

## First Man

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**First Man** reunites Damien Chazelle and Ryan Gosling, director and star of the Oscar-winning *La La Land*. It is based on Armstrong's official biography and focuses on the decade leading up to the historic Moon Landing in July 1969.



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**He is one of the most famous people of modern times. Although his name and his short quote are world famous, few people could recognise him on a photo. Neil Armstrong was the first man to walk on the Moon, but didn't feel that made him anything special.**

On July 20, 1969, Neil Armstrong piloted the lunar module that landed on the Moon. The module also contained his fellow astronaut Buzz Aldrin. But it was Armstrong who was the first human to step onto the Moon. Normally a quiet man, he had prepared a sentence for the approximately 530 million people listening live on Earth: "That's one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind."

Armstrong didn't like to show off in the media. He left NASA in 1971, and very rarely gave interviews about his time as an astronaut. It wasn't until 2002 that he finally accepted to meet with science writer James R. Hansen, who wanted to write Armstrong's life story.

That biography, *First Man*, came out in 2005 and has now been adapted into film. Armstrong died in 2012

**Help**  
**fellow** (adj) here, another astronaut, a colleague  
**leap** (n) bound  
**cameo role** (exp) small role in a film, usually by someone famous



but his family have been closely involved with the film. One of his sons even has a cameo role in the movie.

## The Stuff of Heroes

Armstrong was born in Ohio in 1930. It was the home state of aviation pioneers the Wright brothers. Young Neil was fascinated by flying and took his first short flight, accompanied by his father, at the tender age of six. He worked odd jobs during high school to pay for

flying lessons and got his pilot's license at 16, before his driver's license.

He went on to study aeronautical engineering but his university was paid for by a Navy scholarship and in 1949 he had to interrupt his studies to serve as a Navy pilot for two years during the Korean War.

Once he finished his degree he went to work for NACA, a predecessor of NASA, as an engineer and test pilot. It was an incredibly dangerous job. Armstrong had many close calls and lost several friends and colleagues. He was one of the pilots of the X-15 jet, which could attain 4000 miles (6400 km) per hour.

Armstrong was one of the second group of pilots chosen for astronaut training by NASA in 1962. If being a test pilot for planes was dangerous, being an astronaut was a whole different level of risk. A few months earlier, President Kennedy had announced that the U.S.A. was going to try to put a man on the Moon by the end of the decade. The space race opposing the U.S.A. and the Soviet Union had just moved up several gears.

## Help

**scholarship** (n) money given to students by the state/government to permit them to study

**close call** (exp) moment when a person is in great danger, almost dies

**willing** (adj) ready

## The Space Race

The "Space Race" was the name given to the competition between the Soviet Union and the U.S.A. to dominate space exploration.

**1957:** The U.S.S.R. put the first satellite in space, and then sent a dog, Laïka, into orbit.

**1961:** Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin was the first man to orbit the Earth.

**1962:** Astronaut John Glenn was the first American to orbit the Earth.

**1963:** Soviet cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova was the first woman to orbit the Earth.

**1969:** U.S. astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin were the first humans to walk on the Moon.

In 1961, President Kennedy asked Congress to increase NASA's budget so that the U.S.A. could put a man on the Moon before the end of the decade. In a speech in Houston, home of NASA, on September 12, 1962, he said:

"We choose to go to the Moon. We choose to go to the Moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win, and the others, too."



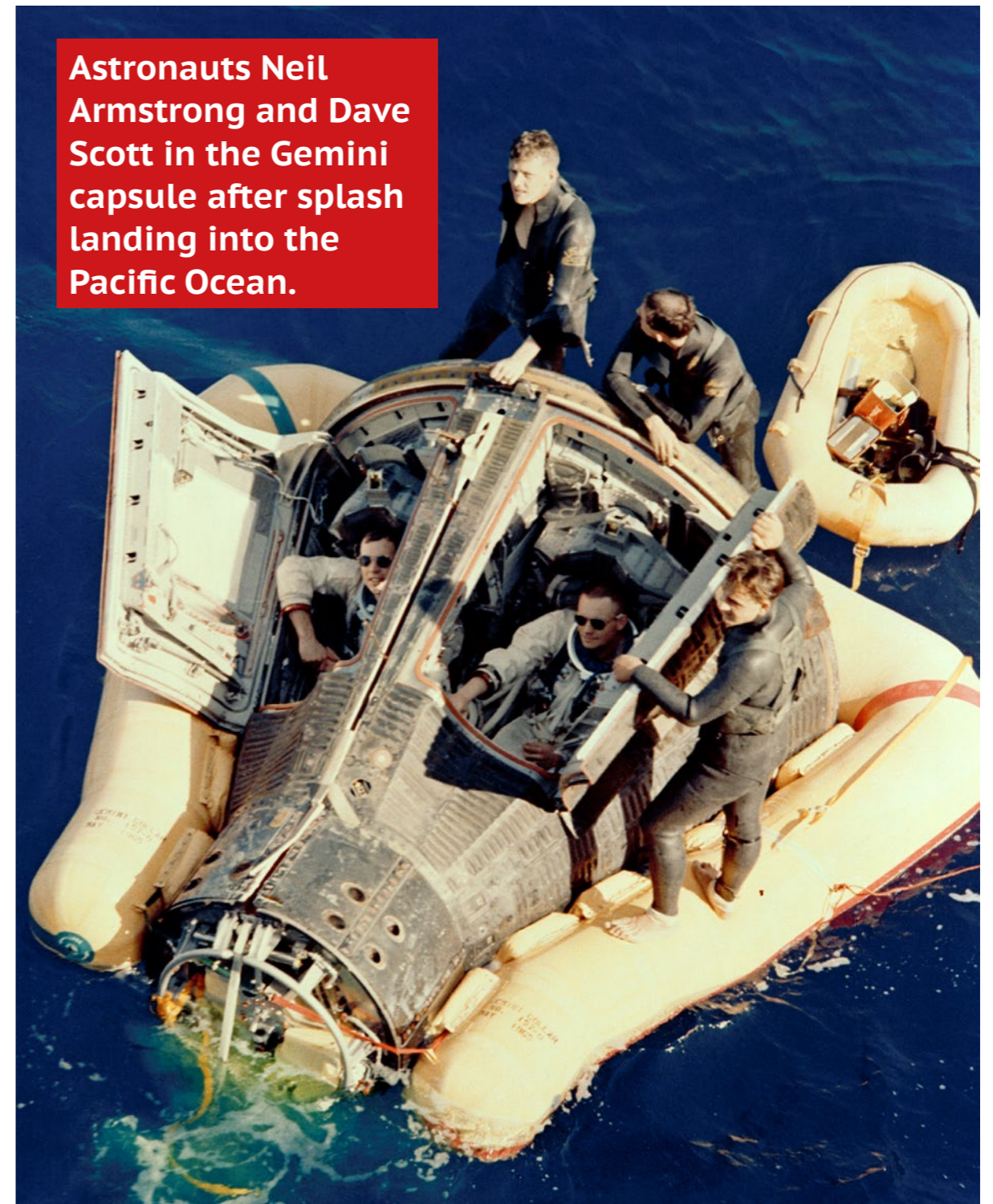


## Houston, We Have a Problem

In 1966, after years of training, Armstrong got his first chance to go into space. He was to command Gemini 8, and prove that it was possible for two spacecraft to dock in space. This was a vital

stepping stone for the travel to the Moon. A future lunar mission would require a module leaving an orbiting rocket to land on the Moon. Then, crucially, it would have to take off from the Moon's surface and dock with the mother ship so that the astronauts could return safely to Earth.

Armstrong and his fellow astronaut Dave Scott succeeded in docking with an un-manned module Agena. But then Gemini started to spin out of control. To make things worse, the module was in a part of its orbit where it was impossible to communicate with the Earth. Armstrong and Scott had to use their initiative. When various attempts at stopping the spinning didn't work, Armstrong used the re-entry control engines. Finally the ship was stable again. But they had used almost 75 percent of the fuel they needed to leave orbit and return to Earth. The mission was cut short, the astronauts' safety being the most important factor.



Astronauts Neil Armstrong and Dave Scott in the Gemini capsule after splash landing into the Pacific Ocean.

## To the Moon

The dangers didn't end there. The programme aiming to put astronauts on the Moon was called Apollo. The very first Apollo mission ended in tragedy before it even reached blast off. The module caught fire during a pre-flight test and all three astronauts, Virgil Grissom, Edward White and Roger Chaffee, lost their lives.

On 6 May 1968, Armstrong had his own brush with death. He was training in a lunar landing research vehicle when it developed problems and he had to eject about 30m above the ground. Seconds later, the vehicle burst into flames.



Ryan Gosling in the scene from the film where Armstrong has to eject from the lunar module before it crashes.

The first manned Apollo mission, Apollo 7, only took place in October 1968, ten months before the Moon mission.

It is easy to imagine therefore the stress experienced by the crew, the technical team and the astronauts' families as countdown approached for Apollo 11.

## The Trip

**Blast-off:** 16 July, 1969

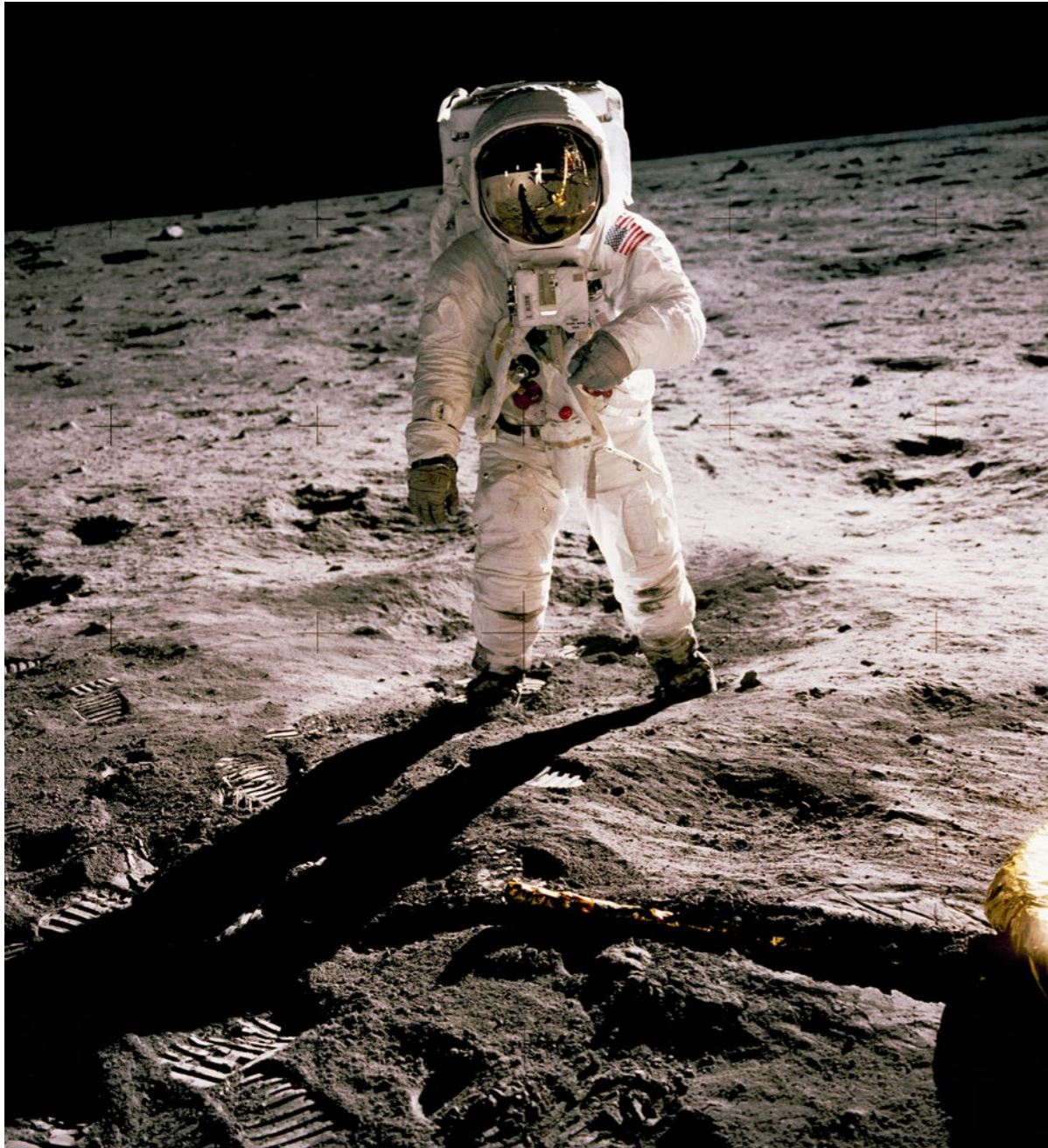
**Duration:** eight days

**Space craft:** just 3.9m in diameter

**Distance travelled:** 953,054 miles (more than 1.5 million km)



Claire Foy (*The Crown*) plays Armstrong's wife Janet in the film. The filmmakers were keen to show the strain the astronaut program put on the astronauts and their families.



The most iconic image of an astronaut during the first Moon landing is actually of Buzz Aldrin. Armstrong was carrying the camera and can be glimpsed reflected in Aldrin's visor.

## Made It!

The Moon landing was an extraordinary technical achievement. The astronauts displayed exceptional courage, as Armstrong had shown throughout his career, whether as a military pilot, a test pilot or an astronaut. Yet Armstrong refused to be cast as the central figure. "I don't deserve all the attention," he said. "Circumstance put me on that flight."

However, once the landing was achieved, public appetite for the expensive Apollo missions diminished. It's not much of a race if there is only one competitor and the Soviet Union never seriously tried to land on the Moon. In his later years, Armstrong worked hard at trying to persuade Congress to renew funding for Moon missions but he recognised, "When we lost the competition, we lost the public will to continue."

**Help**  
will (n) desire

## The Stay on the Moon

**Landing:** 20 July, 1969

**Duration:** 21 hours

**Lunar Module:** The Eagle, in honour of the national symbol of the US, the bald eagle

**Michael Collins:** stayed on board the command module Columbia

**Armstrong and Aldrin:** descended to the Moon's surface in the Lunar Module