



Final Orbit
By Chris Hadfield

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Many of these people are real. Much of this actually happened.
(Prologue, Chris Hadfield)

Kaz (Kaz Zemeckis, Defense Intelligence Agency agent) is back in this third Apollo Murder book participating in the fictitious version of the real Apollo-Soyuz program in 1975. This program was also called a “handshake in space” between USA and Russia during the cold war.

You sit with Kaz as CAPCOM at the mission control center in Houston, talking to Flight Director Glynn Lunney following how Chris Hadfield’s fictionalized Apollo-Soyuz mission unfolds – not without dramatic complications.

On the Russian side we have the Soyuz – TM 74 mission with A. Leonov and S. Kubassov (real) and Svetlana Gromova (the first Russian woman who walked on the Moon, fictitious) and, the American crew consisting of T. Stafford, D. Slayton and V. Brand (real).

The whole story starts with the historical visit of President Nixon to China in February 1972 and the (partly fictitious entanglement with China) resulting from this trip, which was intended to seek diplomatic relations with PRC under Mao Zedong, ending 23 years of no official diplomatic ties between the two countries.

After successful docking and crew handshaking the so far pretty realistic story veers off in a fictional, technical realistic wild thriller starting with a minor technical flaw.

The developing Soyuz accident while docked to the Apollo portion results in a total loss of pressure and reads like a professional ‘Failure Modes and Criticality Analysis’ (FMECA), demonstrating the deep understanding of the Apollo and Soyuz systems, which can only be provided by an author like Chris Hadfield.

The invented interactions with Skylab would have been technical possible, but are the inventions of the author, however no secret military laser projects were onboard – so the race between the Apollo crew and the first China Taikonaut (fictional, China had no human spaceflight capability in 1975) is pure speculation – however gives the a thrilling impetus and keeps the reader “on edge”.

For the reader’s relief, none of the astronauts nor any mission control personnel got killed during the real Apollo-Soyuz program.

So altogether, the book can be relished by insiders, but transfers also a lot of information to interested readers and transposes the flair of the great hopes in space programs to relax the cold war tensions.

My personal hope would be, that this book was not Chris Hadfield’s last one.