



Moonflower is a dystopian science fiction novel about a lone survivor named Dax, who struggles to survive in the ruins of a broken world. He seeks a cure for the Red Eye virus, and fights to stop the alien creatures called Stones.

Moonflower

By Matthew J. Young

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MOONFLOWER

FROM DUST TO STONE



Matthew J. Young

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Paperback ISBN: 978-1-961267-56-5

Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-961267-57-2

Ebook ISBN: 979-8-88532-506-6

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Published by BookLocker.com, Inc., Trenton, Georgia.

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BookLocker.com, Inc.
2026

First Edition

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Young, Matthew J.

Moonflower by Matthew J. Young

Library of Congress Control Number: 2026914695

1

He glanced up to the rearview mirror with a decisive glare. In the back of the truck lay the collapsed figure, still beneath a canvas tarp, rustling with the wind. No movement. No sound. Just weight.

The trees towered above him, rising like jagged reeds of grass encasing a wandering ant. Their trunks hugged the side of the road, tall and overgrown, branches weaving together high above until the sky was little more than a thin ribbon of blue. The forest was once peaceful. A place of silence. A place where the world felt distant and small. Safe.

Not anymore.

I wonder if she'll make it, he thought, eyes darting between the road and the mirror.

Still.

The road hummed beneath the tires as he let his mind wander. Gravel chunks clinked off the tires and into the wheel wells like raindrops falling on a tin roof.

Images of the Stone crept back into his thoughts, uninvited. They moved through his mind like something alive—an octopus gliding through coral and between rocks in the dark ocean. Smooth. Patient. Watching.

He reached into his pocket and closed his fingers around the black orb, its surface smooth and unnaturally cold as it settled into his palm. For a moment he simply held it there, cradling it

like something fragile—an eggshell he did not want to crack open.

The memories flooded his mind like crashing waves over rocks.

Stones.

He gripped the orb tighter.

“Damn it.” He mumbled under his breath, moving his hand back to the wheel.

He blinked hard, forcing his eyes wider as if the act might push the visions out, trying to focus.

Keep fighting. It's what she would want me to do.

But even as the thought formed, something inside him recoiled. He could almost feel them now. Closer than before, more connected than he had ever been.

The smell of their ship lingered in his memory—sterile and metallic, touched with something colder than air. The endless black beyond. The weightless silence of that place where the universe stretched out, indifferent. Watching.

He tightened his grip on the wheel, hands still jet black. He turned a hand over to inspect his palm, hoping to see some blackness had gone. Only pure black remained, texture matte and smooth.

Stones.

His grip tightened around the steering wheel as he wrung it out like a wet dishrag.

You've taken so much from me.

His eyes returned to the rearview mirror to the figure in the back of the truck.

I should have stayed off the cliff, never taken the shot. He shook his head, eyes returning to the road.

The pickup pushed its way through the gravel road, crushing weeds and debris scattered over the unkept path. Smaller shrubs had begun to reclaim the road, difficult to define at times. He knew forward was his only option.

There was no other choice.

There was nothing else left...

2

Three Months Earlier

The quiet, damp morning brought a sacred peace. The silence pressed his skin as though it were a heavy woolen blanket on a cold winter night. Moments like these were a rare commodity—a breath in the chaos—the kind of air that could crawl through an open window past a worn and cracked sill to nestle right beside you in bed. So he laid there, eyes closed, yet fully awake—listening. It was the peace before the storms of his daily duties, like the brief stillness between the beats of an ancient war drum. His fingers brushed the threadbare sheets. His moleskin journal was always within close reach on the nightstand. The cover was brittle and cracked, the leather split open by years of cold air and sleepless nights.

Weeks had passed since he'd seen another living soul—time enough to wonder where all the others had gone. He stood up, bare feet meeting the firm, cold wooden floor. The cracks and roughness in the wood echoed the passage of years, and his own steps softened the grooves in the story.

Peering out his window he could see the sun just cresting the chilled pines. Outside, the field grasses spoke to him, a whisper of the world's unending patience in the wind. The ashen trees were tall, so much that it had been light at least an hour before sunlight prevailed. It was fall, and the leaves reflected an iridescent green and yellow fuzzy radiance. The winds carried swirling debris and leaves while the trees drank the morning

shimmer. With just enough light to see, he opened his leather-bound journal to mark the day.

He wrote, slowly: *October 1. Were there 30 or 31 days in September?* The journal's pages were filled with the shorthand of his existence—a record of survival and resilience, each entry a silent vow to carry on. He looked back at yesterday's entry, scanning over the familiar scrawl he had left, always ensuring that a few tasks remained for the coming day:

hunting
perimeter check
garden harvest

These were his plans for the day. He reached for his binoculars, their leather strap still looped loosely around them, and began his habitual scan of the fields through the window from his room. The morning sun had lifted high enough now to spread dawn's rosy fingers across the fields of knee-high grasses. He watched how the dew sparkled on the swaying blades, creating a fleeting glimmer reminiscent of the ocean before everything changed.

Peering through the battered binocular lenses through the grasses below, he saw the wildflowers struggling to bloom. Their petals bruised and battered by the elements, yet defiantly clinging to life. His bedroom perch provided him with a near-complete view of the surrounding expanse—a necessity in a world where threats often came from the horizon, unannounced and merciless. It offered no warmth, no promises of safety—only the reassurance that, from this vantage point, he could see them coming, whoever or whatever “they” might be.

The grasslands rippled in the wind, hiding secrets in their shadows. The remains of a scorched fence, half-consumed by vines, outlined the property like a skeletal embrace. Beyond it, the wilderness stretched—a wasteland littered with the remnants of humanity’s hubris—twisted metal carcasses of vehicles, crumbling walls of forgotten buildings, and the occasional flicker of movement too far to discern.

As he turned to leave his bed, his eyes lingered on the getaway tube—a relic of his father’s foresight. The steel contraption, shut tight like the mouth of an ancient predator, was always waiting. His father’s voice echoed in his mind, always speaking of the “simple switch locks” with a pride that belied their crude design. It was a lock that required no power, and in these times, such things mattered more than ever. The switches remained untouched, and the lock secure, a quiet reassurance of safety in a world that no longer offered such promises freely.

“Dad, you always said to be prepared,” he muttered softly, resting his head forward in his hands, the roughness of his palms brushing against his face. “But you never said it would come to this.”

Boots scuffing against the worn floorboards, he approached the tube—a hulking, cylindrical construct nestled into the corner of the room like some dormant relic of the old world. Its surface was scarred and pitted, the steel clamshell exterior streaked with rust and soot. It looked as though it had survived both fire and flood, an artifact of desperation hammered into existence when survival was more important than aesthetics.

The lock mechanism on the getaway device stood out sharply against the weathered surface, its dial dulled but still functional. He reached out, brushing his fingers against the

cold metal, and methodically entered the combination: up, up, up, down. The click of the mechanism disengaging echoed through the room, a sharp contrast to the muffled silence of the wasteland outside.

With a grunt, he pushed the clamshell doors apart. They shrieked in protest, their hinges emitting a groan that reverberated through the house, as if the tube were alive and reluctant to reveal its secrets. Inside was the cart—its smooth metal surface almost out of place amid the tube’s rugged, patchwork design.

The interior of the chute was lined with metal rails, their surfaces battered from years of wear but still intact, a testament to his father’s ingenuity.

His father’s words rang in his ears, a memory as vivid as the day they were spoken: “It’ll work perfectly when you need it. Tested it myself. Trust me.”

He tightened his grip on the edge of the cart, his knuckles whitening against the cold steel. He adjusted the straps, checking their integrity as his father had taught him so many years ago.

It wasn’t just a machine; it was a promise of escape, a last-ditch salvation in a world where disasters struck without warning. Yet, standing at its edge, he couldn’t shake the sense that once he entered, there would be no turning back.

He stared into the dark chute below, imagining the ride—the rush of air, the thunderous sound of steel against steel, the fleeting seconds of weightlessness before landing somewhere deep and hidden.

Turning, he walked over to his wood stove, a modest but reliable contraption, still smoldering from the night's fire. The stove creaked as he opened its door, releasing a waft of cherry-scented smoke that filled the room. The wood cracked and steamed, releasing a fleeting plume of smoke that smelled of home. He draped his worn leather jacket over his shoulders, shivering as the chill of the room clung to him stubbornly. His slippers, soft and lined with sheepskin, offered a brief respite from the cold, cracked wood beneath his feet.

His slippers were one of his prized possessions, made with sheepskin and wool, or so he thought. Comforts like these were harder and harder to come by, and he always enjoyed the moment of stepping his bare feet into them like a sleeve as he warmed himself in front of the fire.

He turned to open his bedroom door, lifting the belly of the steel lock that went across the center of the door like something out of a navy ship. The two dead bolts swung open, feeling cold and stiff. Walking down one level of stairs to his mid-level, he poured some water out of his sink into a blue speckled coffee cup. The kind of blue cup only seen in camping stores, with little white speckles throughout. The well water fell into his cup, giving off an ever so gentle mineral smell.

His little cup went onto a single burner in the kitchen, enough flame to boil his water for some tea. He had some spruce tips picked from the day before on his kitchen windowsill in a large jam jar, and he quickly added those to the cup. The sun had reached through his kitchen now, illuminating the entire room. He kept a clean and organized home, focusing on the needs of survival and necessity. The kitchen was sparse with food, having minimal supplies of spices and seasonings. He had a

large wooden bowl of salt near his stove he made from boiling down ocean water.

Cupping his hands around the flame, warming them as the water began to boil, the spruce tips gave an oily shine in the top of his water cup. It began to simmer, so he took it quickly off the heat and stopped the flame. Opening his pantry door, he had a small jar of crystallized honey. Dipping his spoon, he took about a pea sized amount out and placed his spoon into his teacup. Briefly gelatinous long ago, the crystals looked more like yellow sand amidst a scuffed glass jar. He drank the honey spruce tea; the mild hint of pine favor was something he savored. The spruce reminded him of his favorite gin martini—like a face full of snow-covered pine trees.

He brought his cup of half-drunk tea over to the adjacent counter, setting it down on the wood-topped work bench, pushing aside several sharpening and leatherworking tools. Picking up his favorite survival knife, he was satisfied with his repairs. The elk hide had dried enough on the handle, giving it adequate strength and a good grip. He held it in his right hand, checking if it still felt okay. The split in the wood was barely visible at the base below where he could wrap the piece of hide. The knife had leaf cut engravings down the blade, dark black in color. The engraved leaves were on the back spine of the knife, in a small woven pattern. The knife steel was shiny like a mirror, with a fresh edge he put on it the night before. The knife was large, nearly the size of a machete. He put the knife in its leather holster and onto his belt.

Drinking the last bits of his spruce tea, he spit out the tips that made their way past his lips. Moving to the other area of his workbench, he consulted a map tacked to the wood surface with old rusty pushpins. The edges were dried and curled,

almost a burnt appearance showing their age and use. He scanned the area with his pencil, reviewing marks where he'd had success hunting before. The map had "e" for elk, "d" for deer—several of these spread out over the hillsides—probably twenty or so in total. One or two "b" for bears found their way in the northwest corner of his map where he found black bear. The ocean took up nearly half the map—rocky cliffsides between him and the open water.

Looking to the right of his map, his red pencil laid sharp, showing its tip had not been well used. His eyes immediately glanced over his map to two large hexagonal marks. The hand holding his black pencil shook a little, his eyes glazed over as if he was off in another place.

"Stones," he muttered under his breath, letting out a sign of regret and uncertainty.

If it wasn't for the Stones, everything would still be okay, he thought.

The hexagon marks on the map were not close to each other, nearly on opposite sides of his map. He always made sure to not hunt in those areas. It was not worth the risk.

Turning, he reached for his keychain resting in a shallow, worn glass dish on a nearby table. The dish itself was a relic of another time, its once-ornate patterns now dulled and scratched from years of use. He clipped three keys to his waste belt; each one distinct, yet equally weathered, clanked softly against his hip: one for the front door, one for the armory, and one whose purpose only he knew. He double-checked the clasp, tugging it to ensure it wouldn't fail; in this world, misplacing keys could mean losing everything.

He descended the creaking staircase to the entry level, the warped wooden steps bowing slightly under his weight. The air grew cooler as he moved downward, heavy with the lingering scent of oil and gunpowder. Changing into his work boots, they landed with a soft thud on the concrete floor, kicking up a thin layer of dust that swirled in lazy spirals around his ankles. The room stretched out before him, a square cavern of organized chaos, every wall a testament to the years he'd spent scavenging, building, and surviving.

Each surface was meticulously arranged yet undeniably cluttered, covered in racks, hooks, and shelves that bowed under the weight of their contents. One wall displayed an arsenal of weapons: rifles with mismatched parts, handguns in various states of repair, and blades of all sizes, some with edges deeply ruttled. Opposite, a collection of tools was mounted with military precision—everything from wrenches to crowbars, many battered but functional, their handles worn smooth from use. Coils of rope hung like thick vines, and rows of jars filled with screws, bolts, and other salvaged odds and ends lined a sagging wooden shelf. In some ways, the tools were more crucial.

His footsteps echoed in the cavernous space. Reaching a reinforced metal hook on the wall, he pulled down his daypack, the canvas faded to a dull gray-green, its seams reinforced with crude stitches in a dozen different threads. He began filling it systematically: a weathered canteen sloshing with water, a bundle of tightly rolled clothing secured with twine, binoculars whose leather casing was cracked but still intact, bullets, and his compass—a heavy brass relic that still pointed true despite its tarnished exterior.

He slung the pack over his shoulder, adjusting its weight before crossing the room to the weapon rack. The rifle was his most trusted companion, its surface reflecting bright with shine, proud of itself for withstanding the elements and challenges from outside. Its stock bore deep scratches and scars, but it had never once failed him. He swung it over his shoulder with practiced ease, the strap resting comfortably across his chest. Next came his pistol, a compact but reliable piece that he holstered on his thigh, the strap securing it snugly against his leg. He tucked extra magazines in his cargo pants, confirming they were easily accessible. Opposite it, he slid his knife into its sheath, the blade sharp enough to split hairs, its hilt wrapped in leather for grip. It sat on his leg, perfectly positioned to grab quickly when needed. His favorite wool gloves slipped over his battered hands, fingers exposed for ultimate tactile sensation.

The room carried the undeniable scent of preservation: pepper, smoke, and the lingering musk of cured meat. In the corner, a rack of drying elk jerky hung like a thick curtain, the strips of meat shining with oil under the room's pale light. He walked over, pulled out his knife—a blade he had refined to perfection—and sliced through the twine holding one of the larger pieces. The jerky was tough but pliable, a deep reddish-brown with veins of fat running through it, promising enough energy to last him through the day. He tucked the foot-long strip into his pack before stepping back, his gaze sweeping the room one final time.

Satisfied, he approached the heavy double doors that marked the room's only entrance. They were massive and imposing, built from repurposed steel reinforced with welded bars that crisscrossed like scars. Years of exposure had left them streaked with rust, and the hinges groaned in protest as he

pulled one side shut. The ocean finds a way to crawl into every surface of this home, although it was not in close proximity. A small cloud of dust cascaded from the frame, falling like ash to the floor. He slid the thick padlock into place, the metal clinking dully against the door, and secured it with one of his keys. The finality of the lock clicking into place echoed through the room, a sound as solid and unyielding as the steel it bound.

He lingered for a moment, hand resting on the cold surface of the door, before turning away. The world outside awaited—hostile, barren, and relentless. As he stepped out into the harsh light of the day, he felt the familiar weight of his pack and weapons. Behind him, the doors settled with a final thud, and the fortress was sealed again.

The outside door flung open with a metal creaking sound, opening to the field of tall bright grasses. The grasshoppers jumped, scurrying as he opened the door. The dew resting on the grasses in front of his door sparkled in the sun. The morning was cool enough that the grass was wet to the touch. He looked immediately to his right when stepping out the door, lifting the tin roof plate covering his water basin. It looked a little deeper than yesterday, flooding him with a mild sense of relief.

His house had an elaborate water collection system. All of the roofline and gutters funneled down into his water collection area. He checked under the filtration system, noting the water was dripping through the filters at a good rate, ensuring they were not clogged. He turned the spigot at the bottom of the tank to fill his canteen with fresh water.

He turned and locked the door behind him, quickly reattaching his keys to his side.

His eyes glanced to the perimeter fence, about a hundred yards from his home, in a square with barbed wire tops angled outward similar to a prison. The fence used to be shiny and steel in color. Its color now was more rusted, blending into the colors of nature as it showed its age.

The morning fog lingered just above the earth, a translucent veil that softened the edges of everything. It had rolled in quietly from the nearby hills, clinging to the ground as if unwilling to let the dawn reveal too much of the world's scars. "Another day, here's to you. You left me with guidance and preparation, hope and wisdom. Today is for you, Dad," he said while reaching his left hand down to the grasses, wetting his hand with the cold morning dew. Some grasses stuck to his fingers, leaving their seeds and grass residue on his hand and fingerless wool gloves. He lifted his hand to his mouth, taking in the fresh smell of the morning.

Walking toward his gate, a path had been beaten down. His rifle swung over his shoulder as he held it down. He reached down to grab his keychain, finding his gate key—the middle-sized key, dark brown in color from rust and use, the strip of red tape around the top part of the key that was nearly black from dirt. He unlocked the gate and opened it, wheels to the side. It was barely discernible, having been swallowed by time and neglect. But before stepping out, he hesitated. He closed his eyes, looking downward and resting his chin on his already sweaty, damp chest. Pushing forward, he turned to lock the gate behind him, double checking he secured the lock correctly. Turning with his back to his home, facing toward the dense woods outside, he peered into the world. These woods carried a special place in his heart: they supplied him with the life he needed to survive but also presented such danger with the Stones. Their trunks bore the marks of time—deep grooves

where bark had been stripped away by harsh winters and even harsher hands. Moss clung to their roots like an old friend, its deep green contrasting sharply against the brown decay of fallen leaves.

He knew he was less protected, constantly thinking about what he would do if he saw a Stone.

Let's get this done, and get home, he thought, stepping forward in the direction he had planned on his map for his hunt. The leaves crunched beneath his feet. He headed west toward the ocean. In the clearing, shafts of sunlight pierced through the fog like golden arrows, illuminating patches of the forest floor. Dust motes danced lazily in the beams, a gentle contrast to the heavy stillness of the woods. He waited there, every muscle tense, his breath shallow and controlled.

And he waited...

About the Author

Matthew Young is a native Oregonian, practicing dentist, and lifelong lover of science fiction. Inspired by dystopian storytelling and humanity's ability to endure under impossible circumstances, he wrote *Moonflower* as a story about survival, hope, grit, and the will to keep fighting when the world begins to fall apart.

Much of the novel's atmosphere was shaped by his childhood spent backpacking through the rugged wilderness of Oregon with his father and two brothers. These experiences in the forests and mountains of the Pacific Northwest are the inspiration for the landscapes, isolation, and resilience woven throughout the story.

Matthew is married and the father of two young children. Outside of writing, he enjoys tennis, skiing, cooking, bourbon, and traveling with his family.



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