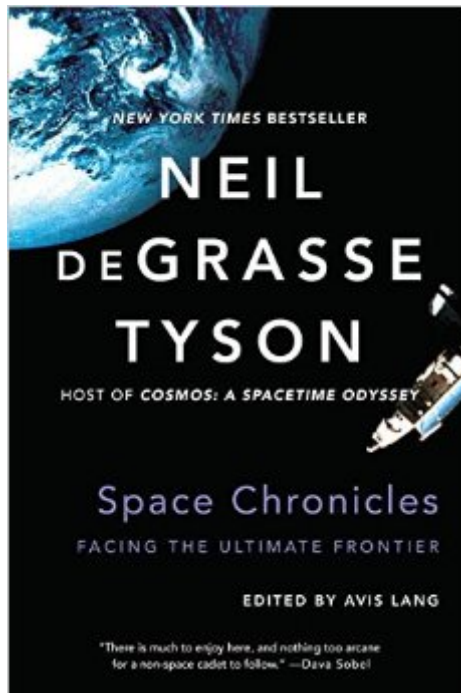


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# Space Chronicles: Facing The Ultimate Frontier



## Synopsis

“A compelling appeal, at just the right time, for continuing to look up.” —Air & Space America™s space program is at a turning point. After decades of global primacy, NASA has ended the space-shuttle program, cutting off its access to space. No astronauts will be launched in an American craft, from American soil, until the 2020s, and NASA may soon find itself eclipsed by other countries’™ space programs. With his signature wit and thought-provoking insights, Neil deGrasse Tyson—one of our foremost thinkers on all things space—illuminates the past, present, and future of space exploration and brilliantly reminds us why NASA matters now as much as ever. As Tyson reveals, exploring the space frontier can profoundly enrich many aspects of our daily lives, from education systems and the economy to national security and morale. For America to maintain its status as a global leader and a technological innovator, he explains, we must regain our enthusiasm and curiosity about what lies beyond our world. Provocative, humorous, and wonderfully readable, *Space Chronicles* represents the best of Tyson’s™ recent commentary, including a must-read prologue on NASA and partisan politics. Reflecting on topics that range from scientific literacy to space-travel missteps, Tyson gives us an urgent, clear-eyed, and ultimately inspiring vision for the future.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

On October 4, 1957, the first artificial satellite, Sputnik 1, was launched into orbit. This technological first marked the beginning of a new era of competition between the former Soviet Union and the

United States. While on the surface the Space Race might have appeared to be spurred on by man's desire for knowledge and exploration, in truth, the only thing that made man's footprints on the Moon possible was the looming Cold War and aspiration to assert technological dominance over each other. Adjusted for inflation, the Apollo program today would cost over 200 billion dollars, twenty times the yearly budget of NASA. It is unlikely any of us alive today will ever see man step foot on the Moon or another planetary surface, or see the equivalent of what millions of people witnessed on July 20, 1969 when Apollo 11 landed on the Moon. The overwhelming costs, technological hurdles, and political backdrop are what make the Space Race such a fascinating subject, and it would be hard to find someone who is so passionate about it or conveys these ideas better than astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson. Like his last novel *Death by Black Hole: And Other Cosmic Quandaries*, *Space Chronicles* is a compilation of previously-published articles and talks over the last fifteen years, with a central theme of the Space Race and exploration (although some of the chapters don't really fit this theme entirely). It is mostly centered on the United States' involvement with a look at the development of NASA. It contains an original prologue by Dr. Tyson with a discussion on Space Politics, with a focus on the last three presidential administrations. A selection of Dr. Tyson's tweets (which are usually interesting facts about the Universe) are scattered in relevant sections throughout the book, and add short distractions to the current chapter. The rest of the book is divided into three sections: Part 1 - Why - Articles detailing with the reasons humans desire to explore space; Part 2 - How - Articles concerned with how we have overcome the barriers to space entry; Part 3 - Why Not - These chapters are mostly ideological articles and speeches about why we should explore space. The last third of the book contain Appendices related to NASA and space travel. I think they're a nice addition to *Space Chronicles*, although I'm pretty sure they were added as filler, since without them, the actual content of the book is only 220 pages. All of them are easily found online but they make a nice reference while reading and I frequently found myself going back to them. They consist of: National Aeronautics and Space Act of 1958 (the law that created NASA); NASA's budget from 1959-2010; 2010 Space Budgets for the United States and Globally; Space Budgets: US and Non US: 2010. Anyone who has enjoyed Dr. Tyson's previous books will enjoy *Space Chronicles*. Since it doesn't deal with as much cosmology, it is a bit easier read than his last book, *Death by Black Hole: And Other Cosmic Quandaries*. I also found it more persuasive. Space exploration is a subject Dr. Tyson excels at. For anyone who has ever heard him give a speech on the subject, he offers up very convincing reasons for the necessity of a space program, many which will resonate long after finishing the book. A great example of this is the final chapter in the book, which is a speech given at the University of Buffalo that I originally saw two

years ago, and still has a powerful impact on me today. Unlike *Death by Black Hole*, which seemed to be a bit thrown together and thematically forced, the articles that make up *Space Chronicles* flow much easier into each other and under their relevant chapters, although you will notice some repetition throughout them. The speeches that make up some of the chapters are also well-adapted, although I strongly encourage anyone who enjoys them to go back and watch the original videos, or actually, to just skip those chapters and watch the videos instead (especially the last chapter). The main reason Dr. Tyson is so successful as a media figure is due to his ability to convey subject matter to his audience, and he does this best in person, where his passion and oration can really stand out. Almost all of the material from this book is already available publicly online. The only original material I noticed was the prologue and a poem (*Ode to Challenger*, 1986). Although it's been published before, I think the editor has done an excellent job in culling through Tyson's large body of work to pick the best material, and arranged it in a way that makes for an intriguing (albeit very short) read. Some of the chapters are as short as one paragraph, others are a dozen pages or so. Tyson's most ardent fans might find the material a bit too familiar, but as a whole, *Space Chronicles* presents itself as a nicely-wrapped look at the last fifty years of space travel, and what's in store for the future. All of the material works well in the book, but all of the chapters adapted from speeches are much better when viewed in their original video presentation. Other than the length of the book, the only real criticism I could give it is that it doesn't source the original material. A few of the chapters do this and actually state at the top that they are from videos, but most of them don't. I can't figure out any rhyme or reason to including this information on some but not others, which would seem simple enough to do (I was able to find almost all of it in about an hour). If you are interested in reading some of the articles or videos from the book, I will provide links to all of those that I've been able to find that are in the public domain, as well as book previews from the publisher and Google Books in the review comments below.

*Space Chronicles: Facing The Ultimate Frontier* by Neil deGrasse Tyson "Space Chronicles" is the inspirational plea of why NASA matters to America and what space exploration means to our species. Renowned astrophysicist, Neil deGrasse Tyson dissects the politics of space and also enlightens the reader of the sense of awe that comes from space exploration and discovery. This book selections represent commentary, interviews, thought-provoking quotes reflecting a spectrum of fascinating topics from one of our icons of science. I share the love and awe of science that radiates from Mr. Tyson; this book arouses such emotions in witty, lucid fashion while stressing the importance of America retaining its global leadership in space. This 384-page book is composed of

thirty-six chapters and broken it in three Parts: Part I. Why, Part II. How, and Part III. Why Not. The first part of the book (Why) has to do with why we want to explore space. It appeals to emotions and wonder and the politics involved. The second part of the book (How), is of more practical science. The last third of the book (Why Not) wraps everything together and is the most passionate.

Positives:

1. A passionate, engaging prose that reflects the love of science of Dr. Tyson.
2. Fascinating topic in the hands of an icon of astrophysics.
3. Witty and humorous tone.
4. Profound without being unintelligible. An accessible book for the masses.
5. The politics involved. The author stresses the need to eliminate partisan politics.
6. Sixty-seven space tweets interspersed throughout the book. A clever way of injecting topical space wisdom.
7. The allure of space evidenced by the most popular museum of the world, the National Air and Space Museum in Washington, D.C.
8. Dr. Tyson is a thinker and educator and uses his prodigious knowledge and skill to enlighten the masses like few scientists can. He makes use of popular science and movies to convey concepts: The Movie Contact to illustrate how radio waves attempt to make "contact".
9. The author's view on fascinating topics like extraterrestrial life and some really interesting views from Stephen Hawking.
10. The reality of killer asteroids and the justification to pursue space. Chart that illustrates impact on Earth.
11. Is China the new Sputnik? And are we losing our scientific edge? Find out...
12. NASA and Dr. Tyson share a birthday. Diverging paths that ultimately converged. Some insights into the interesting life of Mr. Tyson and kudos.
13. The history of NASA, the great Apollo era and the next fifty years in space.
14. Tidbits of knowledge throughout the book! Love that...there is so much that the universe wants to tell us that doesn't reach Earth's surface. I will not spoil it...
15. The three drivers to justify spending large quantities of state wealth. Find out...a recurring theme. Find out what really drove America to space travel.
16. Find out why the Super Collider budget was canceled.
17. A brief but fascinating account of space discovery. Find out the most important single discovery in astrophysics.
18. The turning point in human understanding of our place in the cosmos.
19. The future of discovery.
20. The greatest achievement of flight is...
21. The great Isaac Newton.
22. The solution to the many-body problem of the solar system.
23. The understanding of the achievements of the Soviets. Many firsts...
24. Facts and fictions of space travel. The greatest challenge to human exploration besides money is...
25. Astronauts...the super models of space travel.
26. The many new technologies that resulted from space travel. An interesting list...
27. The Hubble Space Telescope...the most productive scientific instrument of all kind. The discoveries associated with it.
28. Apollo 11 and the great late Walter Cronkite.
29. Dr. Tyson's absolute admiration for the Saturn V design that launched Apollo astronauts.
30. Very interesting look at the future of propulsion for deep space. Topics include the use of the sun (solar

sails) and the difficulty with an anti-matter drive.<sup>31</sup> The points of Lagrange.<sup>32</sup> Star Trek lovers rejoice...Mr. Tyson adds a couple of interesting tidbits.<sup>33</sup> The future of US space travel and the challenges. Money is a recurring theme...the actual cost of NASA.<sup>34</sup> Wisdom, "A review of history's most ambitious projects demonstrates that only defense, the lure of economic return, and the praise of power can garner large fractions of a nation's gross domestic product".<sup>35</sup> One of my favorite chapters, "America and the Emergent Space Powers".<sup>36</sup> One of my favorite quotes, "the greatest conflicts in the world are not between religion and science; they're between religion and religion".<sup>37</sup> How some religious forces have quenched scientific endeavors. Great stuff.<sup>38</sup> The delusions of space enthusiasts.<sup>39</sup> Witty and humorous...projectile dysfunction. Let me leave it at that.<sup>40</sup> By using numbers, Dr. Tyson really puts in perspective how tiny we are...mesmerizing. "More bacteria live and work in one centimeter of my colon than the number of people who have ever existed in the world".<sup>41</sup> Pioneer anomaly...case and point, why science is awesome and the quest to know drives us.<sup>42</sup> The best justification for why we need to spend money on space travel.<sup>43</sup> Practical appendices and charts.

Negatives:

1. The book tends to be repetitive. A lot of the stories and interviews overlap so some concepts and thoughts are repeated.
2. It is not an in depth look at the science of astrophysics. It is more about educating the public of why it's important to fund NASA appropriately. So those looking for an in depth look at the science of astrophysics will surely be disappointed.
3. This book is a plea to fund NASA. Politics is involved but the author treats the topic with utmost respect and care. He is clearly appreciated and respected by both parties as evidenced by being appointed by both parties to important position. That being said, he does make it clear that he is left of liberal.
4. No bibliography or extended notes of references. I would have been interested in reading some recommendations.
5. No colorful illustrations of space, so this is not a coffee-table book.
6. Having to wait for the author's next book and/or Cosmos series!

In summary, I loved this book. It spoke to my love and passion for knowledge and the value to our culture of new voyages. No one makes a better case for the need of space exploration and the drive of discovery than Dr. Neil deGrasse Tyson. Space travel is not just an emotional frontier, it is the frontier of all sciences. That being said, some readers may be disappointed that the book focuses more on the the emotional appeal to fund NASA than the hardcore science. That aside, if you want to rekindle your love for space exploration and discovery by all means read this highly recommended book!

Further recommendations: "Death by Black Hole: And Other Cosmic Quandaries" by the same author, "The Quantum Universe: (And Why Anything That Can Happen, Does)" by Brian Cox, "About Time: Cosmology and Culture at the Twilight of the Big Bang" by Adam Frank, "International Space Station: A Brief History (Enhanced Version)" by Vook, "Death from the Skies!: These Are the Ways

the World Will End . . ." and "Bad Astronomy: Misconceptions and Misuses Revealed, from Astrology to the Moon Landing "Hoax"" by Philip Plait, "TheÂ The Grand Design" by Stephen Hawking, "A Universe from Nothing: Why There Is Something Rather than Nothing" by Lawrence Krauss, "The Fabric of the Cosmos: Space, Time, and the Texture of Reality" by Brian Greene, and "A More Perfect Heaven: How Copernicus Revolutionized the Cosmos" by Dava Sobel.

First, let me say that there are few supporters of Dr. Tyson and his work who are more enthusiastic than I. I esteem him as probably the most important public educator in the United States. He is impossible to dislike, and his acumen for his chosen profession is dazzling. That is why I have to give this book a poor review. It does transparent disservice to Dr. Tyson's glittering legacy. It is hopelessly disjointed, with no discoverable rationale behind its organization. "Tweets," interviews, lectures, and previously published articles are cobbled together higgledy-piggledy in what bears disheartening resemblance to something rushed to press for the sole purpose of drumming up desperately-needed revenue. I do not begrudge Tyson for avoiding an overly-nuanced exploration of astrophysics' bleeding edge; I just feel that the facts in this book could be condensed, and condensed more (much, MUCH more) elegantly. My passion for Dr. Tyson and his work is in no way dimmed, and I have no trouble accepting that even the most brilliant minds can encounter difficulty when navigating the course of transferring information from the realm of the highly technical to that of the popularly appealing. Indeed, Tyson's prose is more often engaging than not--he just needs a better editor who will help us avoid having to roll our eyes at a factoid that was compelling in chapter 1, but is just downright annoying when it is announced to us (for the 10th or 12th time) in chapter 30 as though hot off the presses. I await Tyson's next effort. In the meantime, however, I cannot endorse this effort in any capacity.

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