



Mike Collins in *In the Shadow of the Moon*

Air Tight

A gleaming documentary of the men in the moon

IN THE SHADOW OF THE MOON: Directed by David Sington. Cinematography, Clive North. Music, Philip Sheppard. Starring Jim Lovell (Apollo 8 & 13), Edgar Mitchell (14), Mike Collins (11), Gene Cernan (10 & 17), Alan Bean (12), Dave Scott (9 & 15), Buzz Aldrin (11), Harrison Schmitt (17), Dave Scott (9 & 15), John Young (10 & 16) and Charlie Duke (16). ThinkFilm, 2007. PG. 100 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

There is a moment of uncommon beauty in *In the Shadow of the Moon*, which is saying something, since the film is uncommonly beautiful to watch. High above the Earth, the Apollo 11 command module disengages, leaving behind the depleted rocket that delivered it into space. The orphaned rocket has a camera within it. From this sinking-ship perspective — the interior of a discarded rocket, its round opening an immense portal — we watch the thrusting module disappear into the void. A few uncertain seconds pass. Then, gently, the booster rolls away. Sunlight rotates counterclockwise around the cylinder until, arcing away from the sun, the interior darkens as if eclipsed, only to reveal for a few brief moments the blue horizon of the Earth. It's a scene of incomprehensible splendor, a moment of great stillness whose greatness resides in its refusal to cut away when you think it should.

Naturally, there are technical aspects to *In the Shadow of the Moon*. They tend to involve maneuvers with names like "secondary burn" and "translunar injection." But what gives this documentary its power is the vantage it provides, the sense of being not only at or near history but within or inside it. The Apollo 11 launch is one example: You've seen the footage of the rocket lifting off, the thick, liquid fire of its propellant like an upside-down volcano, but you've never, ever seen it from this close. In fact, watching *In the Shadow of the Moon*, you get the impression that during Apollo missions every strut, every panel, every shoelace had a camera. The amount and variety of the footage is astounding, as is the intelligence with which it was edited. The pace is relaxed and yet incredibly taut. From the in-space home movies and archival footage to the same stirring Vietnam footage that opens

Rescue Dawn, *In the Shadow of the Moon* is a definitive account of the only men ever to visit another world.

The footage — as sublime as it is — can't tell the entire story. To understand what the Apollo missions *felt* like, you need the astronauts themselves. Interviewed for the film, the men still bristle; they're so vital, you want to see them up and walking around. You want to see them playing football, and you know some of them (even at 80 years old) still could. They crackle with personality, with honest opinions. They recall everything, the nicknames, private memories and tiny details (Apollo 11 had hot running water), but above all they remember the overwhelming uncertainty of what President Kennedy called "the most hazardous, and dangerous, and greatest adventure upon which man has ever embarked." Or, in the words of astronaut Mike Collins, it was simply a "fragile daisy chain" of linked procedures, each necessary and vital to their survival. None were more fragile than the crew of Apollo 1, burned alive in a launchpad fire inside their capsule. Listen to the quiver in the newsman's voice as he reports the tragic loss.

In the Shadow of the Moon has a soaring, glorious score that's so emotional it's almost sentimental. The music is big, unabashedly big, but big-hearted might be a better description. I found it deeply moving. Unfortunately, toward the end, *Shadow* tries too hard to stir your spirit. I felt my emotions getting paddled around. The astronauts, wizened ambassadors for an extra-global perspective, share a spiritual and environmental message. You sense their confidence in themselves but not their role as messengers. It doesn't spoil the near-perfection that precedes it, but the film falters a little as tries to stand too tall.

Still, *In the Shadow of the Moon* is one of the best documentaries this year. Fittingly, it serves as a time capsule, a reminder of an era when Americans gave hope to the citizens of the world. How far away it seems. After all this time, nothing like it is on the horizon. **EW**

In the Shadow of the Moon opens Friday, Oct. 12, at the Bijou.

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