



## **The Apollo Murders**

by Chris Hadfield

Publisher: Quercus (12. Oktober 2021)

Hardcopy, Paper Back, Audio CD

ISBN-10 : 1529406854

ISBN-13 : 978-1529406856

### *Prologue*

*Many of these people are real, much of this actually happened.*

The first sentence by Kazimir (Kaz), the protagonist: “I lost my left eye on a beautiful autumn morning with not a cloud in the sky ... on a test flight over the Chesapeake Bay.” grips you immediately and you are hooked.

It is fun to read the book, because it takes you back to the “good old” days around the high time of manned spaceflight and the competition of political systems. The novel is spinning an alternate story upon reality, a fictitious, purely military Apollo 18 mission to the Moon taking place in April 1973.

The fulminant plot takes you from Naval Airbase at Patuxent via Edwards AFB to Houston, Ellington airfield, Kennedy Space Center and the “Beach House”, inside the MSC and in parallel to Berlin, the Baikonur Cosmodrom, TsUP, Moscow KGB and of course to Washington D.C., CIA and all relevant military and security institutions with a cast of impressive real characters like Nixon, Haldeman, Schlesinger, Kissinger, James Fletcher, the spaceflight celebrities Gene Kranz, Alan Shepard, Chris Kraft and many of Apollo the astronauts, on the Russian side Brezhnev, Andropov, Dobrynin, Nikolajewitsch Tschelomei, Almaz designer and others.

The superb, thoroughly researched plot is about the battle of the political systems for security and technical superiority painted against the real background of the cold war in the 1970's. In the middle of it a Russian “mole” in the US military astronaut cadre which was formed for the actually planned MOL (Manned Orbiting Laboratory 1963-1969) project, later replaced by the Gambit-3 Keyhole program.

With Chris Hadfield's experience as test pilot and astronaut the story is studded with existing locations and institutions and real astronauts: “spaceflight is hard and it demands our best”

I am sure all space aficionados will enjoy the book as I did, because it acts like a time-machine catapulting you back into the 1970's in particular if you have had personal experience with some of the people and all the “space-places”.

You even learn details about programs long forgotten now, the U.S. military Manned Orbiting Laboratory (MOL) and the Russian earth-orbiting observation station Almaz, its optical instruments to be operated by a crew of cosmonauts. It gives you an astonishing, behind the scene look at the “early” days of manned spaceflight being dominated by men, driven by fighter pilots and the military.

As mentioned above spaceflight demands our best because a lot is not known and can go wrong.

Chris' exemplary description of a negligible incident causing big problems is right on the money: “A little droplet from a bad soldering connection in the communications equipment gets shaken loose by the violent vibrations during lift-off, the tiny bit of metal falls out of harm's way held in place by the forces of the launch, but when the third stage shuts off, the spacecraft is suddenly weightless orbiting and the little metal orb now drifting gently up from its resting place becoming a tiny conductive balloon in a playground of circuitry...” . The story paces you through a complete Moon landing cycle studded with quirks, anomalies and other surprises, never becoming boring despite all the technical information.

The genre could be named as “realistic-technical” or “historical-fiction” with all the events could have happened that way. The book is entertaining, educational, political and thrilling, reeling off a suspense movie in the readers head.

Although the title is a little too lurid for my taste, in my opinion the book stands well besides Tom Wolfe's "Right Stuff" or Frank Schaezting's "LIMIT" and of course of Andy Weir's "Martian", but on the other hand the title raises interest of "outsiders".

Great book! Chris underlines his great talent as a writer in addition to his many other talents including as first public singer in the weightless void.

When I started reading the book I was wondering how the author would slip back into the current real-history. He did it very elegantly at the Gulf of Mexico looking up at the stars and to Mars in the nightly sky alluding to the Nasa plans for the Mars Viking lander and the manned space laboratory Skylab which were great successes following the Nasa Apollo program.

In addition Chris drives home the point that without solid and expert "ground support" no successful space mission would be possible, in other words, if we fail on Earth we go nowhere in Space.

Thank you Chris! – More to come?

December 2021, Joachim J. Kehr, Editor SpaceOps News for the Journal of Space Operations & Communicator  
<https://opsjournal.org>