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[Beyond the Saga of Rocket Science: In Space to Stay](#)

by Walter Sierra

Xlibris

book review by Peter M. Fitzpatrick

"The International Space Station (ISS)—the most costly and complex project ever undertaken in human history—was 60 years in the making."

This is the third in a four-volume series penned by a man who has spent four decades in the aerospace and defense industries. This volume first explores the Apollo program, created largely in response to the Soviet's success in launching first the Sputnik satellite in 1957, followed by Yuri Gagarin's first successful orbiting of the earth in the Vostok 1 in 1961. President Kennedy helped give focus to the American response, and the 17 Apollo missions were the result. The first six were unmanned test flights, except for Apollo 1, where three astronauts died in a module fire. There was a total of eleven manned flights, with a successful moon landing in July of 1969. Watergate and public ennui regarding space exploration cut funding until 1981. Then the first space shuttle, *Columbia*, was launched. The author covers both the *Challenger* and *Columbia* disasters and has decided that the shuttle was never truly operational but only experimental like the X-wing series of jets. Thirdly, the author describes the slow evolution of the ISS. The final section, "Ασκληπιού," discusses the X-wings, the Mars expeditions, and other experimental spacecraft.

The author does a good job of simplifying complex calculus-derived orbital mechanics into simple concepts. He often does this by placing more technical data inside blue "boxes" interspersed throughout. There is a broad understanding of society's role in space exploration, with funding always being the central issue. But Sierra candidly reveals how the American military-industrial complex has been so completely interwoven with our space program, and how reams of huge multinational company proposals and contractor bidding have kept the cost extremely high. In addition, the author expertly addresses thought-provoking topics such as whether rocket engines are a thing of the past as well as possible futures in space exploration.

RECOMMENDED by the US Review



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