

Author's preface

“Never judge a book by its cover”, or so the saying goes, and a first glance at the cover of *this* book might leave the spaceflight enthusiast wondering *why* it is emblazoned with a picture from Skylab, taken in 1973, when the subtitle highlights ‘The Late Seventies and Eighties’. I ask the reader to forgive me. When I set out to write a five-volume history of humanity’s exploration of the heavens, it seemed a big project, though relatively straightforward. Starting with Yuri Gagarin’s pioneering voyage in April 1961, the journey through five dramatic decades promised to be an exciting one, with specific breakpoints between the volumes: the resumption of manned lunar landings in the 1970s, the arrival of the Shuttle in the 1980s, the development of the International Space Station in the 1990s and the increased ‘privatisation’ of getting people into space in the opening years of the present century. My intention was for something a little more complex than a basic log of manned expeditions into space, but as time has rolled on, the project evolved into something much larger and more complex than I had envisaged. It has, therefore, been impossible to track an *entire* decade with each volume. The first volume, *Escaping the Bonds of Earth*, had to take into account some of the advancements of the 1950s as a prerequisite to focusing on ‘its’ decade, the 1960s. In a similar vein, the second volume, *Foothold in the Heavens*, needed the focus to fall in considerable depth on some of the most remarkable achievements of the Space Age – Apollo 11 being the obvious example – at the expense of covering an entire decade.

Furthermore, I quickly realised that spaceflight was not, and *is* not, a unique phenomenon, outside of public or political control. Rather, it has been an integral part of our social, economic and cultural fabric, and the lightning speed or snail’s-pace slowness of its progress through the decades has been increasingly dictated by outside influences: the Bay of Pigs, a mythical ‘missile gap’ between the Soviet Union and the United States and the Cuban Crisis of October 1962 were all instrumental in determining the course of space policy. In the early 1970s, a progressive thaw in relations between the two superpowers similarly impacted their space programmes, allowing for the genesis of Apollo-Soyuz, but very quickly refroze within a few years, as disagreements over the Helsinki Accords, a resumption of American diplomatic ties with China and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan drew them back into the icy

waters of the Cold War once again. In a sense, the decade or so to be covered in this third volume, *At Home in Space*, from 1973 until 1982, presents a deeply depressing picture: one which began with so much promise for the future, offering not only genuine co-operation in space, but, hopefully, co-operation *on Earth*, as well, but which ended with hostile words of “evil empire” and equally hostile acts of Star Wars and Able Archer. I feel that it would be unconscionable to discuss our progress in space without paying due tribute to *why* we were doing so, the obstacles we had to overcome in order to get there and the opinions, attitudes and feelings of the political masters who controlled the purse-strings for such endeavours.

By the middle of the 1970s, the heady days of Apollo and the lunar landings had given way to an increasingly more frugal attack on the heavens. Astronauts, managers, scientists and even some politicians saw no reason why a manned expedition to Mars and a permanent lunar base should *not* be achieved before the end of the century. It might not be on the scale of Arthur C. Clarke’s imaginings, but it was certainly more than just a dream. However, for an increasingly apathetic public in America and a largely disinterested Politburo in the Soviet Union, the costs were excessive. America’s efforts switched from the Moon and Skylab to the development of what was advertised as a cheaper, more frequent and more reliable means of getting into space – the Shuttle – whilst Soviet Russia focused on gradually mastering the new frontier through the establishment of near-permanent orbital stations, the Salyuts.

My intention in writing this third volume has been to explore some of the reasons why the political, social, cultural and economic climate changed so markedly for both superpowers in the pivotal decade of the 1970s and the early years of the 1980s. More than three decades later, we continue to live with the consequences of those frugal times and the very *shape* and *size* of many components of today’s International Space Station are dictated by the shape and size of a Space Shuttle, whose own shape and size was set, according to military requirements, all those years ago. Even the Russian segments of the station bear more than a passing resemblance to the design of the early Salyuts. However, ‘frugal’ or not, the period from 1973 until 1982 was a decade in which – far from ‘stopping’ or even ‘stalling’ – a new and exciting chapter in space exploration began ... and human beings truly found a new ‘home’ in space.

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At Home in Space

The Late Seventies into the Eighties

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