

# The Man Who Went to the Far Side of the Moon

The Story of Apollo 11 Astronaut Michael Collins

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## Genre

Expository Text can be an account of a historical event. As you read this selection about the historic *Apollo 11* space flight, imagine what it would have been like to have been part of the mission.



Question of the Week

How do the achievements of others influence our dreams?



On July 16, 1969, the United States launched the *Saturn 5* rocket into space. Aboard this spacecraft, the largest rocket ever built, were three men: astronauts Michael Collins, Buzz Aldrin, and Neil Armstrong. Their mission: to be the first to land on the moon. One of these men would not land on the moon, however. That man, Michael Collins, would circle the moon in the command module while Buzz Aldrin and Neil Armstrong landed the **lunar module**, *Eagle*, and explored the moon's surface.

**It is July 20, 1969.** A Sunday. It's four minutes to ten in the morning. It is  $-250^{\circ}\text{F}$  ( $-180^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) in the shade and  $+250^{\circ}\text{F}$  ( $+120^{\circ}\text{C}$ ) in the sun at the Sea of Tranquility, where Neil and Buzz have landed the *Eagle*. They are 242,000 miles (390,000 kilometers) from Launch Pad 39A at Kennedy Space Center in Florida.

In the earliest versions of the checklists, Buzz Aldrin would be the first man to step down onto the moon. But the lunar module **hatch** opens inward to the right, and Buzz, who stood right behind it, had difficulty climbing out. When the astronauts tried to switch places during practice, they damaged the cramped cabin. A few months before the launch, it was decided that Neil should go first. He crawls backward through a tiny hatch near the floor. As he looks toward the **horizon**, he can see that they have landed on a sphere: the horizon is a little bent since the moon is so small. His arms are covered with goosebumps. There is no air. No sound. No life. No footprints.

Wait: now there is one.

Neil Armstrong is the first man on the moon.



When you stand on the moon, you can cover the entire Earth with your hand.

242,000 miles (390,000 kilometers) from home, trapped inside a small vessel, two men are taking snapshots of each other.



Buzz Aldrin's picture of Neil Armstrong



Neil Armstrong's picture of Buzz Aldrin





Neil and Buzz stay on the moon for 21 hours and 36 minutes, but only a little more than 2 hours of that time is spent outside the lunar module. They perform three minor experiments and load two aluminum suitcases with 48 pounds (22 kilograms) of moon dust and rocks.

The three minor experiments:

To measure solar particles

To measure the exact distance to Earth

To measure moonquakes and meteoritic impact

The major experiment:

To land on the moon

When they have climbed back into the lunar module and shut the hatch, they take their helmets off. They look at each other because they both sense a strong smell. Neil thinks it smells like wet ashes. Buzz says it smells like spent gunpowder. It is the moon. The moon has a smell.

OK. WE COPY  
YOU DOWN, EAGLE

Six hundred million people in 47 countries are watching the blurred TV transmission of the lunar landing. There is one person who has no chance of catching Neil and Buzz on TV. He is traveling at a height of 70 miles (110 kilometers) above the far side of the moon. All he can see is darkness and stars outside his window.



In case something unexpected should happen, the astronauts never bounce farther than 200 feet (60 meters) from the landing site.

Michael Collins has 28 hours to go, alone in the capsule. He has trained for so long. He has traveled so far. He is so close now and still he can't land on the moon. They did not choose him.

He was going for 99 percent of the trip and that was good enough for him, he has replied when people have asked. But he knew he didn't have the best seat on *Columbia*.

He thinks to himself that he never really got to know the astronauts who are now on the moon. Neil and Buzz trained together for many months in the lunar module simulator. Michael trained by himself in the capsule.

Once every two hours *Columbia* passes over the landing site. Michael Collins tries to locate the *Eagle*. He can't see it. He only sees crater after crater, cast with sharp shadows from the sun.



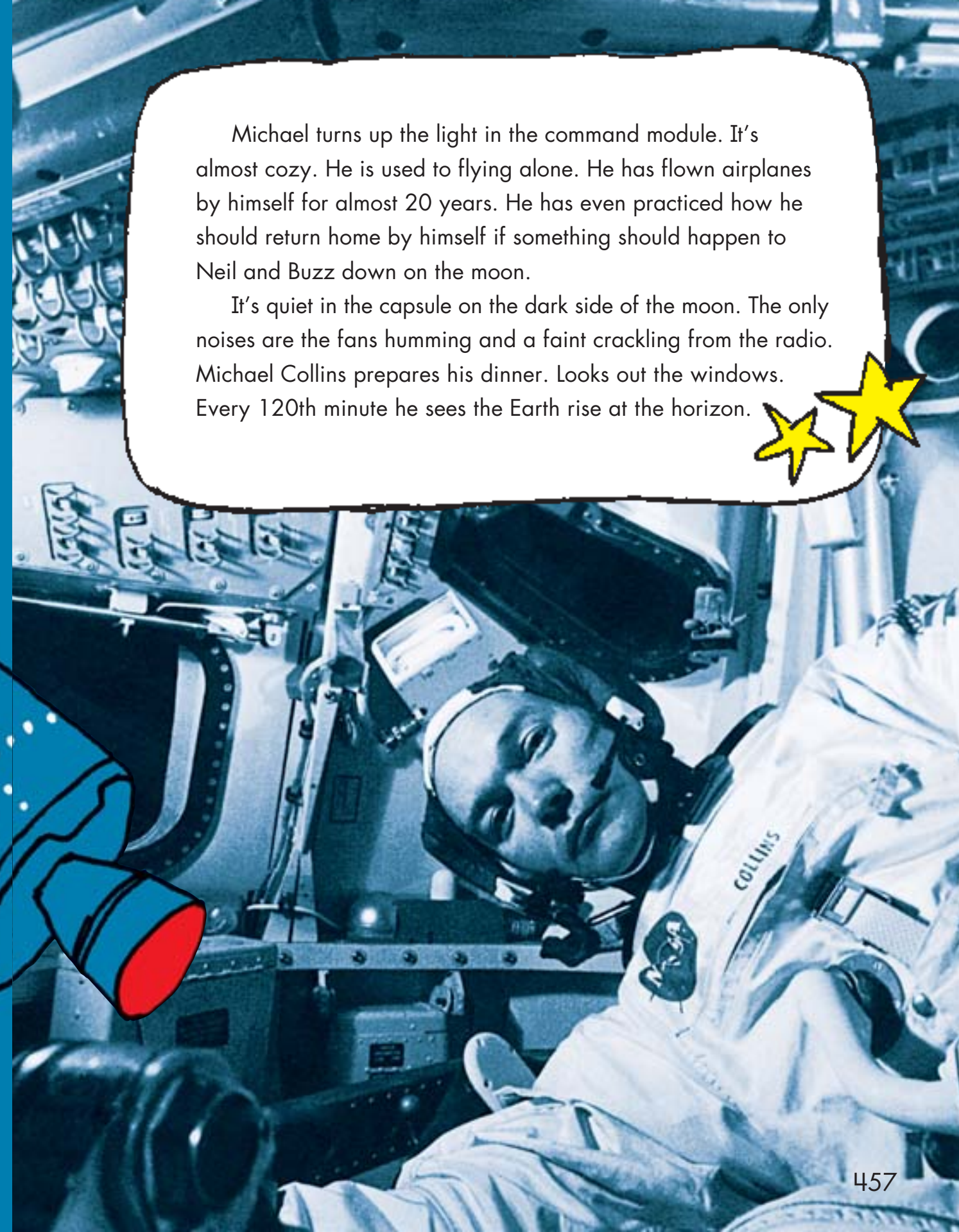
apollo 11, this  
is houston, we're  
three minutes away  
from loss of signal  
over

Every other hour, all radio communication with Earth is lost as the spacecraft skims over the far side of the moon. When Neil and Buzz are on the moon's surface, Michael Collins has to do three people's jobs. He has to make 850 computer commands. He has been taught just *how* to push the buttons—hard, right in the center, and to hold them pushed for a little over a second. They must be pushed in the right order, one after the other: VERB-88-ENTER. VERB-87-ENTER. If he loses track on the far side of the moon, there is no one to ask.



Michael turns up the light in the command module. It's almost cozy. He is used to flying alone. He has flown airplanes by himself for almost 20 years. He has even practiced how he should return home by himself if something should happen to Neil and Buzz down on the moon.

It's quiet in the capsule on the dark side of the moon. The only noises are the fans humming and a faint crackling from the radio. Michael Collins prepares his dinner. Looks out the windows. Every 120th minute he sees the Earth rise at the horizon.





## MICHAEL COLLINS'S FOOD PACK ON THE FOURTH DAY OF THE TRIP

### BREAKFAST:

FROSTED FLAKES  
(FREEZE-DRIED)

4 PEANUT CUBES  
(BITE-SIZED)

COCOA (POWDER)

ORANGE AND  
GRAPEFRUIT DRINK  
(POWDER)

CANADIAN BACON  
AND APPLESAUCE  
(FREEZE-DRIED)

### LUNCH:

SHRIMP COCKTAIL  
(FREEZE-DRIED)

HAM AND POTATOES  
(WET-PACK)

FRUIT COCKTAIL  
(FREEZE-DRIED)

4 DATE FRUITCAKE  
CUBES (BITE-SIZED)

GRAPEFRUIT DRINK  
(POWDER)

### DINNER:

BEEF STEW  
(SPOON-BOWL)

4 COCONUT CUBES  
(BITE-SIZED)

BANANA PUDDING  
(POWDER)

GRAPE PUNCH (POWDER)

ALL THE FOOD IS VACUUM PACKED AND MARKED WITH LABELS, SINCE IT IS DIFFICULT TO TELL WHAT EACH ITEM IS SUPPOSED TO BE. THE TRICKY THING ABOUT EATING IN WEIGHTLESSNESS IS MOVING THE FOOD FROM THE PACKAGE TO THE MOUTH, WITHOUT LETTING IT FLOAT AWAY. THE ASTRONAUTS EAT:

### FREEZE-DRIED AND POWDERED FOOD:

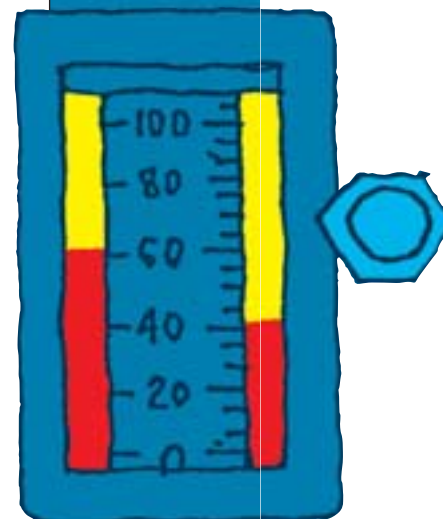
THEY INJECT COLD OR HOT WATER INTO THE PACKAGE WITH A SPECIAL WATER GUN, SQUEEZE THE PACKAGE FOR ABOUT THREE MINUTES, THEN CUT OFF A CORNER AND SQUEEZE THE PASTE INTO THEIR MOUTHS.

### WET-PACKED FOOD:

THEY SUCK THE READY-MIXED WET-PACK FOOD, COLD, STRAIGHT OUT OF THE PACKAGE.

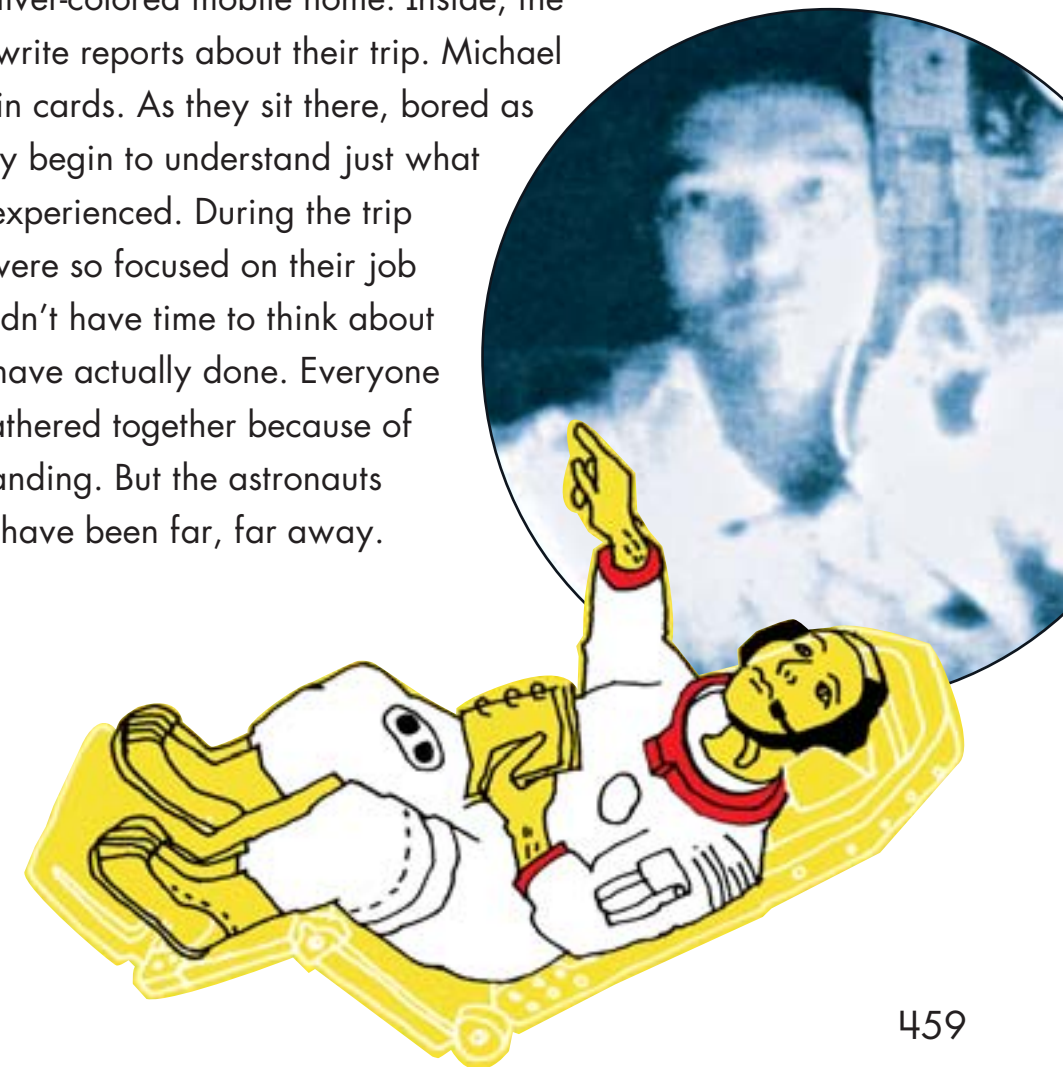
### SPOON-BOWL FOOD:

THEY INJECT COLD OR HOT WATER WITH THE WATER GUN AND SQUEEZE THE PACKAGE A LITTLE BEFORE THEY OPEN THE TOP. SPOON-BOWL FOOD IS EATEN WITH A SPOON. IT IS SO STICKY THAT IT EITHER STAYS IN THE PACKAGE OR CLINGS TO THE SPOON.



It is July 24, 1969. A Thursday. Ever since they left the moon, the astronauts have been eager to get back home. After 8 days, 3 hours, and 18 minutes in *Columbia* without washing, the entire body itches. It is hard to breathe in the spacecraft now. It smells like wet dogs and rotten swamp. Michael Collins has flown *Columbia* during reentry into the Earth's atmosphere. For 14 minutes, the astronauts have been pushed down into their seats. They have weighed seven times their weight on Earth. Now the capsule has splashed down in the ocean near Hawaii.

No one knows if the astronauts have been exposed to dangerous lunar germs that could potentially wipe out the human race. Because of this they are sent straight to a quarantine facility: a silver-colored mobile home. Inside, the astronauts write reports about their trip. Michael beats Neil in cards. As they sit there, bored as can be, they begin to understand just what they have experienced. During the trip itself they were so focused on their job that they didn't have time to think about what they have actually done. Everyone on Earth gathered together because of the moon landing. But the astronauts themselves have been far, far away.





# apollo 11, this is houston do you copy?

As they watch a taped recording of the moon landing, Buzz suddenly turns to Neil and says: "Neil, we missed the whole thing!"

In the past, Michael Collins never really cared about the machines he has flown, but this time it's different. On the second night of quarantine, he climbs back into *Columbia* and takes a seat. Then he leans over and scribbles a message in ballpoint pen on the capsule wall, in the tiniest handwriting imaginable:

*Spacecraft 107—alias Apollo 11—alias Columbia  
The best ship to come down the line  
God bless her  
Michael Collins, CMP*

To find out if the astronauts are carrying deadly germs, mice are let into the quarantine trailer. The mice have grown up in a germ-free laboratory. After 17 days the astronauts are let out. For the first time in a month they breathe fresh air. If the mice had died, Michael Collins, Buzz Aldrin, and Neil Armstrong might still be quarantined.

This picture of *Apollo 16* astronaut Charlie Duke and his family, Dottie, Charles Jr., and Thomas, has been lying in the exact same place on the moon since 1972. ▼



## LEFT ON THE MOON

SINCE *APOLLO 11*, THERE HAVE BEEN FIVE OTHER LUNAR MODULES ON THE MOON. THE LAST ONE LANDED IN 1972. EVERYTHING THE ASTRONAUTS LEFT BEHIND STAYS EXACTLY LIKE IT WAS WHEN IT WAS FIRST PUT THERE. THERE IS NO RUST. THERE IS NO WEAR AND TEAR. IN THE GRAY MOON DUST LIE THE TRACES OF SIX *APOLLO* MISSIONS:

2 GOLF BALLS HIT BY ASTRONAUT ALAN SHEPARD ( <i>APOLLO 14</i> )	6 LUNAR MODULES	A SCULPTURE OF A FALLEN ASTRONAUT, IN MEMORY OF ALL THOSE WHO HAVE DIED IN THE EFFORTS TO REACH THE MOON
	3 MOON BUGGIES (FROM <i>APOLLO 15, 16, AND 17</i> )	
TO SAVE ON WEIGHT, THE ASTRONAUTS LEFT EVERYTHING THEY DIDN'T NEED BEFORE TAKING OFF IN THE LUNAR MODULE:	MEMENTOS AND HONORARY OBJECTS:	ONE RED BIBLE
SCIENTIFIC EXPERIMENTS	PLAQUES	6 AMERICAN FLAGS
TV CAMERAS AND CABLES	MEDALLIONS	UNVERIFIED:  LAS BRISAS HOTEL IN ACAPULCO, MEXICO, INSISTS THAT THE <i>APOLLO 11</i> ASTRONAUTS PLACED A PINK FLAG FROM THE HOTEL ON THE MOON IN GRATITUDE FOR THEIR COMPLIMENTARY STAY.
HASSELBLAD CAMERAS	ASTRONAUT BADGES	
EMPTY FOOD PACKAGES	CRUCIFIXES	
PARTS OF THE SPACESUITS: BACKPACK, BOOTS	A GOLD OLIVE BRANCH	
	A COMPUTER DISC THE SIZE OF A SILVER DOLLAR WITH PEACEFUL GREETINGS FROM PRESIDENTS AND PRIME MINISTERS OF 73 COUNTRIES	

OVER FOUR HUNDRED SIXTY THOUSAND PEOPLE WORKED ON THE *APOLLO* PROJECT. THEY GOT 12 ASTRONAUTS TO THE MOON. ALTOGETHER, THE *APOLLO* ASTRONAUTS BROUGHT 840 POUNDS (380 KILOGRAMS) OF MOON MATERIAL BACK TO EARTH. ON THE MOON THERE ARE FOOTPRINTS FROM 12 PEOPLE, TRACES THAT WILL NEVER BE SWEEPED AWAY BY ANY WIND.



T STARS



When Michael Collins returned from the moon, he made a decision to never travel again. He wanted to spend the rest of his life fishing, bringing up his children, taking care of his dogs, and sitting on the porch with his wife.

Sometimes, when he's talking to other people, the thought strikes him: *I have been to places and done things that no one can ever imagine. I will never be able to explain what it was like. I carry it inside, like a treasure.*

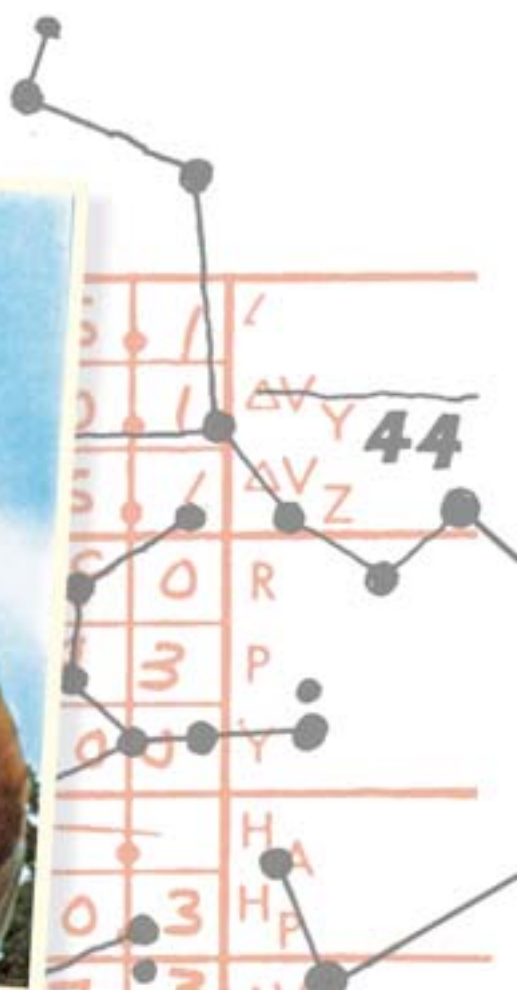
At night, Michael Collins tends to the roses in his garden at the back of his house. The soil smells good. The wind feels warm and humid against his face. He looks up at the yellow disk in the sky and thinks to himself: *I have been there. It was beautiful, but compared to Earth it was nothing.*

He never wants to go back to the moon.

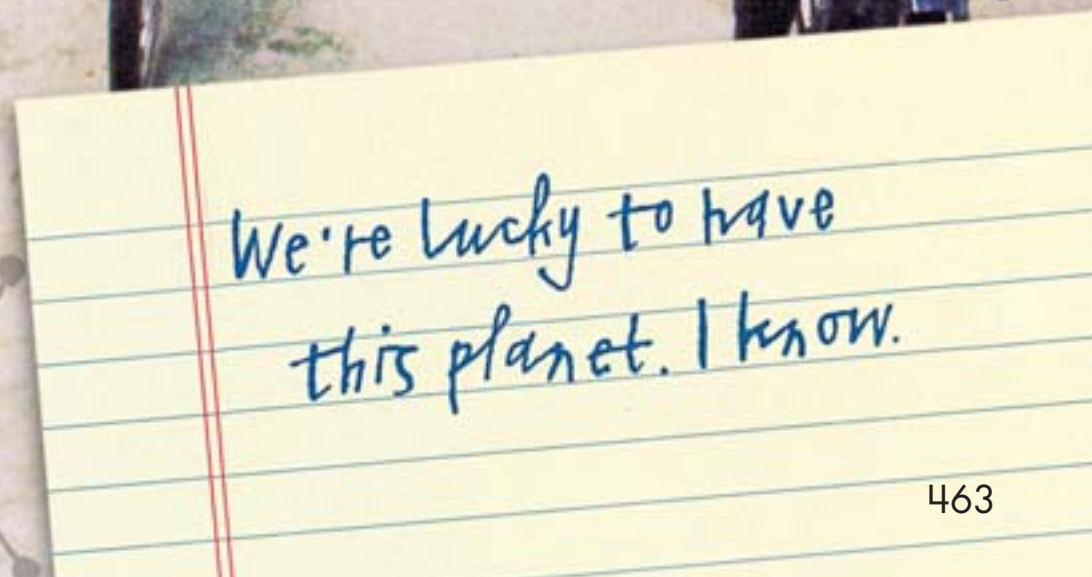
URSA

UNDO

Veget



URSA MAJOR



We're lucky to have this planet. I know.