

One Giant Leap by Robert Burleigh; extracts Part 2

The written style of this book is unusual; it is based on fact but the layout looks like a poem BUT it is not, although all the lines are quite short.

On July 20th, 1969, the world tuned in for a broadcast that would change history.

'That's one small step for man;

One giant leap for mankind.'

Spoken by Neil Armstrong moments after he became the first person to set foot on the moon, these words are instantly recognizable. They have come to represent all that is possible when humankind's determination to achieve the seemingly impossible becomes a reality. Robert Burleigh

A hatch opens,

Armstrong, on all fours, crawls through its small space.

He moves awkwardly in his 'moon cocoon.'

Outside on the narrow porch.

Where a ladder is attached to one landing leg,

He climbs to the bottom rung and stops.

A TV camera, placed in the *Eagle's* hatchway, is pointed down.

Armstrong knows that back on earth,

Hundreds of millions of people are watching.

He jumps to the landing leg's round footpad.

He holds on. He pauses. He points his foot and steps off.

The surface is as fine as powdered charcoal.

The treads of his boot leave a perfectly crisp print in the dust.

On the weatherless moon, it will last for millions of years.

His voice sounds staticky and far away;

"That's one small step for man - one giant leap for mankind."

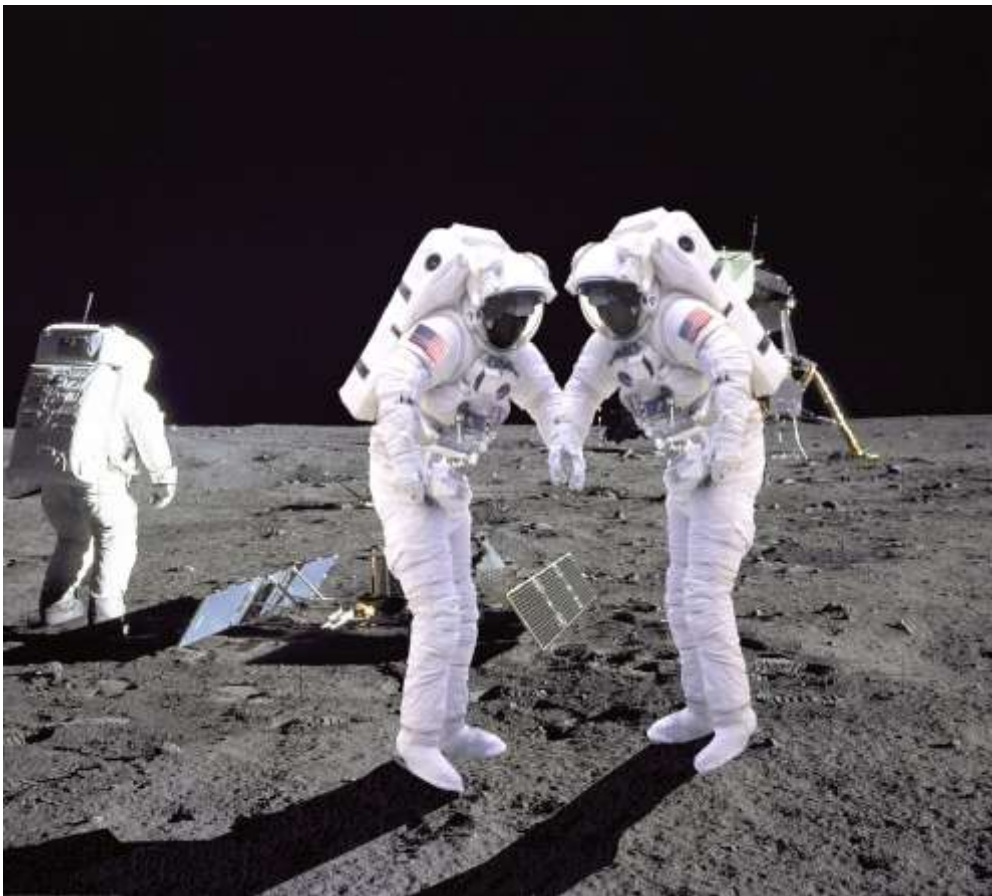
In orbit, Michael Collins listens. And waits.

Now it is Buzz Aldrin's turn.

He climbs down, feeling full of goose pimples.

Together the astronauts go moon-walking.

Flexing their toes and ankles, they walk stiffly.
As if navigating inside a rigid balloon.
But moving about is easier than they expect.
The twirl like slow-motion tiptoe dancers.
They jog. They kangaroo-hop,
Like two boys bouncing on a trampoline.
Because of the moon's lesser gravity, they feel light as air.



Armstrong checks the time. They must hurry.
They have just two hours on this strange and beautiful world.
They use long metal tongs to collect rocks.
Some are slippery with dust.
Some sparkle. Some look tan or even purple.
The rocks go into two large boxes that scientists will open back on Earth.

They try to plant the American flag.

But underneath its' surface dust, the moon is like steal.
They jab the pole into the hard crust.
They twist and turn, leaning with all their might.
At last they are able to balance the staff - just barely.
A rod across the top keeps the flag unfurled.
Then *click*. Armstrong takes a picture of Aldrin saluting the flag.
A surprise call comes from the President;
"For a priceless moment, all the people on this earth are truly one."
A tightness rises in the throats of the astronauts.
They feel part of something so much larger than themselves.

Yet soon it is over. They are inside again.
This world is not theirs. Not their own.
Streaks of dirt cover their spacesuits.
The smell of the moondust hits them as they remove their helmets.
"Like spent cap pistols," they tell each other.
They have been awake for eighteen hours straight, but it feels like much more.
Can they sleep now? Maybe.
It is shivery cold in the cramped *Eagle*.
Aldrin curls up on the floor.
Armstrong lies in a hammock stretched across the room.
Exhausted.
He looks up. Above him, there is an unshuttered porthole.
The earth stares down. "A big blue eyeball," he thinks.
He blinks back at the bright blue eye.
Then turns. And tries to sleep.

July 21. Unease. Uncertainty,
This is the part they are most afraid of.
This is the place where things can go terribly wrong.
Armstrong and Aldrin stand quietly in the tiny cockpit.

Liftoff in one minute. Away from here - *maybe*.

The *Eagle* will split into two parts.

The upper half must fly up.

The lower will stay on the moon - a permanent monument.

Will the engine light? Will it keep on burning?

They try to ease their worries - but there is no escape from this.

No backing up. No doing it again. No second try.

They know one thing only; failure means death.

The second hand winds down. Now or never.

Aldrin's voice cuts into the awful stillness.

"Three, two, one.....ascent....."

At first - a frightening pause. What is happening?

The bang! Whoosh! Zoom!

It feels as if the floor is coming up at them.

The *Eagle's* top half rises like a fast- moving elevator.

Its' engine leaves a trail of wide, white light.

The *Eagle* soars skyward, silently, faster and faster:

Fifty miles up. Almost a mile a second!

Aldrin glances sideways. Nods and grins.

Into moon orbit. On our way.



Higher still, Michael Collins peers through his sextant,
Still waiting. *Where are they?*
He scans the sky and sees - only blackness.
The *Columbia* has been circling now for over twenty hours.
From the far side of the moon,
Collins cannot even radio back to the people on Earth.

He squints through the sextant's eyepiece again.
There! A tiny blinking light in the darkness!
He locks his computer on the distant speck, tracking its' approach.
The *Eagle* keeps climbing and climbing. Up and up.
It is like an intricate dance: *Columbia* leads; *Eagle* follows.
All at speeds of over 3,000 miles an hour!

Now they fly in perfect formation. Closer. Closer.
Collins punches hundreds of keystrokes to make the docking work.
They touch. They connect. The capture latches snap shut.
A small door opens into a tunnel.
Look who's here! Welcome!
Armstrong and Aldrin come floating through.....

It is the final orbit around the moon.....

Can a photo capture the wonder of what they've seen? Not likely..

Still, the astronauts hover beside the *Columbia's* windows taking pictures.

The spacecraft accelerates.

It curls around the moon's far edge

It is flung free like the tail-end skater in a game of crack-the-whip.

It soars into the emptiness of space.

The astronauts look back with a sad-happy feeling.

Hours go by. They can rest at last.

They sleep. Read. Talk. Play music.

Sometimes they glimpse the slowly receding moon.

Was it all a dream? No, we were there. We were there!

But mostly their eyes are fixed on another place:

Blue, white, light brown and shining below them.

They want that now. More than anything.

A planet of oceans and rivers. Of grass and green hills.

A world of trees and family and friends.

A place called Earth: fragile, beautiful, home.

