



In the Shadow of the Moon: A Challenging Journey to Tranquility, 1965-1969

Francis French, Colin Burgess, Walter Cunningham (Foreword)

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In the Shadow of the Moon tells the story of the most exciting and challenging years in spaceflight, with two superpowers engaged in a titanic struggle to land one of their own people on the moon. While describing awe-inspiring technical achievements, the authors go beyond the missions and the competition of the space race to focus on the people who made it all possible. Their book explores the inspirations, ambitions, personalities, and experiences of the select few whose driving ambition was to fly to the moon. Drawing on interviews with astronauts, cosmonauts, their families, technicians, and scientists, as well as rarely seen Soviet and American government documents, the authors craft a remarkable story of the golden age of spaceflight as both an intimate human experience and a rollicking global adventure. From the Gemini flights to the Soyuz space program to the earliest Apollo missions, including the legendary first moon landing, their book draws a richly detailed picture of the space race as an endeavor equally endowed with personal meaning and political significance.

In the Shadow of the Moon: A Challenging Journey to Tranquility, 1965-1969 Details

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Michael Flanagan says

In the Shadow of the Moon delivers an extremely well researched look at the race to put man on the moon. This is done by following the Gemini program through to Apollo 11. The authors also take a look at the Soviet Union's efforts to beat the US to the moon.

What really stood out for me was the effort the authors took in not just telling the story of those astronaut's we all know well but also shining the light on all the astronauts that went into space before them. They step the reader through the Gemini and early Apollo flights weaving together the story from the astronauts themselves with good ole fashion facts.

I walked away from this book with a lot more knowledge on the early space program of both Superpowers as well as a unique personal view of what it was like to reach for the stars. In the Shadow of the Moon is an example of history writing at its best.

Angela Joyce says

Like its predecessor, this book is a delight. Not only was I glad (or in one instance, devastated) to learn more of the fates of the astronauts from the first book, I greatly enjoyed learning more about the crews which came next. As before, they are presented as real, complex human beings, and it's easy to grow attached to them while reading both the narrative and their own accounts. The authors really know how to keep you reading!

Additionally, there are insights about the moon landing/moon walk which had never occurred to me. I appreciated this new way of seeing the event. The book concludes in a satisfying manner, too, reminding the reader of the progress in space travel over a relatively short amount of time, beginning with Yuri Gagarin.

If you read the first book, do be sure to read this one as well. You'll never look at the night sky the same way again.

Gretel says

I read quite a bit of non-fiction, but I haven't read much space history before -- so the book was very interesting, and I learned a lot. This was a very long audio book with lots and lots of details. The chapters were so long that they exceeded the length of the audible chapter files. The book was presented mostly chronologically, but with each new astronaut introduced often a biography from birth to death would be given. I had a difficult time figuring out why some astronauts were given so much time and others so little. The book could have been improved by a bit more organization, as it seemed to flow, almost stream of consciousness, from the beginning to the end.

The narrator did a good job and it was an easy listen.

I received this audiobook free for an honest review.

Leslie Fisher says

I thought this was a really interesting book, and I enjoyed it. I learned a lot about the space program during the '60's. I had no idea of the different problems or situations that they had in the space program. It was interesting to learn about the different personality types that become astronauts, and how they interacted. If you are interested in space, or just enjoy non-fiction, I recommend giving this book a try. I listened to the Audible version and enjoyed the narration.

Roopkumar Balachandran says

The cover of the book caught my attention to pick up from the library. The book is about the race to reach Moon.

Foreground is Moon and the crescent is the Earth. First photo of Earth from Moon. Image courtesy NASA.

It is well researched and the author has given much details about the space programs to put man on the moon, he also given the biography of each astronauts and selected cosmonauts in the space race. The vivid description of each mission is worth mentioning.

The description given for first manned flight in Gemini program Gemini III nicknamed Molly Brown and the first space walk by Ed White on June 3rd 1965 engrossed me and which let to NASA website to quench my thirst about these two missions. Below are some of the images from NASA website.

Gemini III lift off

The difficulties faced in each mission, how the astronauts coped with inside the capsule, the space walk they performed and how they mastered, docking procedures and re entry procedures are worth mentioning. We can feel how much difficulties the astronauts suffered.

The first American space walk

The failures of US and Russia are given in detailed manner. After the loss of three precious lives of Astronauts they created faultless rockets to put man on the Moon.

I enjoyed reading the book and I wanted to buy this book for my future reference.

Michael says

I have a great interest in the space program, being a child of the 60's. I admit I was born in 69 on the Apollo 11 launch date, but always had the memory of my mother telling me often that she was making me watch the moon landing at the hospital. So I always had a fascination for the era which persists to this day. Listening to audiobooks on the subject, particularly the Apollo program, is a favorite pastime of mine. I was fortunate to be able to get a free copy of this from the narrator, but it was on my list of books to purchase eventually.

Of all the audiobooks on the subject I've listened to, I did find that I learnt a lot on this book on the crews that I didn't know. The book covered well the manned Gemini and Apollo mission up to the Apollo 11. I note that one of the authors (Francis French) has a separate book covering an earlier period (*Into That Silent Sea*), also available on Audible. This book also spends a little time on an aside covering the Soviet space program.

Primarily the focus of this book is the crews only, in often times their backstories, and their mission. I don't think that the publisher description of the book is clear enough in this regard. It did touch on other aspects, but not many. The unmanned missions weren't discussed, nor were many of the ground staff and technical and engineering aspects. It was a book about the astronauts. In that respect though I felt it did a very admirable job covering it. I would personally however love to find a book that covers the Apollo program itself in wider detail, with more stories on the engineering such as the Saturn V, the LEM development, the CSM development, etc. There might be one but I've not found it - if anyone has a recommendation, let me know!

Gary Willprecht's narration was excellent, and was easy listening. Enough differentiation was put into characters dialog to distinguish it from the text narrative of the book as well.

In all a recommended addition to the series. I'd be glad to read the next book, if the authors produce one covering the all of the missions after Apollo 11.

Gary Willprecht says

Being very young when the Gemini flights were taking place, I was very interested in learning the tasks each Gemini mission set out to accomplish. We knew very little about travel in space, each mission added to our understanding of equipment needs, affects on the human body and technical know-how. Without that understanding, our men would have perished.

You can see some parallels taking place today as we set out to travel to Mars. We are sending probes to Mars to gather information about weather & terrain. We are building a new spacecraft for missions to Mars and testing the components before making the journey. We performed many of these same tasks in the 1960s before that first trip to the moon, Apollo 8.

Beyond the equipment requirements and testing, it tells the stories of the astronauts and their families, crew selection & humorous moments.

Smh624 says

This is second of three books by Francis French and Colin Burgess covering the history of manned space exploration. It's an incredible book...telling an incredible story. It covers both US and Soviet space travel and provides a detailed account with comments from many of the astronauts and cosmonauts. I grew up near the Manned Spacecraft Center in Houston and knew many people who worked for NASA. I thought I knew a lot about the Gemini and Apollo programs - this book's focus. I learned so much more by reading this book.

Tracey says

When I was in my teens, I had a poster showing Earthrise – a photo, I know now, by Bill Anders – with the quote "Someday I would like to stand on the moon, look through a quarter of a million miles of space and say *There certainly is a beautiful Earth out tonight.*" I loved that poster; I don't know what happened to it, but to my joy I found a close facsimile online, reminded by this book to go look for it. I loved that quote – and I meant it. I was (and am) a Trekkie. I loved the shuttle program. My heart broke on January 28, 1986, and again on February 3, 1990. One of the literally happiest moments of my life was hearing that there really, truly, honestly is water on Mars. And when I look at the moon, more often than not I'm thinking not only *how beautiful* but about the 47-year-old footprints up there, and *why the hell aren't we up there right now?*

When this book's narrator, Gary Willprecht, offered *In the Shadow of the Moon* in the Goodreads Audiobooks group free for review, I realized how shamefully little I actually *know* about those early days of the space program. Apart from reading and watching *The Right Stuff* back in the day (from which I learned the phrase I actually use now and then, "Our rockets always blow up", and the one I have to be careful about using, "screw the pooch"), and that glorious documentary I can't remember the name of, I've never stirred myself to fix that. (I have the same issues with Civil War generals: fascinated but dumb, that's me.)

Still, I am a fan of the space program, in a big way. And I've always had to fight a hair-trigger reaction of outrage whenever I hear the time-worn complaint that "there are so many problems on earth, why do we need spend the money or risk people by sending them into space?" My first reaction is always confusion – how could you ask that?? But, growing up, I've tried to come up with a better reaction, using actual words. As I hoped, this book helped.

As they tried to launch *Gemini 6*, a mission set to attempt the first rendezvous in space, a certain set of variables came together on the launchpad. In the resulting situation the astronauts were supposed to, going strictly by the book, eject. "Had Schirra and Stafford ejected from the spacecraft, it would have been damaged beyond repair by the ejection-seat rockets, and the rendezvous with *Gemini 7* would never have happened." Schirra had launched before; he knew what it felt like; he would have felt the liftoff through his seat. So even though the computer sent a signal to the clock in the capsule showing they had lifted off, he never felt it, so he knew he didn't need to eject. The quote in the book is "I had my butt working for me." So maybe there's my answer to the ~~idiots~~ uninspired folks who have asked why we need to send people into space, why not just keep sending unmanned vehicles up. Unmanned craft don't have butts.

"Individuals and the choices they made once again made the difference" ... "Because of Schirra's risky

decision, the mission was saved." Unmanned craft also can't make risky decisions.

And as to why the American space program has been so spotty, why it faltered in the seventies and has all but died again now ... The blame is always placed on the American public. The country is fickle and easily bored, and interest wanes, so it's hard to keep it all going. Yet another thing I found sad in this book was this quote from Dick Gordon: "We had become, as a team, very complacent about the environment in which we were operating." My interest has never waned; my passion for getting our butts into space has never slackened; I find it impossible to believe that if, I were working on the space program, I would not bounce out of bed every morning and hasten to work with a song in my heart and an awed glee at the whole idea of it. I guess I'm the oddball, since even the astronauts became blasé.

I had to stop for a while about two thirds of the way into the book, because quite frankly the disillusionment and irritation became a bit too much. The fighter pilot mentality battled the scientist mindset every step of the way, and the fight wasn't pretty. The back-biting and in-fighting and petty politics among the astronauts was hard to listen to. Back-biting, bitching, bitterness, and bile – oh, and bitchiness. (Oh, and vomiting, but that would be a whole other paragraph.) Were the best possible astronauts assigned to each flight? Who knows? I'm old enough that I don't expect anything but feet of clay in my heroes – but these are our first astronauts. I projected onto them the giddy intoxication of everything about the space program to an avid Trekkie. Instead, I heard about the actual contempt from the astronauts over all the excitement among the general public about stepping onto the lunar surface, because test pilots get excited about flying, not getting out of the vehicle)... Really? Where is all that awe and glee? Was there no excitement at all in some of them about being among the first human beings to set foot on a planetary body other than Terra? It baffles me. In fact, Neil Armstrong apparently didn't understand why there was such a fuss over going to the moon. That goes beyond bafflement to complete stupefaction. It makes no sense.

I was also dismayed about the lack of dissemination of information. I understand the rabid competitiveness of the space race, but not only did the Russians not pass on any data which might have increased safety for American astronauts (or, I daresay, vice versa), *Americans* didn't pass on anything to Americans – they learned nearly nothing from earlier missions, made the same mistakes over and over.

And then there's the emotional blackmail used by some astronauts, or NASA (or both), in personal relationships. "If you upset me it will affect my performance in the cockpit, and I could die." There's some truth in that, of course – that's why it worked – but good lord, you can't tell me the Astronauts Wives Club knew what they were getting into.

Chapter after chapter I dreaded the story of the Apollo 1 fire. I specifically did not look up the date, because in a way it would have been harder knowing exactly when to expect it. (It was January 27, 1967... Challenger was January 28, 1986. I don't like the end of January.) Well... I don't know if it really could have been harder. It was horrible. Gus Grissom went to Grumman, the company which manufactured most if not all of the tech for the program, and went department by department throughout the company to shake each employee's hand. He wanted to meet the people involved in working on this materiel which was meant to protect and preserve his life, and he wanted them to have a face to remember as they worked, to perhaps sharpen their attention in their work. It didn't help.

While I was flailing in the grief and pain of the accident, there came this line, a quote from engineer Sam Beddingfield: "Moments later an ambulance tore past, heading for the gantry area. I could hear sirens going off near the pad, and assumed there'd been an accident somewhere. My major concern was that it might further delay my evacuation systems check with the crew". I already felt sick ... as counter-irritants go, that was a powerful one.

The narration was very good, though at times a little awkward – especially the Russian-concentrated bits; new or longer Russian names sound like they were spliced in, with different sound level and timbre. And the voice in which astronaut (and other) quotes are read was a little uncomfortable.

There was a truly massive amounts of time spent on Donn Eisele's divorce – without a paper copy it's hard to judge how many pages (and listening at work means constant interruption, so it's hard to accurately clock it). But it just went on and on. It was important – it was a test flight in a whole different way, as the first divorce among a group of men who were being portrayed as the squeakiest of the squeaky clean (and really it's no wonder the disillusionment hit so hard, given the snow job perpetrated by NASA). But the level of detail was immense.

And to be honest, though I knew virtually nothing about the history of the Russian quest for the moon landing ... I was fine with that. It's part of the theme of the book – the voyage to the moon – but I wasn't expecting the Russian side, and I simply was just not interested. Maybe if it had alternated a bit more regularly with the American program it would have held my interest a bit better, but as it was there was a long chunk of the Russian program dropped in about midway, and – like Eisele's divorce – it just went on and on. And yet though it brings in the death of cosmonaut Vladimir Komarov, but I had to look him up to find out what happened. One of those interruptions might have made me miss a mention, but I didn't hear it.

Overall, it's kind of hard to separate my reaction to the content of the book (like the fact that equipment for lunar landings after Apollo 17 *was already built* – and apparently either went straight into storage or was scrapped) from my reaction to the writing and narration. There were a couple of sections – while astronauts were vomiting right and left, and when the disillusionment set in – when I would have been content slapping the whole thing with two stars, whatever else happened. And there were times when the narrator's way of using slight variations on the same voice for all of the quotes in the book got on my last nerve. And I found the end of the book quite abrupt – there, done, that's – literally – all they wrote.

But the book also relayed the story of those early years quite effectively, those primitive early flights. How terrifying a loss of telemetry was. How even the most prepared astronaut or engineer could be caught off guard by the simplest thing in this brand new environment. It was fascinating to learn that Michael Collins was a bit claustrophobic; that sextants were still being used in 1968; and for the meaning of "dark-adapted eye" (also the title of a Ruth Rendell novel) to finally click in my mind. On the whole, it was quite worthwhile. Who needs illusion and idealism, anyway? Being jaded makes life much less painful. Right?

I received a copy of this audiobook from the narrator via the Goodreads Audiobooks group – thank you.

A few more quotes:

...Humans have not returned to the moon since.

Several things stopped it: economics, desire, and leadership. The reward to risk ration went down. Put them all together ... There's always this controversy, too, over 'why spend all this money in space?' and all that kind of thing. Not a damn nickel has been spent in space – it's spent right here, right here on earth. I think of our advances in technology, and I think the space program has given them all to us. Our standard of living and the advances in technology have been accelerated because of our space program. The only other event that accelerates technology is war. You know which one I would choose? I think you would too. You always hear about so many social ills that this country has to take care of. I propose to you that if our social ills had been a priority back in the 1700's and 1800's, the western boundary of the United States would be Virginia's Allegheny Mountains.

– astronaut Richard F. Gordon, Jr.

I am, and ever will be, a white socks, pocket protector, nerdy engineer — born under the second law of thermodynamics, steeped in steam tables, in love with free-body diagrams, transformed by Laplace, and propelled by compressible flow."

— Neil Armstrong, February 2000 (he was from Wapakoneta, Ohio – which is where Kent Boyd of *So You Think You Can Dance* lived. Which has nothing to do with anything.)

But why, some say, the moon? Why choose this as our goal? And they may well ask why climb the highest mountain? Why, 35 years ago, fly the Atlantic? Why does Rice play Texas? — Kennedy

To the surprise of some, Stafford argued that [Apollo 10] shouldn't land. The commander was ruling himself out of becoming the first person to walk on the moon. The reasons he did so are sound, practical ones, and show that this crew's dedication to test piloting excellence was more important to them than personal glory.

Andrew says

Great book on the Apollo space program, although not the very best book of the many I have read on the subject, it is right up there near the top of the pile.

Kevin says

A very good book on the history in human space flight. It is a long one considering it covers only the Gemini and early Apollo flights between 1965-1969. The events and the technicality are already well documented in many places, so the major differentiator of this book is its focus on the people. Many of its interviews look at what the astronauts went through from a personal stand point, both in the space and on earth.

I received the audiobook version for free from the narrator in exchange for a honest review. The narrator did a fine job on a 18hr non-fiction book that is very interview-centric. His tone variation enhance the listening experience. It could be difficult to voice for so many different interviewees but he handled it well.

I just realized this is the second book of a long series on human space flight (Outward Odyssey). I like the series' approach and already have my hands on the first and third books, which talk about early space flight and post-Apollo 11 era. Looking forward to read them.

Mike says

I nicely written and researched book. Although this is a topic that I have read many accounts/vignettes of, this one added to my knowledge by digging out archives from both the US and Russia. How much new material? That's hard to say, but it's also about how different authors approach a topic. This author was different enough that I read it through without feeling that it was just another re-hash of familiar material.

A good reprise of the Apollo program and its first successful landing on the moon. You should consider reading it.

Jim says

A workmanlike look at the U.S. space program from 1965 to 1969, encompassing the Gemini program, the Apollo I tragedy and the first five flights of the Apollo program. This book is the second of a trilogy looking at the entirety of the race to the moon and its exploration by the United States.

Overall I enjoyed the book in the same way I enjoy a really well written Wikipedia entry. I get all the information I want, with the pleasure being the information itself and not so much the writing.

It was cool having such a detailed description of each Gemini mission which is often overlooked in the history of the space race. The sections that looked at the Russian program were also interesting in I had read very little about it in the past. Detailed and lengthy reflections by the Astronauts and Cosmonauts themselves was also interesting.

Where this book falls short in my opinion is in its obvious attempt to avoid any hint of controversy. Astronaut biographies read like NASA press releases, and in sections that looked at controversies that were so public they could not be ignored the authors inevitably tried to take as sunny a view of them as possible.

If you are looking for a good first book to read on this era of space history you could do worse than this book. If you are looking for a book that puts the space race into a wider political, social and economic context you should look elsewhere. A good book on this topic is ...The Heavens and the Earth: A Political History of the Space Age by Walter A. McDougall.

Alex Mu says

I'll admit I have a lot of interest in space programs, and both the historical and current progress made in space exploration. Therefore the description of the book grabbed me right off the bat. I have read a number of space related books, both paper and audio, and this ranks high in that list. A lot of interesting facts, anecdotes, and stories that let you learn the different personalities of the mission teams, particularly the flight crews. I knew a lot of the problems encountered in the space program from the engineering side of things beforehand, but learned a lot more about them from the flight crew perspective in this book. I would love another book or if this turned into a 'space-set' of books covering unmanned missions and their mission control side in the same vein as this one – but I guess that shows how much I enjoyed the presentation of this book.

Narration on a book like this which includes facts, interviews, and papers can be tricky. The narrator here had, for me, the perfect voice quality, tone, intonations and pacing. There are both explanatory passages, stories, and interview excerpts throughout the book, which I had no trouble distinguishing. I especially appreciated the change in voice made when reading a quote which not only distinguished it from the rest of the section, but overall made for a very nice listening experience. I would definitely recommend listening

over eye-ball reading the book.

I'd recommend to all, and especially to people interested in space, or history, or human/personality-interactions in team settings.

I received a review copy of this book for my honest opinion.

Melissa Dwyer says

Originally rated G by Dale J. Bizub

In the Shadow of the Moon tells the story of the most exciting and challenging years in spaceflight, with two superpowers engaged in a titanic struggle to land one of their own people on the moon. While describing awe-inspiring technical achievements, the authors go beyond the missions and the competition of the space race to focus on the people who made it all possible. Their book explores the inspirations, ambitions, personalities, and experiences of the select few whose driving ambition was to fly to the moon.

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A well written but in-depth study of early spaceflight, this book chronicles missions through the eyes of the participants. A little more of an advanced read, some high school students may find it interesting and informative.

D. J. Bizub – Allderdice HS
