

Moon-Landing Deniers? I Kinda Get It



ASTRONAUT BUZZ ALDRIN punched a guy once. Specifically, Bart Sibrel, who says all moon landings were staged, and produced a movie to further that claim. In 2002, outside a Los Angeles hotel, Sibrel accosted Aldrin, told him to swear on a Bible that the moon landing wasn't fake, called him "a coward, a liar, and a thief." Then, Aldrin threw a right cross.

The scene made me remember Paul Fisher, my high school science teacher. Not because he punched anyone, but because he made me realize how dauntingly complex something like basic orbital physics can be. Before teaching, he was a systems engineer at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory. He worked

on the Galileo mission to Jupiter, and the Cassini-Huygens mission to Saturn. Brilliant, funny, inspiring, way overqualified, he earns every superlative you can give a teacher. He once asked our class a question I'll never forget. "The Earth revolves around the sun, right?" he asked. "Can you prove it?"

Uhhh...

The moon landing can seem almost quaint now. But it happened because of powerful ideas based on already powerful principles that, all these years later, would still leave me bumbling if I had to explain them.

My response, then, to these ideas is wonder. Actually, awe. That's what I felt as I watched video of dozens of rocket liftoffs while we worked on this issue's Apollo 11 50th anniversary feature (page 60). Part of it is the scale of the thing, in size and sound. Part of it is the audible cheering and gasps from the people watching in real life. For the kid whose high school science teacher left him flummoxed about how to explain a simple scientific fact, part of that awe comes from how space is a realm of wonderfully incomprehensible ideas that reward you for even trying to comprehend them. Even after you learn just a bit about retro-rockets, for example, watching SpaceX boosters deploying landing gear and touching down gently seems even more epic.

Our goal every issue is to research and report and tell stories that make incredible stuff seem even more incredible—yet somehow more comprehensible. With that in mind, I'll quit writing and let you get to the rest of this issue. Or maybe some YouTube launches.

ALEXANDER GEORGE
Editor in Chief

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