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Opening extract from

Moon Man

Written by

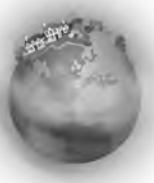
David Donahue

Published by

Egmont

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DAVID DONOHUE

MOON MAN

EGMONT



EGMONT
We bring stories to life

First published in Great Britain 2006
by Egmont UK Ltd
239 Kensington High Street, London W8 6SA

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ISBN 978 1 4052 1998 3
ISBN 1 4052 1998 X

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

A CIP catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library

Offset by Avon DataSet Ltd, Bidford on Avon, Warwickshire
Printed and bound in Great Britain by the CPI Group

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Drowerof

Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination encircles the world.
Albert Einstein

Type the words 'moon landing 1969' into an internet search engine and, chances are, you will find many theories on how it never actually happened, how it was faked. Now, most people think that it doesn't matter what the non-believers say, because the moon landing in 1969 is now accepted as one of the greatest achievements of Man and no two-bit doubting Thomas is going to take that away from us. And I agree. Those words 'This is one small step for Man, one giant step for mankind' now resonate in our minds, as if they had been spoken by God.

I should tell you that the story you are about to read is almost *as crazy as any other story claiming*

the moon landing was faked. It is definitely *as crazy as the notion that the moon landing actually did happen. Consider this: seventeen years after Apollo 11 went to the moon, the Space Shuttle Challenger exploded 73 seconds into its flight due to the failure of a seal in the rocket booster. If NASA* failed *to take a shuttle into space in 1986, could they have successfully launched a rocket in 1969* and *landed two men on the moon* and *taken them home safely?*

Fake or real, this is what the Apollo mission stands for: the power of the imagination (or ***Noitanigami*** *as you'll call it after reading this book): the single most important element in a project as ambitious as landing a man on the moon. It was the imaginations of the rocket scientist Werner Van Braun and NASA's engineers that took the Apollo rocket into space and beyond that, into history. However, though their imaginations had no bounds, their skills as engineers most definitely did; while sending a rocket into space was relatively easy, landing on the moon and guaranteeing the astronauts' safe return was not as simple.*

This is the first time my version of events has been told. You might well find it more crazy than NASA's version, but I don't believe you can argue with this: those who are chosen to be history-makers are often the most unlikely sorts, plucked from a hum-drum world to dance to a magical tune whose composer is unseen.

Let me tell you a story about a curly-haired boy with a peculiar approach to spelling words and an imagination as big as the moon itself. This story may seem stranger than fiction but it may also be truer than the 'truth'. You decide!

Eugolorp

Walter leaned up against a white wooden fence in the glare of the morning sunshine. He felt as if he had just woken up from a nap. A slight dizziness made him reach out and hold on to the fence to steady himself. He took a deep breath. Wherever he was, it was summer – giant palm trees swayed in the breeze against a hazy-blue sky. Cars drove by, looking as if they had just jumped out of the pages of his dad's *Vintage Classics* magazine; a red Corvette, a yellow Dodge Charger, a blue Pontiac, a long black Chevrolet. A bunch of teenagers strolled by, looking sleepy and happy and wearing old clothes and shoes like those in the window of the Nittiburg charity shop.

Walter glanced down to check what *he* was wearing. Phew! He still had on his blue T-shirt, grey corduroys and black and red stripy trainers. At least he didn't have a flowery shirt with a pointed collar, like some of those teenagers were wearing!

Nearby, a radio played a song with a fast thumping beat and a lot of ‘Sha, la, la’s’. Miss O’Connor had once told the class that they had used ‘Du-waps’ in the fifties, ‘Sha la la’s’ in the sixties, and that the seventies were all about ‘Hey, hey, hey’.

Walter could scarcely believe it – it had actually worked – he was now back in the sixties! Good ol’ Grandad!

Na Lausunu Yob

Walter Speazlebud was an ordinary boy and, like all ordinary boys, there were certain things about him that were extraordinary or, at the very least, un-ordinary. First, Walter could spell and pronounce any word or name backwards, and this unusual talent made him a regular guest on national TV, where he was known as ***Retlaw Dubelzaeps***. Secondly, he was fascinated by the worlds of astronomy and space travel, particularly the Apollo 11 moon landing of 1969. However, apart from Walter's beloved grandad, his teacher, and his parents, few people paid much attention to this – they were much more interested in his backwards spelling talents – but to Walter, astronomy and space travel were the most important things in his life. They were the passions around which he wove his dreams.

Walter's bedroom, a small upstairs room in a

modest, pebble-dashed house on the edge of an ordinary village called Nittiburg, looked more like the attic of an astronomy professor than the bedroom of a ten-year-old boy: photographs of Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, Uranus, Neptune, Pluto and Venus covered one entire wall, while the opposite wall was covered in bookshelves, heaving with dog-eared encyclopedias and books on space travel and astronomy. By his bed sat an antique telescope on a rickety tripod and, above the bed, Walter's greatest hero, the astronaut Neil Armstrong, smiled down on him, his fellow astronauts Buzz Aldrin and Michael Collins on either side. Alongside was another photograph of Neil Armstrong, with his arm around Walter's other hero, his granduncle Bob Speazlebud, who had once been an aeronautical engineer for NASA.

Tinted by the fluorescent green glow of the plastic stars scattered across the ceiling, Walter lay in his bed listening to his mum, Peggy, read to him. Reading was difficult for Walter, at least reading forwards, and, ever since he was a baby,

Peggy read to him every night. Walter *could* read forwards, but only if he pored over every word, reversed it, then flipped it back again in his mind; so it was much easier to lie there and let Peggy's gentle voice take him to the moon and beyond, to the stars, and deeper still into the mysteries and the magic of outer space.

Tonight, however, Walter seemed distracted, nervous, lost in his thoughts. Peggy stopped reading, placed *The Complete History Of Outer Space* on the bedside table, then leaned over and kissed Walter, her only child, on the forehead.

'I know you're worrying about your grandad,' she whispered.

Walter nodded, his eyes as moist as dawn grass.

'You know he loves you more than anybody in the world?'

'More than he loves Mrs Frost's Xtra Strong Mints?'

'Well, maybe not quite that much,' said Peggy with a laugh.

'As much as I love the moon.'

'Exactly,' said Peggy. 'As much as you love the moon.'

'***Doog Thgin***,' said Walter.

'***Doog Thgin***,' replied Peggy.

As his mother left the room Walter switched off the bedside light and looked through the window at the night sky. The moon, almost full, was creeping into the window frame like an old friend coming to say good night.

'Luminous glass ball floating in a pool of stars,' Walter whispered to himself over and over, like a mantra to help him to relax.

Now, you might say that the moon looked like no such thing – it simply looked like a full moon in a starry sky – and it would be hard to disagree, but it was Walter's imagination, more than anything else, which defined his place in the world and, indeed, sometimes made his life difficult.

'I'll walk on the moon one day,' Walter had once told a particularly nasty old teacher, who promptly ordered him to stand in the hallway for being 'childish and ridiculous'.

From that moment onwards Walter shared his dreams with nobody except Grandad.

Walter sat up, reached over and brought the eyepiece of his telescope to his left eye. He pointed the fat end through the window and adjusted the focus until the moon was so close that he could clearly imagine walking upon its sandy surface, one giant step after another.

'This is one big step for a small man,' he said aloud, with a chuckle, reciting the words his grandad had jokingly suggested he should say when he finally fulfilled his greatest dream.

Walter heard the sound of singing coming from the room next door. It was the unmistakable, if unmusical, voice of his beloved grandad.

'Ho Ynnad Yob,
Eht sepip eht sepip era gnillac,
Morf nelg ot nelg
Dna nwod eht niatnuom edis . . .'

The song brought a smile to Walter's face. It was

'Danny Boy', *backwards*. Grandad Speazlebud was the only other person Walter knew who could spell, speak or, for that matter, sing backwards. Of course, Walter's parents and some of the townsfolk had taught themselves certain backwards words and phrases, but nobody came close to Grandad.

Suddenly the singing stopped, as if the old man had forgotten the words.

Walter fell back on to his bed with a sigh, his curls spreading against the pillow. If you were to have taken a close look at Walter's face at that moment you may have noticed the glinting track mark of a single tear which had made its way from his big green eyes down his freckly cheek.

Walter opened his eyes and began to sing, quietly at first, then louder and louder. '***Ho Ynnad Yob, eht sepip eht sepip era gnillac*** . . .'

He heard his grandad's voice again, now singing along with all his might. It brought a smile to Walter's face and made his eyes glow bright like

the plastic stars on the ceiling, like that luminous glass ball floating above him in its pool of stars.