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In the exotic interstellar civilization of the Second Starfaring Age, youthful wanderers are known as Children of Fortune. This is the tale of one such wanderer, who seeks her destiny on an odyssey of self-discovery amid humanity's many worlds. Arresting and visionary, *Child of Fortune* is a science-fictional *On the Road*.

Child of Fortune Details

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From Reader Review Child of Fortune for online ebook

Marsha Wilcox says

Hippie, quirky, full of ideas that make you say "I wonder if that'd work?" I liked it the first time I read it as a counter-culture book in my late teens, and found more depth when I re-read it almost 4 decades later.

What would it be like to be given a year or so to wander and find your true calling? What if society was set up with the expectation that all teens would do this?

What would your true calling have been?

Jaeme says

This is one of the "bestest/funnest" books I've ever read. It's the tale of a girl's "interstellar life and travels" as she grows to womanhood, and it takes you through some fascinating places and amazing adventures. The characters are colorful, unique, and very memorable.

I've read it at least twice in my life, and I intend to read it again as soon as I can lay hands on a copy.

Andrew S. says

A flawed jewel. Narrated by a young woman from a privileged family in a future, interplanetary society, it is basically a soul-searching travelogue - in space. Just to funk it up a little, Spinrad gives her a sort of futuristic, neo-Edwardian/Cajun dialect. Yes, really. It borders on extreme silliness too many times to mention, especially in descriptions of tantric sex, of which there are many (oddly enough, though they are wordy and elaborate, they don't actually "show" much).

There is so much about this book which is awkward...and yet...and yet...I read it five years ago, and a week hasn't gone by where I didn't think about it. Spinrad's imagination is rich and deep. But, in addition to being wonderfully strange, it is guided by moral and spiritual issues at the center of all the best storytelling. This book is like Siddhartha, except good.

Marley says

This is the most ragingly 1960s book I've ever read that wasn't produced by '72. Somehow, it took Spinrad till the mid-'80s to sum it ALL up in the form of an idealized coming-of-age-in-space story set in a culture with a pronounced "journeyman" phase that's celebrated as the cornerstone of identity-building; yes, this is in the same universe as the Void Captain's Tale, which is all about spaceships powered by mentally unstable women strapped into mindblowing-orgasm machines, which probably hints that this ain't aiming at subtle.

Written in a pretentious but utterly suitable polylingual style full of Germanic and Spanish and

pseudomystical Japanese and Sanskrit, it's totally over the top and totally right on. Plus, it involves traveling gypsy tribes, piles of tantric sex, a fetishization of adventure, a planet full of pernicious flowers producing millions of psychoactive compounds, proud Zelaznyesque mythic indistinguishability between science and magic, an old-school cryogenic immortal or two, and a big fat helping of Northrop Frye hero questing turned into a full on *kunstlerroman*.

Seriously, a very particular kind of person is gonna find this as awesome as I did. Some of those people will be really lame, but the book isn't.

Ronald says

Norman Spinrad wrote numerous novels and short stories, mostly in science fiction, and is still writing today. His blog is <http://normanspinradatlarge.blogspot....>

Child of Fortune by Spinrad is one of the most wonderful novels I ever read, an under-rated classic of science fiction. It is the opposite of a dystopian novel: it shows a future, which, at least for me, is quite desirable. Two notable elements of this far future is that the human race has colonized hundreds of worlds, and that every adolescent undergoes a *wanderjahr*. "Wanderjahr" is a German word which means "year of wondering." More loosely speaking, it a period of time when a young person travels in order to find him- or her- self. Examples would be the walkabouts of Australian aborigines; The Grand Tour made by upper-class European males in the 17th to the 19th century; and the medieval Goliards, wondering students who were really interested in wine, women and song.

This novel is the *wanderjahr* of one such adolescent, named Moussa. She travels to three different worlds, meets interesting people, tries out different things, experiences love and loss. At the end of her *wanderjahr* she, like others who complete their *wanderjahr*, gives herself a new name reflective of who she is.

This is a great work of sustained imagination--wonders regularly unfold such as a device which enhances pleasure; a young looking guy who is hundreds of years old; spaceships powered by something like Reichian orgone energy; a forest of mind and mood altering plants, etc.

One current example of the *wanderjahr* is the international youth hostel movement. Also, I saw a professor say in an internet discussion forum that college is like a *wanderjahr* for the middle class. Perhaps this book will give impetus to a social movement promoting the *wanderjahr* for all young people.

MissingNorth says

Child of Fortune found me when I was a teenager. It was the first book I read with a female character who was encouraged (pushed even) into taking control of her whole life, including her sexuality.

This is the type of coming-of-age story I wish more girls could experience in real life - that the world is huge and full of the terrific and terrible, that our individual realities are shaped by how we act and with whom we associate, and that it is not only okay but important to enjoy lovers and friends on our own terms, without shame or embarrassment.

Spinrad is a highly visual writer - his prose paints itself in my mind in technicolor as I'm reading and I can still 'see' it years after. And when his marvelous characters plunge into philosophical rant or glorious rally I find myself invigorated instead of lulled, inspired instead of bored.

Child of Fortune is one of a few books that drives home for me the regret of having been born too soon, stuck on one lonely planet instead of loosed into a world of worlds.

Vivian Williams says

My initial impression of this book was that anyone in their late teens and twenties should read this, if only for the psychological discourse on youth and spiritual (as well as physical) wanderlust and love of adventure. But as it went on, it developed into something far more sweeping and universal: a tale about the power of tales and their eternal place at the very heart of humanity. And Spinrad wraps up the conclusion both in a satisfying way on this larger, philosophical level, and in the personal life of the engaging and witty heroine we followed throughout the book. It gets a little long in the middle, but the opening and conclusion both make it worth the journey.

Bill Tillman says

Zany

Sgmiller says

Norman Spinard's science fiction tale takes place in a distant Utopian future where humanity has left Earth and colonized some three hundred planets in our race's quest for the ever elusive frontier. We open on a water world that feels like a tropical jungle where people live in buildings suspended or built on the complex root structures (similar I imagine to the Lost coast of Florida).

Here our narrator, a young female around the age of 17 or 18 years, explains to us some intricacies of human history from modern day to her time and how humanity came to conquer so many planets. Among the explanation (one minor drawback here: the book has a longish exposition) we find out about how the right of passage ritual, commonly implemented before the industrial age, has been rekindled and from this journey one finds their profession, name, and many times their future home planet. Spinard puts a lot of time explaining these rituals and how they've evolved to fit the current state of humanity, which if it wasn't so florally written it would be a major bore. In this grail quest/coming of age story we follow young Shasta from planet to planet learning about and exploring the different subsections and subcultures humanity has adapted to based on their planet and personal drives.

My favourite part of this book was the language. Everything from the word choice, to the sentence structure choices were superb. Even reading about histories and expositions of a culture which may be repetitious for some authors is kept interesting in how the narrative flows and how languid the sentences and syllables cascade over the tongue into the brain. This is not to say the book is more flowery than a botanist's backyard, what the author manages is to balance poetic language with well structured narrative to keep the reader wanting more but not getting overwhelmed with fluff.

James Jesso says

This book was hard to get into with its writing style, and between arcs it was hard to stay interested. That being said, WOW, what a f*cking amazing ride that book was. I am so glad I pushed through and read the whole thing. I am also really glad for having read his other book, *Void Captains Take* first as it put the story into a much more interesting and full context.

jojo the burlesque poetess says

lent to me by Laurie/libramoon (producer of "emerging visions" ezine) and oh my gosh it is so much fun. erudite franglais and then some. a gibberish even i can say is a bit bizarre, however easy it is for me to understand, given, similar hippy linguisilliness i write in myself...

Melody says

I picked this up at Powell's because I remembered loving it as a kid. Apparently I was hypnotized by the combination of two dollar words and sex, because that's all this book consists of. Spinrad is especially fond of 'puissance', 'hypnagogic' and 'lingam'.

Here's a random sentence: "In truth, as I knew even then, the weltanschauung which had so consumed my soul with dread under the influence of the psychotropic had been little more than the heightened subjective apprehension of the rudiments of quantum cosmology which we are all taught as children."

In a word, unreadable.

Kat says

Will forever remain my favorite.

Patrick says

Started this but having a hard slog as the whole thing is written in a kind of neo-Victorian patois that is damned annoying...

I like Norman Spinrad. A lot. I like his snarky humor, his neo-anarchic politics, his fine eye for satire. That being said, this is just about the worst damn novel I've ever read. Meant as (apparently) a kind of hippy Bildungsroman, it is instead a disjointed mess of uninteresting characters, contrived plot and that godawful annoying pretentious repetitious in-universe dialog! If I never read the word "quotidian" again I will die a happy man. The main character Moussa begins as a spoiled self-absorbed brat and ends as a boring pretentious brat. None of the other characters are even remotely memorable. The future of the Second

Starfaring Age is bland and unremarkable, the technology reads as dated and anachronistic. The only thing worth noting is Spinrad's genuinely creepy exploration of the dark possibilities of symbiotic biology set on the planet Belshazzar. Beyond that, there's nothing to recommend.

Dan says

This book (and author) are perennial favorites of mine; in particular his post-global polyglot writing style infects any sci-fi I even think about writing.
