

Letter from Frank Cottrell-Boyce to the Reader

Dear Reader

Usually when I write a book I like to set it somewhere near where I live. When I'm writing I go on day trips to the places in the story – I draw maps, take photos, talk to people. This book was different. It's set in space. You can't just pedal off into space on your bicycle with a packed lunch. I had to go there in my imagination instead. To be honest, my imagination wasn't really up to the trip. I had to strap some booster rockets to it, by reading books, by talking to astronauts, and by spending time looking at the Moon through a telescope.

I discovered that, since stories began, people have told stories about the Moon.

In ancient China people believed that the Moon was the goddess Chang O, who fell in love with a mortal man and is eternally looking for him. In Nepal people say the Moon is where dead ancestors live. Native Americans tell a story about the Moon being chased by a bear who takes a bite out of her every night (which is why the Moon gets smaller and smaller). The Aztecs thought the jealous Sun God cut his sister's head off and threw it into the sky. You probably already know lots of Moon stories – whether they're about cows jumping over it or werewolves being excited by it.

on the Moon, where they had built vast temples and hunted tailless beavers. There were even pictures to prove it and thousands of people believed the story.

But the Moon is a real place. Real people have really been there. In July 1969 – 360 years after Galileo first looked through his telescope – the Apollo 11 rocket finally transported men to the Moon. The whole world held its breath, waiting for the first moonwalker – Neil Armstrong – to come out of his landing module. They held their breath for half an hour. Why was he half an hour late? Because he was putting the breakfast dishes away, and it was a bit more complicated than usual because of weightlessness. Of all the stories that mankind told about the Moon, the only one that turned out to be true was that the dish really did run away with the spoon!

I didn't want my story to be full of people with bat wings eating green cheese. I wanted it to be about what it's really like to go to space. So I read books, talked to astronauts and spent time looking at the Moon through a telescope.

The real moonwalkers explored the surface, took photos, collected rock samples and tried their best to describe 'the magnificent desolation' that they were witnessing for the first time. But here's the twist – the

But people didn't really start thinking about going to the Moon until after 1609, which is the year that Galileo first looked at it through a telescope and proved that it was not a flat silver disc, or a severed head, or a sad Chinese goddess, or green cheese, but a globe, like the Earth, with mountains and craters. He showed that it was a place, somewhere a person could travel to. Of course, first you'd have to work out how to get there. Cyrano de Bergerac tied himself to a big firework. In *The Man in the Moone*, by English bishop Francis Goodwin, first published after his death in 1638, a man is pulled to the Moon in a chariot drawn by geese! And in Jules Verne's *From the Earth to the Moon* (1865) the astronauts are shot into space from a canon, which isn't far from the truth when you think about it.

Once you'd imagined the journey, you had to imagine the visit. We can see the Moon clearly, but not clearly enough to work out what's happening on it. It's like a blank white page floating around in the sky, just asking us to draw our fantasies on it. H. G. Wells imagined an underground civilization up there. But my favourite ideas about life on the Moon are from an American newspaper of the 1830s. The newspaper reported that it had a telescope powerful enough to see humans with huge bat-like wings living

thing that really surprised them wasn't the Moon at all. It was the Earth. The Apollo astronauts were the first people to see the Earth from a distance. One of them – Ed Anders – took the famous 'Earthrise' photograph in 1968, which shows the Earth rising over the Moon. That photograph really changed the way that people thought about the Earth. For the first time they saw their own big strong planet as something small and beautiful and fragile. Something we need to take care of. So we flew all the way to the Moon, but what we really discovered was the Earth.

In a way this happened to me when I wrote this book. I spent a lot of time thinking about rockets and the silent wastes of space, but in the end I wound up writing a book that is about the thing that is closest to me: what it's like to be a Dad.

Since Apollo, no one has left the orbit of the Earth, but we've explored the furthest reaches of space with radio telescopes. And in all that time and space we've found nothing quite like this planet. Not only is it beautiful and small; it is, possibly, unique.

So please look after it.

Frank Cottrell-Boyce

Retrieval

1. What did the ancient Chinese and the Aztecs believe about the moon.
2. Why was Neil Armstrong late when he walked on the moon ?

Words in context

3. Find and copy a simile which describes the moon.
4. It is unusual to describe desolation as magnificent. Why do you think the author chose these words ?

Inference

5. How did going to the moon actually change people's ideas about the Earth ?
6. Is the book mainly about Space or does it have another key theme ?

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