

Island of Clouds: The Great 1972 Venus Flyby

Gerald Brennan

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Harnessing the power of imagination, Island of Clouds is a fresh perspective in historical fiction.

An intense character study set in space, *Island of Clouds: The Great 1972 Venus Flyby*, by Gerald Brennan, is a surreal journey through what could have been the world's first deep-space mission.

The latest and first full-length installment in the Altered Space series, *Island of Clouds* focuses on three well-known astronauts charged with leading the world's first interplanetary mission: a year-long endeavor to fly past a planet then largely considered a mystery, Venus. Based on actual blueprints created by the Apollo Applications Program in the early sixties, the mission encounter is only the beginning, setting the stage for a complex character-driven drama that focuses on self-discovery.

Narrated by Buzz Aldrin, both through internal monologue and his brief journal entries, the novel is primarily a dialogue, allowing exposition to happen quickly and naturally. There is never a lull in plot advancement. Brennan's approach allows for a plethora of imparted meanings and a richness of content, giving the text a literary and believable feeling.

Myriad literary devices make for a robust text. Brennan effortlessly brings to life the overwhelming feelings of traveling through space and confronting inner demons. Brennan also gives each astronaut on the mission—Buzz Aldrin, Joe Kerwin, and Alan Shepard—decidedly separate identities that stay true to their real-life legacies. *Island of Clouds* is indeed science fiction, but it is science fiction driven by the internal and interpersonal struggles that each astronaut must confront and overcome.

Brennan's style is expert and crafted, especially his focus on the mysterious, hellish, and hazy Venus. Mirroring both the interpersonal turmoil on the spacecraft and the larger global issues of the time, Venus becomes a harbinger of things to come.

Sections deal directly with the deep-space mission, spliced with place-and-time-jump intermissions that provide context and add to the text's dreamlike quality. Much like during their time in space, characters float from place to place, never truly settling down.

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AMANDA ADAMS (May/June 2017)

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