

## **Two Sides of the Moon**

David Scott and Alexei Leonov with Christine Toomey

Review By: Lucy Cohan

**Two Sides of the Moon**, by David Scott and Alexei Leonov, tells the story of the space race through two differing points of view. Scott was an American astronaut who flew on Gemini 8, Apollo 9, and walked on the moon in Apollo 15. Leonov was a Russian cosmonaut and was the first person to walk in space. The book, told in first person, alternates between the two authors, intertwining their stories through a chronological history. It begins at childhood and continues to follow the events of their lives, focusing on both the parallels and differences.

The book highlights the differing points of view, centering on how the same event can be interpreted in very different ways by people on opposite sides of the space race. However, a major theme of the book is that the lives of Scott and Leonov were also very similar, even though they lived in such different situations. Both men were fighter pilots in the Air Force, and became astronauts/cosmonauts rather reluctantly. Both subsequently became heroes in their respective countries. Both saw the race to the moon as an end to the space race, and both encountered potentially life-threatening problems during their missions. Both men abandoned protocol at certain points of various missions, saying that the missions would have failed if not for human intervention and intuition. Both shared the same passion for their respective countries and for space exploration.

Despite the strong similarities in some of the major themes of their lives, their stories are very different. Scott's father was a pilot, and he knew from a very young age that he would follow in his footsteps. On the other hand, Leonov grew up in war-torn Siberia in a rather poor family and recalls going to school with no shoes. He did not always intend to be a pilot, and eventually chose between art school and the Air Force. Also, once they became astronauts, the American program was very open, and Leonov knew about all of the astronauts, read about them in *Life Magazine*, and constantly followed the US space program. On the other hand, the Americans had very little information on any of the Soviet programs, and only knew of a few Cosmonauts after they had completed key missions.

Both authors were key players in the space race, and tell the story first hand, through their own stories and accounts. The book is written as if they are talking to the reader, casually telling the stories of their younger years, making the descriptions very powerful and moving. There are also many obscure, rather humorous, recollections of interactions between various people, including each other, that add depth and feeling to the book.

The book is not meant to be a book of pure history or fact, but rather an understanding of both sides of a series of events that changed the world. The sources are mainly Scott and Leonov's personal recollections of the events of the time, along with some interviews and flight reports to help their memories. While there is no direct evidence presented countering their memories, by including both an Astronaut and a Cosmonaut, they attempt to include both sides of a complicated story.

The book is a memoir of two men who are so different and yet also the same. It clearly fits into Launius' five categories; it is a tale of the astronauts, their lives, and their flights. However, by presenting both the Russian and American point of view, it touches upon foreign policy and Cold War relations. It fits into the larger Apollo project by presenting the first-hand memories of some of the less-covered events of the Apollo program. Apollo 8, 11, and 13 are the three most commonly discussed missions, and are mentioned, but certainly not the focus of the book. Rather than tell the stories of those familiar flights, it puts them into the context, explaining the implications of those flights to the American astronauts and to the Russian space program.

Throughout the book, both men encounter moments where quick decisions saved their missions and their lives. One particular moment of major decision came in Leonov's historic first space walk. This particular mission was full of decisions that illustrate the attitude of the Cosmonaut corps at the time. First, there was a problem with the test rocket, and Leonov and his commander were given the option to either continue with the mission, or to wait until the test was completed successfully. However, they were also told that the American astronaut, Ed White, was preparing to perform a spacewalk during an upcoming mission. Since the Cosmonauts thought their own system of government was superior, and the way to show superiority was to win the space race, they went ahead with the risky flight. Their flight initially went well, and Leonov performed his EVA. However, the spacesuit unexpectedly inflated more than expected, and he could not reenter the hatch. The Russians had very strict protocols, and

the cosmonauts could not do anything without the permission of mission control. However, Leonov realized that he was the only one who could save himself, and did not consult mission control before bleeding oxygen from his suit and crawling into the hatch in the wrong direction. This quick thinking and lack of interference from mission control likely saved his life, illustrating the benefit of human intuition in space missions. However, this action was against protocol. These two decisions, made within hours of each other, illustrate two major themes of both space programs. The first shows the seriousness of the cold war and the space race, and how both the astronauts and the cosmonauts were sure they were correct. Also, both sides believed that the space race was a way to a peaceful end to the cold war. The second decision shows the benefit of human interaction in space, and demonstrates the desire of both the astronauts and cosmonauts for more control of their spacecraft, and less interference from automatic systems and mission control.

Overall, the book wonderfully interweaves the two men's stories. It highlights that even though there was this great rivalry between the US and Russia, the astronauts and cosmonauts did not resent each other. Rather, they were fascinated by the progress of the other country, and, though they wanted to win the space race, they ultimately wanted humans to succeed in space. The end of the book focuses on the joint Soyuz-Apollo program, the peaceful ventures and meetings of the two countries, and the love of space and hopes of peaceful cooperation from both countries. While the book is by no means a comprehensive story of the space race, or even a specific mission, it is a fascinating story and rather light reading. It entertainingly touches on some of the major themes of the space race and the cold war, but serves mainly as a pleasurable book about two heroes during a time of immense technological progress.

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