

ARE YOU SURE WE WENT TO THE MOON 25 YEARS AGO? *Are you positive? Millions of Americans believe the moon landings may have been a US\$25 billion swindle, perpetrated by NASA with the latest in communications technology and the best in special effects. WIRED plunges into the combat zone between heated conspiracy believers and exasperated NASA officials.*

**“Columbia, he has landed Tranquility Base. Eagle is at Tranquility. I read you five by. Over.”** The voice from Houston betrayed no emotion, although this was anything but business as usual. A human being was about to set foot on the moon for the first time in history, armed only with the Stars and Stripes, some scientific instruments, and an almost reckless, can-do demeanor that had captivated the world.

The reply from Columbia, the command-and-service module that had released the lunar lander 2 hours and 33 minutes earlier, betrayed only equal professional cool. “Yes, I heard the whole thing,” Michael Collins said matter-of-factly.

**Houston: “Well, it’s a good show.”**

Columbia: “Fantastic.”

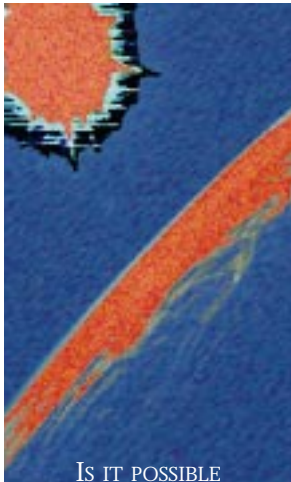
**T**hat’s when Neil Armstrong chimed in. “Yeah, I’ll second that,” said the 38-year-old astronaut, the moonwalker-to-be, America’s own Boy Scout, and the most famous man in the - well, in the universe. And even though the static ate away at the clarity of his consonants, Armstrong’s sneering tone came through loud and clear. The mission control man heard it too. And he knew what was coming. Sort of.

B y R o g i e r v a n B a k e l

# The Wrong Stuff



VIDEO TECHNOLOGY must pose a subject against a blue or neutral background. This presents production challenges.



IS IT POSSIBLE for an entire suite of astronomical data to be faked?

"A fantastic show," Armstrong said. "The greatest show on earth, huh, guys?" There was a moment's silence. Then a cameraman sniggered. And the director sighed, and did what directors do when actors screw up their lines. "Cut," he groaned. He was a heavysset man in his 50s, and the combination of the long hours and the hot studio lights had started to get to him.

"Shit, Armstrong, if you're gonna be a smart-ass, do it on your own time, all right? We got 25 tired people on this set. We got a billion people who are going to be watching your every move only a week from now. We're on deadline here. Now, do you suppose you could just stick to the script and get it over with? Thank you."

His assistant stepped forward with the slate. "Apollo moon landing, scene 769/A22, take three," she announced.

"Action!"

"Columbia, he has landed Tranquility Base," the mission control man began again.

### Superfraud

The history books lie. So do the encyclopedias and the commemorative videos and the 25-year-old coffee mugs with the proudly smiling faces of Neil Armstrong, Edwin Aldrin, and Michael Collins. When Armstrong got down from that ladder, proclaiming that it was only a small step for him but a giant leap for mankind, he was merely setting foot on a dust-covered sound stage in a top-secret TV studio in the Nevada desert. NASA's cold warriors and spin doctors faked the whole moon landing. Come to think of it, they faked all six moon landings - spending around US\$25 billion to prove to the world that not even the Soviets, especially not the Soviets, could hold a candle to the US when it came to space exploration.

Well, at least, that's the view of writer Bill Kaysing. He seems to have never heard a conspiracy theory he didn't like, and this one tops 'em all. "NASA couldn't make it to the moon, and they knew it," asserts Kaysing, who, after

begging out of the "corporate rat race," became a freelance author of books and newsletters. "In the late '50s, when I was at Rocketdyne, they did a feasibility study on astronauts landing on the moon. They found that the chance of success was something like .0017 percent. In other words, it was hopeless."

President John F. Kennedy wasn't convinced at all that the endeavor was next to impossible. In fact, he had publicly announced in May 1961 that "landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to earth" would be a Number One priority for the US, an accomplishment that was to instill pride in Americans and awe in the rest of the world.

To hear Kaysing tell it, NASA had good reason to stage moon landing after moon landing, instead of simply admitting that lunar strolls would have to remain the stuff of science fiction novels, at least for a while. "They - both NASA and Rocketdyne - wanted the money to keep pouring in. I've worked in aerospace long enough to know that's their goal."

### Absent Stars

There is an almost instinctive rejoinder to all of this: but we saw it. If television ever had a killer app, the moon landing was it. We bought new sets in droves, flicked them on as zero hour approached, and, miraculously, felt ourselves being locked into an intangible but very real oneness with a billion other people. It was our first taste of a virtual community, of cultures docking. It felt good. And now there's this guy telling us that it was all a lie? C'mon! His rockets are a little loose. What proof does he have anyway?

Kaysing points out numerous anomalies in NASA publications, as well as in the TV and still pictures that came from the moon. For example, there are no stars in many of the photographs taken on the lunar surface. With no atmosphere to diffuse their light, wouldn't stars have to be clearly visible? And why is there no crater beneath the lunar lander, despite the jet of its 10,000-pound-thrust hypergolic engine? How do NASA's experts explain pictures of

moon landing, scene 769/A22, take three," she announced.

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astronauts on the moon in which the astronauts' sides and backs are just as well lit as the fronts of their spacesuits - which is inconsistent with the deep, black shadows the harsh sunlight should be casting? And why is there a line between a sharp foreground and a blurry background in some of the pictures, almost as if special-effects makers had used a so-called "matte painting" to simulate the farther reaches of the moonscape? "It all points to an unprecedented swindle," Kaysing concludes confidently.

**But just how could NASA possibly have**

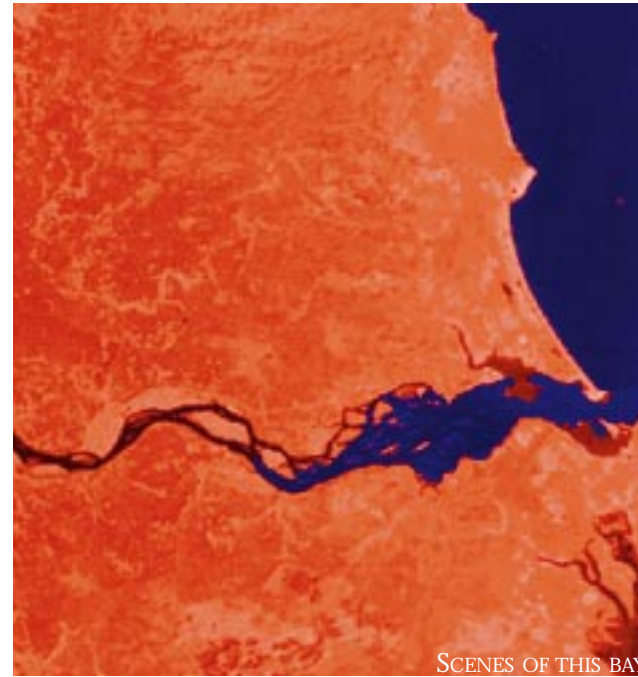
pulled it off? How about the TV pictures that billions of people saw over the course of six successful missions: the rocket lifting off from the Cape Kennedy launch pad under the watchful eye of hundreds of thousands of spectators; the capsule with the crew returning to earth; the moon rocks; the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of space-program employees in the know who would have to be relied upon to take the incredible secret to their graves?

**Easy, says Kaysing. The rockets took off all right, with the astronauts on board, but as soon as they were out of sight, the roaring spacecraft**

set course for the south polar sea, jettisoned its crew, and crashed. Later, the crew and the command module were put in a military plane and dropped in the Pacific for "recovery" by an aircraft carrier. (Kaysing claims that he talked with an airline pilot who, en route from San Francisco to Tokyo, saw the Apollo 15 command module sliding out of an unidentified cargo plane, but he can't provide the captain's name or the name of the airline.) The moon rocks were made in a NASA geology lab, right here on earth, he continues. Not very many people on the Apollo project knew about the hoax, as they were only informed on a need-to-know basis. Cash bonuses, promotions, or veiled threats could have ensured the silence of those who were in on the whole scheme.

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*Anagram enthusiasts will find that Rogier van Bakel (rogiernl@aol.com) has Brave Ink Galore. He is a Dutch correspondent in Washington, D.C.*



SCENES OF THIS BAY in Saskatchewan are of the type seen in capsule recovery, not the Gulf of Mexico.



HOW IS IT POSSIBLE for the body of photographic evidence to stand without contradiction or expert analysis?