a Balloon" as a book that made me truly laugh.

ALLEN says

British soldier / actor / wit / raconteur David Niven took as his personal life myth that once everything is smooth sailing for him, something comes along to louse it up. These vicissitudes are well in evidence in this, his first set of memoirs, that was a huge bestseller on both sides of the Atlantic. From a dodgy childhood bordered with neglect he was kicked out of one school and wound up in a worse one, until a better one surprisingly presented itself. He was deemed officer material in the Royal Army, but given his third choice of squadron in most soldiers' last choice of location.

Yet when Niven was invited to New York by a wealthy friend he made the acquaintance of truly wealthy people and real aristocrats -- then, when Hollywood called, he had a detached leg-up knowing how to deal

with pretend wealth and pseudo-aristocracy of the kind that Tinseltown bred in such profusion during its "Golden Age" pre-World War II. If you, the reader, object to chronic name-dropping then this book is probably not for you; but when the names dropped are this memorable and so ably drawn, warts and all, it does make for a superlative set of memoirs. This book is pretty much still a dream read, even after the passage of over 45 years.

Later Niven would publish a second, and just as highly acclaimed set of memoirs, *Bring on the Empty Horses*. It deals exclusively with Niven's Hollywood years.

NOTE: The title was taken from a poem by E.E. Cummings, which Niven cites at the front of the book.

Ellie says

David Niven is not just an actor who writes, he is an actor with something to say who says it well-in written form. The combination of all 3 qualities is not so easily found. He is, as is said, witty, urbane, and sophisticated; he has moved in exciting, glamorous circles; he has known tragedy and he has witnessed it in others lives and he has been present for it all. His gift to us is his ability to articulate memory and insight. What a surprise it was to me: I opened the door of this book because he was an actor whose work and presence I loved who knew other actors I was curious about. I stayed in his world for the stories and the voice. I only closed the door because I knew I would come back. I'm sorry he's gone; I'm glad he was here; I'm most glad he left us these written traces of his life.

Petra X says

Quintessentially English, Niven was a Hollywood star in the time when an English accent and formal manners were in vogue. Successful as he was, as soon as war against Germany was declared, he returned to Britain to fight as a soldier for six years.

One of Niven's most famous lines, illustrating just how he could appeal to an audience was delivered when he was presenting the Oscars in 1974 and a naked man ran across the stage behind him, "Isn't it fascinating to think, that probably the only laugh that man will ever get in his life, is by stripping off and showing his shortcomings!"

This is light reading, an entertaining life-story of an officer, a gentleman and a excellent raconteur.

Jane says

I love David Niven. I read *Bring on the Empty Horses* a long time ago and he cracked me up then, so I was excited to read his autobiography. His pre-Hollywood life is pretty fascinating, especially his army friends. I did enjoy all the name-dropping, especially from his first days in Hollywood, but he started losing me after his Oscar win, and the last few pages just felt strange. I guess it's what he was living through at the time, but

the transition from the classic film era to his brushes with counterculture was an odd note to end on, and one that detracted from my enjoyment of his other stories. Or maybe it just felt rushed. Or maybe I just think the '60s and onward are boring. Oh well.

In all, it's very funny, and very reminiscent of Douglas Fairbanks Jr's fist autobiography, which I read earlier this year (the two being friends helped, too).

Kevin Goodrich says

Very interesting story. You can hear his voice. His history is worth the read.
