

Hot Moon

Alan Smale

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In the exciting alternate timeline of Alan Smale's *Hot Moon*: the Soviet Union beat the United States to the Moon; the Cold War went hot; the conflict spread to the Moon. This sets the foundation for a gripping tale of space warfare.

In 1979, Ronald Reagan is the president, and the Soviet Moon landing has energized the US's part in the space race. A planned, routine photographic opportunity becomes life-threatening following an unprovoked attack on an Apollo spacecraft. Its mission commander, Vivian, makes a death-defying spacewalk with no life support and no way to guide herself, except for a gas gun. The crew manages to escape to a Moon base, from where they defend themselves against a Soviet siege.

The book alternates between the viewpoints of the Russians and the Americans. There is a cat-and-mouse game of strategy. Vivian is brave and resourceful, and it is easy to get caught up in the suspense when she encounters one challenge after another. One harrowing scene sees Vivian captured and interrogated by Russian space soldiers, too.

The American characters are the best fleshed out, including a commander, Sandoval, who puts up a fierce front, but who secretly is terrified of the lifeless void of the lunar surface. The book's Russian characters are more often stereotyped.

While the story is straightforward, there are twists and turns that keep it interesting. The battles are realistic, reflecting the realities of the environments on the Moon and in space. Illustrations of the Apollo and Soyuz spacecrafts, and of what Moon bases could have looked like, further flesh the book's environments out. An appendix discusses the plausibility of the plot from technical, political, and historical perspectives.

Hot Moon is a provocative science fiction novel set in an alternative but plausible reality. It follows a war in space with original, imaginative flourishes.

MATT BENZING (July / August 2022)

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