



Back to the Moon

Travis S. Taylor, Les Johnson

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The Saga of the Return to the Moon, This Time to Stay—and the Technological Problems are the *Simplest* to Solve. Science Fiction by Two Scientists Who Know Both Science and the Ways of Government Bureaucracies.

Praise for Travis S. Taylor

“[*Warp Speed*] reads like Doc Smith writing Robert Ludlum. . . . You won't want to put it down.” —**John Ringo**

“In the tradition of Golden Age SF . . . explodes with inventive action . . . dazzling . . . cutting-edge scientific possibilities. . . .” —*Publishers Weekly*

Praise for Les Johnson:

“. . . *Solar Sails: A Novel Approach to Interplanetary Travel* . . . convincingly captures the history of ideas about solar sails, their current state of play and their future promise. . . . Suitable for aerospace students and keen enthusiasts alike. . . .” —**Stuart Clark, Nature**

“I can recommend this book [*Living Off the Land in Space: Green Roads to the Cosmos*] to everyone interested in the future of space exploration.” —**Claude Semay, Physicalia**

Back to the Moon Details

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From Reader Review Back to the Moon for online ebook

Thomas says

The authors know their space technology. But they are just so-so novelists.

Barry Haworth says

This book is an account of a near future return to the moon, in which a private mission from the US, and government missions from the US and China, all reach the Moon within a short time of each other.

Having grown up during the Apollo era I have a soft spot for stories about trips to the Moon, so I'm giving this book four stars when perhaps it only deserves four. The story is fairly basic & pretty predictable, the writing adequate but not amazing. That said, I read it with great enjoyment, and will likely read it again some day.

Tommy Carlson says

China has secretly gone to the Moon, but are in trouble and need rescuing! It sounds like a smaller, earlier version of *The Martian*. So I gave it a shot.

Ugh. This is awful. I abandoned it after four chapters. It reads like competent-men SF from the fifties, yet is only four years old. The characters? Here's Bill:

Bill rose from his chair and strode to the table, the alpha male in the room by the way he carried himself and his purposeful stride to the chair adjacent to the one Carlton had just occupied.

Here's Millie:

She had been Stetson's secretary, or, to be politically correct, his management support assistant, for almost five years.

Seriously, Millie the secretary?

Then there are the long rants at NASA, for making space travel boring. Legitimate gripe? Oh yes. Do you want to spend time with folks continually making said gripe? I don't.

After four chapters, I checked out some reviews, to see if this got any better. What I found was that the

characterization became even worse once the Chinese showed up, and the rants at NASA continued.

Remember, kids, life is too short to waste it on bad books.

Brett Thomasson says

When I was younger, some of my favorite science fiction books were Robert Heinlein's "juveniles" series for Charles Scribner. Those stories and a number of Heinlein's short stories in his "future history" series were all set inside our solar system. They dealt with what were at the time science fiction ideas of space stations and trips to the moon, things that later became reality. They also dealt with ideas that have yet to come to pass, such as moonbases and manned travel to other planets in the solar system, as well as ideas which have been proven wrong or unlikely by later exploration, such as life on Venus or advanced civilizations on Mars.

Back to the Moon, by NASA scientists Travis S. Taylor and Les Johnson, brings to mind some of those old Heinlein juveniles, following in that author's path of accurate scientific descriptions and real-world feel of the technology and situations. Heinlein, in writing for younger readers, didn't varnish his style a great deal, nor did he spend a lot of time adding depth to his characters. Neither do Taylor and Johnson -- the lead character is a stalwart astronaut named Bill Stetson, fer cryin' out loud -- and they don't display half of Heinlein's style and skill even though they're not writing for a younger crowd.

But those things aside, *Back to the Moon* is still a fun romp, a just-the-facts-ma'am kind of story about events surrounding the United States' first manned mission to the moon since Apollo 17 left in 1972. The time frame seems to be the early 2020s and relies on the now-canceled Constellation program as the basis for the U.S. effort. The manned mission is only months off when a private company also launches a flight to the moon, although this one is just a flyby carrying wealthy tourists. The tourists, though, catch a distress signal from a wrecked Chinese moon mission. What had been announced as a robotic test flight had actually carried a crew and is now stranded on the moon's surface. Stetson convinces his NASA superiors to scramble his planned flight for an immediate launch to rescue the stranded Chinese crew. But will the glitches shown in test flights mean his ship can't reach the moon? And will the Chinese crew, facing political pressure from a system that would rather have a failure on its own than success with help, actually go through with the rescue?

Taylor and Johnson move us through the mostly predictable plot with an engineer's straightforward prose -- no frills and not a lot of flavor. The appeal is in watching tried-and-true heroes do tried-and-true heroic things and seeing resourceful quick thinkers solve the problems that come their way quickly and resourcefully. Back is also fun because it uses recognizable and plausible technology instead of way-out stuff like warp drives and hyperspace jumps that are far beyond anything current science can manage.

Of course, a moon landing in the early 2020s is also far beyond anything current NASA technology can manage. In an afterward, Taylor describes how bipartisan presidential and congressional indifference starting with the Nixon administration starved the space agency of funds, requiring it to put off spacecraft development time and time again in order to keep what it had running. That culminated in the current administration's myopic ending of manned U.S. spaceflight, it being one of the very few things that the president and congressional leadership didn't want to spend money on. Both the possible Chinese moon mission and spaceflight by private corporations could happen within *Back to the Moon*'s timeframe, but the idea that there would be a NASA mission waiting in the wings could not.

Taylor and Johnson offer a clue about what they probably think the solution is, as their privately-owned spacecraft and its wealthy owner play important roles at crucial points in the story. Private enterprise and free-market forces may or may not be the actual future of humanity's presence in space, but at least betting on them takes the matter out of the hands of people who ask whether or not additional soldiers on an island might make it capsize.

Original available [here](#).

Zachary Wagoner says

A good hard sci-fi book involving the return of humanity to the moon. This is all fairly realistic stuff, no aliens or pew-pew lasers going on. Just astronauts and rockets and sending people to the moon. Can be slow at times, but there is also suspense and some action taking place as well. I even had an emotional moment during this book, that I struggled a bit with a sudden influx of liquid around my eyes. Great read, and a good length. Every once in a while, I like to step away from the military sci-fi and space opera side of the genre to the more scientific hard sci-fi, and *Return to the Moon* was able to fill that niche nicely.

John says

A secret Chinese mission to the Moon crashes, a commercial US spaceship hears its call for help, a NASA spaceship is sent to the rescue. This potentially dramatic SF storyline is buried in a shitstorm of axe grinding outrage at the treacherous way the Government has historically disemboweled the US space program and how NASA has screwed up its public relations. The jeremiad is also replete with utterly dry (and repetitive) technical discussions (many of which could be transcripts of Apollo-era exchanges), boring news conferences and business meetings described in eye glazing detail, pointless subplots that go nowhere (see: the Chinese spies)---and pervasive racism in the way the Chinese in general are demonized not only by being the providers of glitchy circuit boards and sabotaged software, but by fiendishly stealing plans and data from their scientific superiors in the good ol' US because, as events show, they plainly can't build properly working spacecraft of their own. Or construct a crew without an unstable Political Officer with a big gun. Wow, Yellow Peril, modern version!

Both of the authors are bona fide space scientists---which makes it disheartening to see how often in this story (meaning virtually every time) solutions to crises involve either a swift boot, or a simple reboot. Not much ingenuity or imagination on display there, guys.

ben says

Need to go!!

Great story that has huge implications for the U.S. Based on factual information, our space program has been and could again be something to make us proud and increase the intelligence of our nation.

Douglas says

A good story, but clearly written by scientists and not sci-fi writers.

Suraj says

This is my only third hard sci-fi after The Martian and I'm so lovin' it!

Lee Belbin says

Fictional nationalistic tale about NASA and a private company going back to the moon at long last. Chinese steal plans and crash on the moon and NASA saves them and the private company saves NASA!

Arindam Pal says

Technically profound - every detail about how a space mission takes place in the modern day is captured wonderfully. But I was not at all impressed with the other stuff, the real stuff that makes a book worth reading. No good story, under developed characters and details of the political ramifications because of the incident

Dennis says

The title says it all. Lots of drama and the added situation that the Chinese have set out to beat the US of A. Can't let that happen can we?

Steve says

Not half bad. Far better written than his Tau Ceti books. He did have a little bit of ax grinding to do about NASA, but really, for the most part he kept that to the afterword. And even there he didn't pick on NASA as much as he did the politicians involved--probably with justification.

Andreas says

The story is set in the 2020s. NASA is finally returning to the Moon using the (now canceled) Orion/Altair hardware. Meanwhile, a private company is sending tourists around the Moon and the Chinese are up to something. The first mission back to the Moon turns into a daring rescue.

I'm a big space program buff so I'm a sucker for this kind of book. The story itself is a decent adventure/thriller. The engineering is well described, as would be expected since Dr. Taylor works with NASA Huntsville and Les Johnson is a NASA physicist. Unfortunately the prose is quite stilted, especially during the first third. The characters are stereotypes, especially the Chinese. Unfortunately the Chinese are also the wrong stereotype. They feel like reruns of Cold War era Soviets with a dash of "Asian" thrown in. The story does pick up in the second half and there are some nice thrills for the space buff. If you aren't interested in the space program particularly you should give this a pass. It isn't a bad book per se but could have used an author with a smoother prose style.

<http://www.books.rosboch.net/?p=171>

Bonnie says

This is a refreshing novel that helped me gain more interest in reading science fiction. The story is interesting and the events are believable. The characters are easy to enjoy. I liked this book and hope it becomes a movie some day. Les and Travis did a wonderful job on this and I will be waiting for the sequel to come out.
