



First Man: The Life of Neil A. Armstrong

By James R. Hansen

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Marking the forty-fifth anniversary of Apollo 11's moon landing, *First Man* 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 *First Man*, 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” (*Publishers Weekly*, 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test pilot, and astronaut have long been a matter of record, but Hansen's unprecedented access to private documents and unpublished sources and his interviews with more than 125 subjects (including more than fifty hours with Armstrong himself) yield this first in-depth analysis of an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 *First Man*, as an astronaut and as an individual. In *First Man*, 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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- Sales Rank: #349420 in Books
- Published on: 2012-11-27
- Released on: 2012-11-27

- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 9.25" h x 1.30" w x 6.12" l, 1.90 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 784 pages

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

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.

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From [Booklist](#)

For the first time, the cool, precise, and celebrity-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 demurral of fame. *Gilbert Taylor*

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Review

"Historian James Hansen...expertly combines the saga of Armstrong with the historical background of America's introduction to the Age of Space. An excellent book." (Captain James A. Lovell, Commander, Apollo 13)

"Most of the astronauts books are about the adventure. Jim Hansen's well-researched and documented book is about the adventurer. *First Man* is a compelling story of a modern day Columbus, which provides the rare opportunity to understand the personal qualities driving explorers. Quiet, complex, and deep, Armstrong, as fuel was running out, was the right man at the right time to take America and the world to the surface of the moon (Eugene F. Kranz, Author, *Failure is not an Option*)

"Jim Hansen has captured the essence of Neil Armstrong, not only as the first man on the Moon, but also as an outstanding aviator and astronaut. I was there for Neil's other major 'space step'; he recovered Gemini 8 from the ultimate end game with aggressive action, cool skill and creative judgment seldom performed in

any aviation or space endeavor. Just 16 days after the deaths of the Gemini 9 crew, he probably saved the Moon. Jim Hansen has written an exceptional and accurate account of a unique period in aerospace history and the adventures of Neil Armstrong." (Dave Scott, Gemini VIII, Apollo 9, Commander, Apollo 15)

"A fine authorized biography brimming with groundbreaking research, fresh anecdotes and fair-minded analysis. . . . Hansen should be commended for decoding the enigmatic Armstrong: a space hero short on words but sky-high on Midwestern integrity." (Douglas Brinkley *The New York Times Book Review*)

"For Americans who lived through it all, and for those who came later and can't imagine such an achievement, *First Man* is compelling reading." (Thomas Walton *Toledo Blade*)

"A powerful, unrelenting biography of a man who stands as a living testimony to everyday grit and determination. . . . A magnificent panorama of the second half of the American twentieth century. . . . A must for astronaut buffs and history readers alike." (*Publishers Weekly*)

"A lot of us have been waiting a long time for a book like this one, and it was well worth the wait. . . . Will likely stand as the definitive biography of Neil Armstrong." (Tom D. Crouch, Senior Curator, Aeronautics, National Air and Space Museum, Smithsonian Institution)

"Masterfully written . . . technically accurate, scholarly yet independent and accessible. . . . Mission accomplished and a perfect touchdown." (Leonard David, *Ad Astra, The Magazine of the National Space Society*)

"First Man burrows deep into Armstrong's past and present. . . . What emerges is an earnest and brave man." (Mark Carreau *Houston Chronicle*)

"To understand Armstrong on his own terms is to see a large truth of our time. . . . A compelling and nuanced portrait." (James Tobin *Chicago Tribune*)

"Armstrong raises the mirrored visor for the first time." (Bo Emerson, Theresa K. Weaver *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*)

"Hansen capably captures both Armstrong's expertise and his Garbo-like demurral of fame." (Gilbert Taylor *Booklist*)

"Thoroughly researched... incredibly detailed . . . Hansen's attention to detail serves the story well, relaying the difficulty and danger inherent in the Apollo program. Along with this comes an understanding of Neil Armstrong himself." (Howard Shirley *Bookpage*)

"[A] taut, well-told tale of our nation's race to the moon and the man who took the first step." (Doug Allyn *The Flint Journal*)

"More than the most complete story of Armstrong's remarkable life, [*First Man*] is a fascinating study of how the modern world treats a historical figure . . . Hansen does a fine job of retelling Armstrong's childhood and remarkable career in aviation. The NASA years have been covered in many other books, but Hansen manages to keep them fresh, benefiting from Armstrong's perspective . . . As Hansen shows, the way Armstrong chooses to carry the heavy burden of history only proves once again that he has the right stuff." (Brian Hicks *The Post and Courier (Charleston, SC)*)

"A great read." (*The Kansas City Star*)

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Eloise Torres:

Nowadays reading books are more than want or need but also be a life style. This reading practice give you lot of advantages. Advantages you got of course the knowledge the rest of the information inside the book that will improve your knowledge and information. The info you get based on what kind of publication you read, if you want drive more knowledge just go with schooling books but if you want really feel happy read one together with theme for entertaining for instance comic or novel. *The First Man: The Life of Neil A. Armstrong* is kind of book which is giving the reader unpredictable experience.

Frank Barcomb:

Your reading 6th sense will not betray an individual, why because this *First Man: The Life of Neil A. Armstrong* reserve written by well-known writer who really knows well how to make book that could be understand by anyone who read the book. Written throughout good manner for you, dripping every ideas and producing skill only for eliminate your personal hunger then you still uncertainty *First Man: The Life of Neil A. Armstrong* as good book not just by the cover but also through the content. This is one book that can break don't judge book by its protect, so do you still needing one more sixth sense to pick this!? Oh come on your reading sixth sense already alerted you so why you have to listening to another sixth sense.

Rene Moore:

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Rodolfo Buker:

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