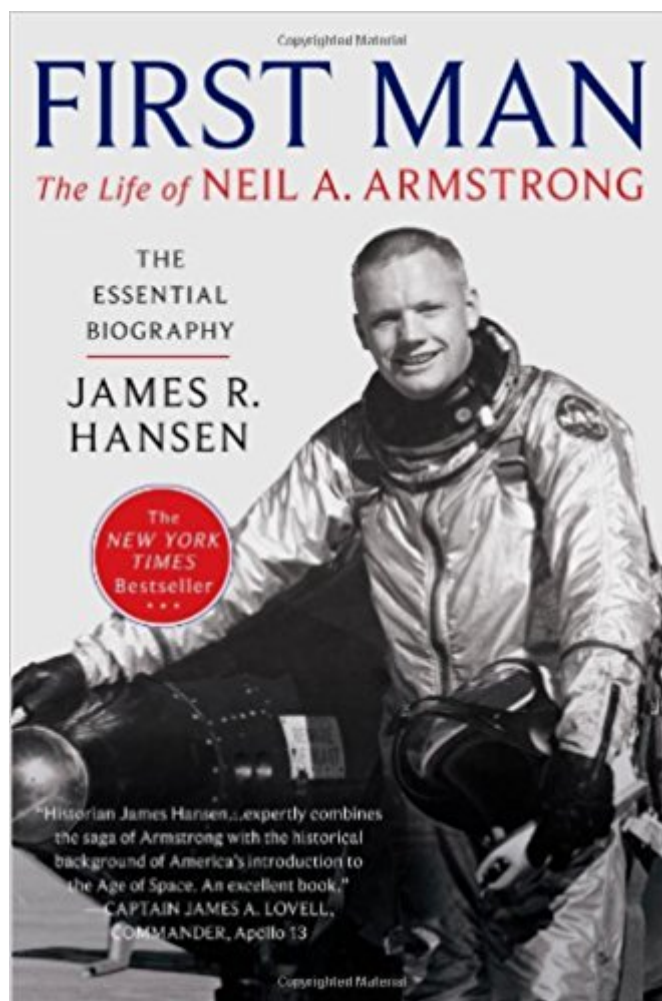


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First Man: The Life Of Neil A. Armstrong



Synopsis

Marking the forty-fifth anniversary of Apollo 11's moon landing, > by James Hansen offers the only authorized glimpse into the life of America's most famous astronaut, Neil Armstrong—the man whose “one small step” changed history. “The Eagle has landed.” When Apollo 11 touched down on the moon's surface in 1969, the first man on the moon became a legend. In >, Hansen explores the life of Neil Armstrong. Based on over fifty hours of interviews with the intensely private Armstrong, who also gave Hansen exclusive access to private documents and family sources, this “magnificent panorama of the second half of the American twentieth century” (>, starred review) is an unparalleled biography of an American icon. Upon his return to earth, Armstrong was honored and celebrated for his monumental achievement. He was also—as James R. Hansen reveals in this fascinating and important biography—misunderstood. Armstrong's accomplishments as engineer, test pilot, and astronaut have long been a matter of record, but Hansen's unprecedented access to private documents and unpublished sources and his interviews with more than 125 subjects (including more than fifty hours with Armstrong himself) yield this first in-depth analysis of an elusive American celebrity still renowned the world over. In a riveting narrative filled with revelations, Hansen vividly recreates Armstrong's career in flying, from his seventy-eight combat missions as a naval aviator flying over North Korea to his formative transatmospheric flights in the rocket-powered X-15 to his piloting Gemini VIII to the first-ever docking in space. These milestones made it seem, as Armstrong's mother Viola memorably put it, “as if from the very moment he was born—farther back still—that our son was somehow destined for the Apollo 11 mission.” For a pilot who cared more about flying to the Moon than he did about walking on it, Hansen asserts, Armstrong's storied vocation exacted a dear personal toll, paid in kind by his wife and children. For the forty-five years since the Moon landing, rumors have swirled around Armstrong concerning his dreams of space travel, his religious beliefs, and his private life. In a penetrating exploration of American hero worship, Hansen addresses the complex legacy of the >, as an astronaut and as an individual. In >, the personal, technological, epic, and iconic blend to form the portrait of a great but reluctant hero who will forever be known as history's most famous space traveler.

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Customer Reviews

Starred Review. On July 20, 1969, a quiet, determined man from Wapakoneta, Ohio, stepped out of his fragile spacecraft and into history. Neil Armstrong--engineer, naval aviator, test pilot, astronaut and devoted family man--became the first man to walk on the moon. In this powerful, unrelenting biography of a man of no particularly spectacular talent yet who stands as a living testimony to everyday grit and determination, former NASA historian Hansen has achieved something quite remarkable. Like a rich pointillist painting, he has created a magnificent panorama of the second half of the American 20th century by assembling a multitude of luminescent moments in one man's life. From Armstrong's birth to a middle-class family in Ohio to the mind-boggling fame of the Apollo 11 triumph, and later his service on the commission investigating the 1986 Challenger space shuttle disaster, Hansen details it all. He writes of the number of rounds of 20-millimeter ammunition loosed by Armstrong's fighter squadron in Korea in October 1951 (49,299), his heart rate on liftoff in Gemini VIII (146 beats per minute) and the price of a signed Armstrong letter at auction (\$2,500). Rather than overwhelming, this accumulation of details gives flesh-and-blood reality to a man who is more icon than human. With the recent renewal of interest in manned space travel, this book is a must for astronaut buffs and history readers alike. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

For the first time, the cool, precise, and c-elebrity-averse Neil Armstrong has authorized a biography. Its readers cannot expect any more access to his emotional interior than the first man to

walk on the moon has ever allowed, but they will learn about everything he achieved in aerospace engineering. Deflecting aerospace historian Hansen's inquiries about personal crises, such as the death of an infant daughter or his divorce, Armstrong proves disarmingly more voluble about his involvement with airplanes and spacecraft. Quelling apocrypha circulated at the time of Apollo 11 about the all-American boy who dreamed of going to the moon, Hansen follows the empirical arc of Armstrong's interest in aviation, his engineering studies at Purdue University, and his qualification as an aircraft-carrier pilot. After the Korean War, Armstrong resumed his engineering career, wrote technical papers, flew hotshot planes like the X-15, and stepped irrevocably into history with Apollo 11. Dramatizing the mission in meticulous detail, Hansen capably captures both Armstrong's expertise and his Garbo-like demurrer of fame. Gilbert Taylor Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Neil Armstrong was one of my boyhood heroes...how cool would it be to be the first man on the moon? I looked forward to reading this biography, and it finally made it to the top of my "to-read" list.=== The Good Stuff ===* James Hansen evidently had pretty good access to Armstrong. He had a wealth of personal, family and professional history, including the occasional glimpse behind the scenes. There are a few interesting tidbits and some bone-headed maneuvers throughout the years, all of which make the man "more human".* Armstrong was evidently a very private man, and very careful about what parts of his thoughts and personality were going to be available for public discussion. Occasionally Hansen succeeds in penetrating this stoic front and capturing glimpses of Armstrong's thoughts. For example, he explains multiple times that he was not at all disappointed or angered that crew-companion Edwin Aldrin never took a picture of him while on the moon. He says multiple times that it was just the way the time-line of the moon walk worked out, and he is sure there was no "revenge" factor because Aldrin didn't get to step out of the LEM first. He repeats himself, again and again. It is not hard to get the feeling that it is something that has bothered him all these years, but he is too professional to admit.* The book is certainly detailed. (See more thoughts below). Hansen carefully builds a portrait of Armstrong based on his personal, professional and military career of a man cool and calm under pressure, and capable of thinking his way through problems when all the alarm buzzers are flashing red. He relates a story of where Armstrong had baled out of a plane, nearly killing himself, early in the morning. Coworkers found him working at his desk that afternoon as if nothing had happened.* The latter parts of the book, from about the time of the Gemini launches, were much better than the beginning, and held my interest. Even the explanations of his "reclusive" behavior later in life were also very revealing and captivating.=== The

Not-So-Good Stuff ===* NASA was a great believer in weight reduction, and this book could have used some of that skill. I have no interest in Armstrong's medieval ancestors, and I have strong doubts about records that old anyway. Likewise, I really don't care that his Mother made her own wedding cake, or that it was "an iced angel food cake in three graduated layers ornamented with rosebuds and garlands". The book is full of such detail, although at least in latter parts of the book the detail actually concerns the subject. It is almost as if the author was determined to use every scrap of information he could find about Armstrong, interesting or not.* Similarly, Hansen could have added details which might not have been directly available. For example, a number of times the text mentions the problem of "roll coupling", an aerodynamic problem of high speed flight in which the inertia of an aircraft overcomes the counter-effects of its control surfaces (thanks, Google). But while the book went on for pages and pages about Armstrong's Mother's favorite teacher, it couldn't devote a paragraph or two to a phenomenon that almost killed Armstrong, twice.* By about the first ten pages, I was sick of hearing about his Mother and her religious fervor. Enough already.===

Summary ===There is a lot to like about this book, but an almost equal amount to dislike. I came very close to putting the book down for good during the first 100 pages or so, but glad I kept at it, because it definitely improved as it went on. The author genuinely seemed to like Armstrong, which is fine, but seemed to let that cloud his analysis of some of the personal and professional conflicts in Neil's life. You could almost feel Hansen taking Armstrong's side in a few conflicts. Overall, I'd recommend it to fans of the space program, but with the caveat that it is OK to skip over entire sections of the text without missing anything interesting or important.

This is a good biography of Neil Armstrong, and is chock-full of fascinating information and insights into this legendary life. James Hansen has definitely done his research, and is to be commended for all the effort he put into researching and writing this tome. However, I felt this book could have been more concise, which is why I gave this book 4 stars rather than 5. Still, this book does justice to Neil Armstrong, correcting the popular misperception that Armstrong was hostile towards the public. He was definitely reticent, and preferred to be private, but he did make public appearances, even if they were not as often as the public or news reporters wished. Another thing that really comes through in this book is that Neil's first love was always flying, and not necessarily exploration. This is a good book for scholars who wish to study Neil Armstrong's life in depth. For those who wish to have a general overview of Neil's Armstrong's life, I would suggest you look elsewhere for a more concise book.

I love space travel and any media items about it, be it books, tv shows, etc. I was 15 years old when Neil Armstrong touched down on the moon in July 1969. My whole family was in front of the tv set watching. This is a very detailed book about Neil Armstrong's life, seems like nothing was just glossed over about him. It's also a long book, so you won't get through it in just a couple of nights. When I read biography's about a person I try to pin down their personality and what they must be like in real life. Neil Armstrong was hard for me to do just that. I saw him as a super intelligent person and engineer, as well as test pilot and astronaut. I could also pick up on the tension between him and Buzz Aldrin, never quite sure how either one really felt about each other. You will learn things by reading this book about their touchdown on the moon, like what the moon dust smelled like on their space suits. If you like books about space you'll like this one. At \$1.99 I could not go wrong.

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