

Author's preface

When I set out to write a five-volume series to commemorate the first 50 years of our adventure in space, it seemed a big project, though relatively straightforward and something that I have always wanted to do. An obsessive space enthusiast for as long as I can remember, I received my first space book at the age of five, as was given a toy Space Shuttle as a birthday present soon afterwards and by the time I reached my seventh birthday I had watched in astonishment as Enterprise – mounted atop a Boeing 747 carrier aircraft – hurtled above my primary school in Birmingham, England, during a sports day. It caused me to drop the egg from my spoon, unfortunately, but the sight hooked me for life. The Moon landings excited me, and still do, beyond compare, and I began writing articles at the age of 15 for the British Interplanetary Society's *Spaceflight* magazine and, later, for *Countdown* and *Astronomy Now*. As I grew older, it became a goal of mine to someday write a 'meaty' history of the human exploration of space, which I continued to believe ranks highly as one of the greatest adventures ever undertaken by our species.

However, each space history book that I read seemed to 'lack' something. Some were overloaded with facts and figures, whilst others were devoted wholly to a popular audience, and still more simply ignored the detail and human interest factor. I cannot promise the reader that my series fulfils any of these gaps, but what I can say with certainty is that I have spent an enjoyable six years exploring the story of our adventure, told through news sources, books, the memoirs of those involved, magazines, press kits and oral histories and have learned a huge amount. The reader may love or loathe my work – they may find it hard to put down or may simply find it a useful additional castor for their sofa – but I have derived great joy from every aspect of researching and writing it.

It has been impossible for me to track entire decades within the pages of each volume. The first, *Escaping the Bonds of Earth*, had to take into account some of the achievements 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 upon some of the most remarkable events of the Space Age, including the Apollo 11 lunar landing, at the expense of covering a whole decade. The third instalment, *At Home in Space*, tackled the 1970s and 1980s, an era of the

first space stations and the origins of the Space Shuttle, whilst the fourth volume, *Tragedy and Triumph in Orbit*, covered the devastating loss of Challenger and the success of the Soviet Union's Salyut 7 and Mir space stations.

By this time, it became clear that I was punching above my weight. My determination to cover each mission with the level of detail that it deserved, including biographies of each crew member, turned *Tragedy and Triumph in Orbit* inside something much longer; so long, in fact, that it barely covered the 1980s and was already approaching 600 pages in extent. As a result, with the gracious approval of Clive Horwood at Praxis, the series expanded to encompass a sixth volume, to cover as much of the first half-century of our exploration of space as possible. *Partnership in Space*, the fifth volume, covered the early 1990s, leaving this final text, *The Twenty-First Century in Space*, to explore the final decade of the last century and provide an overview of the explorations of the future.

I have learned much about the human space programmes of both Russia and the United States and, equally importantly, I have learned a great deal about the political events which shaped their progress. Starting with Yuri Gagarin's pioneering voyage in April 1961, the journey has carried me through a handful of dramatic decades, punctuated by conflict and reconciliation, meddling and political manoeuvring, and has seen the first men walk on the Moon, the first men occupy an orbiting space station, the first men pilot a reusable spacecraft beyond the atmosphere, the first men from nations other than Russia and the United States and, of course, the first representatives of *womankind* to carry their dreams and aspirations into the heavens. The human side element has always been profoundly important to me and the remarkable tales of astronauts and cosmonauts, engineers and managers, journalists and spectators, add a richness to the story. In fact, the tale is not simply about who spent the most time in space, who made the most spacewalks or who flew the most missions. Rather, it is a collection of stories: the stories of how a few hundred remarkable people, all of whom accomplished an uncommon goal, forever altered our perspective of the world in which we live and fixed our eyes, our minds and our imagination on the cosmos around us.

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