

The Astronaut's Son

Tom Seigel

Woodhall Press (Sep 18, 2018)

Hardcover \$25.95 (226pp)

978-0-9975437-8-0

In Tom Seigel's *The Astronaut's Son*, Jonathan Stein is the CEO of an emerging private aerospace company. He is close to achieving a lifetime goal of reaching the moon—a task his father left unfulfilled after suffering a fatal heart attack just days before the Apollo 18 launch.

Stein's own launch date approaches with few difficulties, save a presumably genetic heart condition acting up. Stein becomes sidetracked when presented with an earth-shattering conspiracy theory: His father didn't succumb to natural causes; there was a sinister cover-up.

Stein relentlessly seeks to uncover the truth as compelling clues mount, but no clear answers emerge regarding his father's death, the increasingly real conspiracy, or the iconic Neil Armstrong's reason for seclusion.

The Astronaut's Son heavily draws inspiration from NASA's history, to interesting effect. Stein's Jewishness and family legacy within the agency connects to the organization's relationship with the Nazis after the war. The conspiracy begins with rather inflammatory anti-Semitic connotations, but Stein's research unearths some uneasy realizations.

Initially, the quest for answers starts as a way for Stein to connect to his father, especially as his own child's birth approaches. Along the way, Stein's flawed nature crops up; instead of casting him as unsympathetic, he becomes a tragic figure haunted by the past and its continuing impact on the present.

Armstrong's relative absence from the story, despite his importance to it, highlights a blind obsession with celebrity. Armstrong forces himself to hide from a world that only knows him as "the most famous man without a face." In his lifelong attempts at a relationship with Armstrong, Stein confronts a difficult past and a potentially equally troubling future. *The Astronaut's Son* is a compelling literary thriller.

JOHN M. MURRAY (September/October 2018)

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