



Moondust: In Search of the Men Who Fell to Earth

Andrew Smith

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In 1999, Andrew Smith was interviewing Charlie Duke, astronaut and moon walker, for the Sunday Times. During the course of the interview, which took place at Duke's Texan home, the telephone rang and Charlie left the room to answer it. When he returned, some twenty minutes later, he seemed visibly upset. It seemed that he'd just heard that, the previous day, one of his fellow moon walkers, the astronaut Pete Conrad, had died. The more Charlie spoke the more Andrew realised that his grief was something more than the mere fact of losing a friend. 'Now theres only nine of us,' he said. Only nine. Which meant that, one day not long from now, there would be none, and when that day came, no one on earth would have known the giddy thrill of gazing back at us from the surface of the moon. The thought shocked Andrew, and still does. Moondust is his attempt to understand why. The Apollo moon programme has been called the last optimistic act of the 20th Century. Over a strange three year period between 1969 and 1972, twelve men made the longest and most eccentric of all journeys, and all were indelibly marked by it. In Moondust Andrew sets out to interview all the remaining astronauts who walked on the moon, and to find out how their lives were changed for ever by what had happened. 'Where do you go after you've been to the moon?' In addition to this question that would prove hugely troubling to many of the returned astronauts, they also had to deal with the fantasies of faceless millions at their backs, for this was the first truly global media event. The walkers would forever be caught between the gravitational pull of the moon and the earth's collective dreaming.

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