

## Space: The Initiating Frontier - Part 1

Written by Alex Baer

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The final frontier is not about the space outside us, it is about the space within us: The ability to believe in ourselves, to get out of our own way, to get to that sweet point in any project where we step back and say, *Wow -- how did we do that, anyway?*

The first frontiers are down here, on Earth, of course, trying to make sense of any of our lives, trying to find perspective to lend meaning to what can increasingly be seen as randomized, cascading bursts and bubbles of reason and insanity, with reason riding a pendulum that's swung way out of orbit, no idea when it could be back.

\* \* \* \* \*

If you grew up in the sixties, or maybe the early seventies, too -- before it was hot to be jaded or hip to be cynical -- and had even a passing interest in the night sky, knowing what it was you were seeing when you looked up, out in the dark, the NASA nameplate was known to you, its acronym sketched and etched into the back of your mind. It was stored with the rest of the wonders of the world encountered, from Great Pyramids to dinosaurs to cloud lore, and how the seas and Grand Canyon got to do what they did.

Of course, there were disconnected moments of that flickering youth, where duck-and-cover drills were unconnected from space-race fascinations and fare. Instead, it all got wrapped up in the zeitgeist of the time, the elements we could decode, being only so high off the floor, getting our height periodically marked on the door post for family posterity, glued to this new thing, The Tube, watching our futures unfold.

In these new vessels of space were stirred vast dreams and hopes, star-struck hopes explorers must have once breathed and felt, enthusiasms seeping into all their pores. All around us, then, was a sure-handed, unquestioned optimism and unwavering certainty firing, crackling invisibly through our air, our hair, our ears, all our minds.

NASA was a child of the space race. Fears thrust at it from behind, that we would lose the zenith peak status at all, no less to a country we had come to distrust, the USSR. But, NASA was fueled by simple reach, too -- the desire for more knowledge, to see what's out there,

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beyond the edges of our campfire. The booster from behind was the *must-do-and-can-do* stage of that first marvel into space, but our desire to reach provided the energy to stretch, turning an urgent but routine "race against the Russians" chore into untraditional, state-of-the-art, once-in-a-lifetime treats, even for us bumpkin pedestrians looking on.

\* \* \* \* \*

As every child knows, the *Haftas* in life -- the work and errands and chores of this life -- clearly outnumber the *Wannas*, the things we'd rather be doing if we had a chance to cast a vote. It could be the secret in life is to turn as many

*Haftas*

into

*Wannas*

that you can. Somehow, NASA found that path, too, turned all their

*Haftas*

into

*Wannas*

-- and, along the way, they made teeming multitudes of us

*Wanna*

, too, made us

*Wanna*

be on that team, too.

Funny thing, though: *We were not whipped or bullied or threatened to obey.* The stakes seemed obvious, and it was time to get cracking.

*We were not told to shut up and go shopping.*

Instead, we were told the truth as it appeared to be known by our leader, and we heard explanations about why the race into space was important, what it meant for you and me, and what it could and would mean for us all. We were encouraged to go to the moon in less than a decade --

*on your mark, get set, go*

-- and told we should do these things not because they are easy or simple, but, because they are

*difficult*

to do.

In our history, only the building of the Panama Canal or the Manhattan Project had been close to comparable in scope. The gauntlet was aimed and thrown at us by events of the day, but

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guided to land at our feet by a leader unafraid to court the truth and seek out our enthusiastic response to sketches of important dreams. Somehow, with great skill and daring, courting great trials and vexations, facing terrible moments of doubt and deep danger, up we all went, held our breath, all together, and -- *it got done*.

It must have been what weightlessness feels like, the first footfall on the moon, then, hearing yourself breathing again, while standing back, wondering how on Earth it all got done, how it is that even occurred, surveying the television screen, July 20, 1969 -- asking ourselves and each other, *Hey, how'd we do that?*