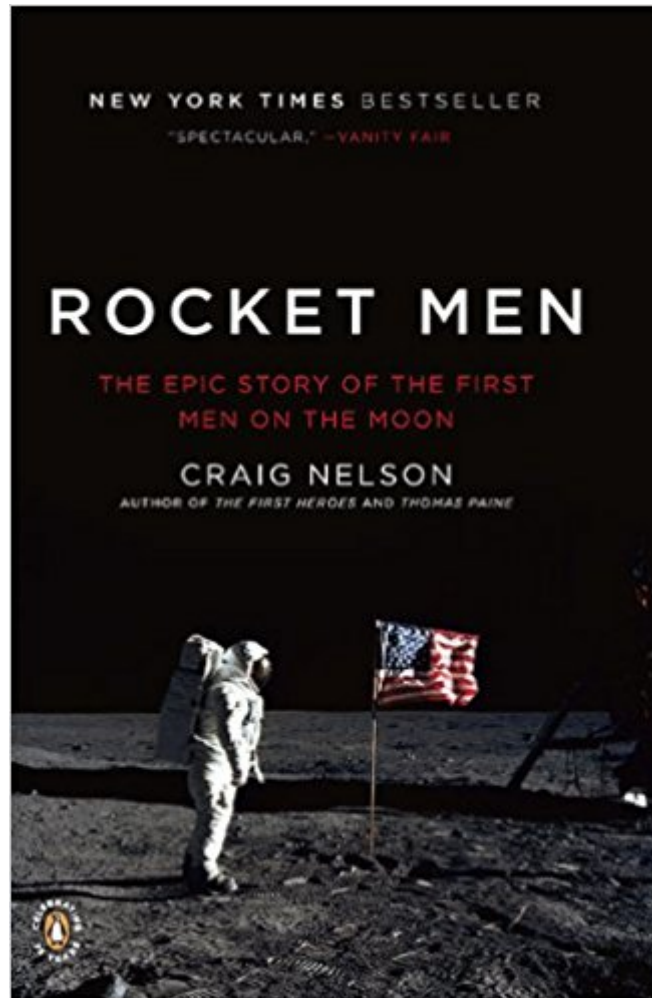




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# Rocket Men: The Epic Story Of The First Men On The Moon



## Synopsis

Read Craig Nelson's posts on the Penguin Blog. "Celebrates a bold era when voyaging beyond the Earth was deemed crucial to national security and pride." -The Wall Street Journal Restoring the drama, majesty, and sheer improbability of an American triumph, this is award-winning historian Craig Nelson's definitive and thrilling story of man's first trip to the moon. At 9:32 a.m. on July 16, 1969, the Apollo 11 rocket launched in the presence of more than a million spectators who had gathered to witness a truly historic event. Through interviews, 23,000 pages of NASA oral histories, and declassified CIA documents on the space race, *Rocket Men* presents a vivid narrative of the moon mission, taking readers on the journey to one of the last frontiers of the human imagination.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. In commemoration of the 40th anniversary of the moon landing, historian Nelson offers a compelling account of the Apollo 11 mission, creating such an authentic retelling that listeners will find themselves sweating the outcome right until the very moment that Neil Armstrong sets foot on the lunar surface. Richard McGonagle delivers a rich and layered performance as he navigates through the mix of interviews, anecdotes and declassified documents and renders the central figures as endearing and heroic as they were in their heyday. A fascinating and compulsive listening experience. A Viking hardcover (Reviews, Apr. 20). (June) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

**\*Starred Review\*** Using interviews, NASA oral histories, and declassified CIA material, Nelson has produced a magnificent, very readable account of the steps that led to the success of Apollo 11. In the 40 years since the first moon landing and the 52 years since Sputnik was launched, it isn't always remembered now what an experiment the Apollo program was, nor that the space race was as much a military as a scientific campaign. The space program was launched using the knowledge of rockets available at the end of World War II and former Third Reich scientists working in both American and Soviet programs. When it came to sending men into orbit and beyond, routines and equipment had to be invented and tested in minute increments. Nelson's descriptions take us back, showing the assorted teams and how they worked together. We meet the astronauts and find out why they were eager to take on this mission, and we also meet the hypercareful technicians, without whom neither men nor craft would have left the ground. Nelson shows, too, how the technology and the politics of the times interrelated. Leslie Fish, songwriter, summed it up perfectly, "To all the unknown heroes, sing out to every shore / What makes one step a giant leap is all the steps before." • Nelson brightly illuminates those steps. --Frieda Murray --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

"You can't imagine living in something that close; it's like being in an outhouse and after a while you just don't care, you know, and without getting into detail ... messy. But we didn't smell anything ... And I did notice a very strange odor when I got out of the spacecraft and it turned out to be fresh air." - Apollo 8 crewman Bill Anders on the ambience of the Command Module, from *ROCKET MEN* "All the conditions necessary for murder are met if you shut two men in a cabin measuring eighteen feet by twenty and leave them together for two months." - Russian cosmonaut Valeri Ryumin, from *ROCKET MEN* "Imagine this scenario: It's 2029, and a lunar mission lands at Tranquility Base. A crew of heroic young Indians - or Chinese - quietly folds and puts away America's sixty-year-old flag. If the world saw that on television, wouldn't the gesture be worth tens of billions of rupees or yuan?" - SF author Bruce Sterling on America's abdication of civilian-controlled world space leadership post-Apollo, from *ROCKET MEN* In my sixty-two years, there are four events that I seemingly remember as if yesterday: the Kennedy assassination, the Apollo 11 landing on the Moon, getting the news of my father's death, and the fall of the Berlin Wall. But memory plays tricks. According to author Craig Nelson, the first step onto the Moon's surface occurred on July 20, 1969 at 9:56 PM CST, or 7:56 PM PST in California; yet I would've sworn that when I watched the event on television in Los Angeles it was mid-day. Evidently it was the landing I

recall, not the initial EVA. Note: An online encyclopedia has that first step being taken at 10:56 PM EDT, which would be 9:56 PM CDT, i.e. Central Daylight Time, not Central Standard Time as the author indicates. So, now I'm even more confused - but apparently not the only one. **ROCKET MEN** is Nelson's otherwise fine telling of the Apollo 11 mission and the lead-up to it. I just hope his facts are more accurate than my memory. **ROCKET MEN** incorporates a section of thirty-nine useful photographs. Since most of my generation is more or less acquainted with how the Apollo 11 flight played out, perhaps the more instructive section of the book is that which describes the evolution of America's rocketry program and manned missions in the milieu of the Cold War, when both the United States and the Soviet Union perceived (or misperceived as the case may be) the abilities of the other. The competitive race approached being a farce on a grand scale. And, in the last chapter, when the post-mission lives of Armstrong, Aldrin, and Collins are briefly summarized, the reader realizes that personal glory with a capital "G" is sometimes best left unrealized. I was a bit puzzled, however, by the author's treatment, or lack thereof, of the four manned Apollo missions preceding 11. The narrative might lead the reader to believe that Apollo 8, a flight which the text briefly summarizes and memorably sent American astronauts around the Moon on Christmas Eve 1968, was the first. Yet it was Apollo 7, about which there is no mention at all, that lofted the Command Module into Earth orbit and which was the initial manned test of the Apollo vehicle in space. And Nelson says nothing about Apollo 9 or 10, the former testing the docking maneuver of the Command and Lunar Modules in Earth orbit, and the latter, which was a full dress rehearsal for 11 and included everything but the actual lunar touchdown. Of course, the core of **ROCKET MEN** is the odyssey of Apollo 11, and value is added when Craig describes the landing of the Lunar Module in nail-biting detail; it's gripping stuff. I, for one, can say that July 20, 1969 was the time of my life that I was proudest to be an American. Honor is due Nelson for doing the events of the day justice.

This review is for the Audible audio book. This is my edited review in which I will cover the content as well as the audio presentation. My initial review was supposed to only cover the narration of the book. Confession time: I'm a space-nut. I was a supplier to NASA during my early career in electronics and computers, so I experienced some of these events first hand, some via stories related to me directly by NASA staff at NASA Ames, NASA White Sands Test Center, Holoman AFB test center, and the NASA Johnson Materials Lab (now the NASA Materials and Components Laboratories), one Apollo astronaut, and yet other events at a distance through journals and the press. I always have been and still am a practicing amateur astronomer and amateur scientist. Therefore, I typically enjoy this type of book. As mentioned above, I experienced this era 1st hand,

and read many accounts of technology and events that frankly just didn't happen. Still, I found this to be a more interesting telling of this type of story than the "The Right Stuff", and this general genre, although being the generation that followed the Right Stuff. Never the less, it's also told in a more engaging fashion. TOO BAD about the flaws in accuracy. I must confess I've had a different perspective on some points presented in the book. I think in some cases, the fact and numbers may actually be correct, but are attributed to the wrong event, people, places, and things. To me, this makes Rocket Men rank as a personal narrative, not a factually accurate history. A revised edition is in order. I should point out that one person's history is often another person's myth. Read the Wright Bother's histories, or for that matter compare some of the incidents in the Right Stuff with Yeager's two biographies. Which ones are correct? It's possible all three suffer from "creative memory" problems. Still, there ARE glaring errors in many facts in Rocket Men. An example of the most obvious include the claim of 120 Atlas ICBMs being deployed in Europe. While that may have been a plan at some time, according to Convair's production history, there were never more than 129 simultaneous deployments of the Atlas, all being in the USA. Now there may have been a 120 "somethings" deployed in Europe, but not Atlas ICBMS. However, Craig Nelson did capture the important issue, the Atlas was dismally unreliable, especially as a vehicle for a human occupant! There is also some controversy over the attribution of some abnormal flight behavior and mid-air corrections by the Saturn V rockets. That also appears to be a pretty strongly supported bone of contention that while the event may have happened, it didn't happen to the Saturn V. I wasn't there so can only report there are conflicting reports. I think the account detailed in this book is grossly overstated as it is seemingly in violation of the laws of physics, but may have happened in a different program and to a different launch vehicle. Lastly, I think I noticed several cases where mph was erroneously reported as fps, or visa versa. I'd have to revisit the text or listen again to be certain, but it caught my ear as way out of range for the event being reported. Good exercise for someone to check. If you like the genre, I think you will still enjoy this audio book in spite of the flaws in accuracy. But like it's been said for generations: " Don't believe everything you read" (or listen to). IF you are old enough to remember these events, you will likely spot some examples of a history that's different than the one you remember. Who's wrong? I chose to think Craig Nelson's editor got a little cut-and-paste and acronym happy and failed to spend any money on checking facts. Thomas J. Frieling critiques this book's technical and factual accuracy in his review at: [...] You might want to read that, before spending your reading or listening cash. The audio book was on sale, and I purchased before reviewing the facts. In short, it was nice to relive that part of history through someone else's eyes, but I reserve the right to my own memories, accurate or not... In the

paraphased words of Adam Savage: " I reject your reality and accept my own". (Also a product of the 60's culture no doubt...)

The author has taken one of mankind's greatest events and made it a dull slog . There seems to be no editing or organization. Every possible quote and detail from anyone involved with the space program, no matter how uninteresting, is included. The low point is a lengthy description of astronaut vomit patterns floating in zero gravity. I only read it because of a book club assignment.

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