

Apollo 11 and First Man

A REVIEW



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First Man, directed by Damien Chazelle, and *Apollo 11*, directed by Todd Douglas Miller, both depict the 1969 Apollo 11 Moon landing. While the two films both focus on the same awe-inspiring event, the areas of interest and storytelling differ enough to make the two films oddly different. *First Man* takes the viewer through the emotional turmoil that such a groundbreaking expedition causes while *Apollo 11* shows off the science and the countless man hours that went into sending the first people to the moon. Being an avid space fan, I saw both films on their opening day, and both times, I was left on the edge of my seat. The two movies represented the moon landing in different lights and were able to tell two different stories of the same event.

First Man was released first on 12 October 2018 in the US. The movie opens with Neil Armstrong, played by Ryan Gosling, in a jet that is bouncing off the upper atmosphere nearly headed off course and into space. The opening scene immediately starts the movie off with a hectic, nerve-wrecking experience both on screen and off as the deafening sound rattled the seats and the audiences' ears. The movie continues to portray Armstrong's early career and transition to NASA where the introduction of the Apollo program is made. As Armstrong is introduced to the necessary tasks of sending someone to the moon, the audience is introduced to the Armstrong family and other astronauts and scientists. The audiences' emotions are first toyed with in a scene when Virgil Grissom, Ed White, and Roger Chaffee are engulfed in flames in a launch rehearsal test. When I watched this scene, I felt both saddened by the loss of those brave astronauts, but also belittled by the raw power that is required to take man to the moon and how quickly it can change the course of events. Those feelings were only shortly lived as the next scene or so caused me to feel almost guilty for Neil Armstrong as it showed his wife nervously yelling at him for accepting the role as mission commander for Apollo 11. The movie continued

with the launch, the landing on the moon, and more importantly, the famous quote. The movie kept cutting between the astronauts on their voyage and the Armstrong household. At the Armstrong household, the movie depicted the constant presence of news crews. During the movie, at times, I felt the same fear, anxiousness, and annoyance that Neil's wife must have felt. Claire Foy, who played Armstrong's wife, did a wonderful job of portraying the raw emotion that one might feel when their husband is going where no man has gone before and as someone who is constantly in the presence of news crews in the event that something goes wrong.

I am certainly no avid fan of Ryan Gosling's work as an actor, but in *First Man*, he did an excellent job portraying Armstrong. The real gem of this movie was the emotion captured by Claire Foy. Any space geek like myself can spew off random facts about the Saturn V rocket and the historic Apollo 11 moon landing; but it was the depiction of the family and how they lived through the event that made this movie more than an entertaining documentary.

Apollo 11 was released in the US on 1 March 2019. This movie walked viewers through the science and chain of events that all led up to the historic first man on the moon. Throughout the movie, the archival footage and original music score were used to create suspense, which is a difficult task considering everyone knows how the mission worked out. The only new images that were presented in the film were the illustrations describing what was happening, for instance, one illustration demonstrated how the lunar lander would meet up with the crew capsule. These illustrations had no overall effect on how the movie was portrayed, however, they provided a nice visual to those who are unfamiliar with the specific maneuvers performed during the mission. Overall, there was no plot twist in this movie nor any drama among characters; plain and simple, this movie was a documentary about the Apollo 11 moon landing, and a very impressive one at that. I wasn't able to see this movie in an IMAX theater, however, the way the

filmmakers handled the footage was spectacular. The aspect of this movie that was able to turn it from a documentary into a voyage back in time to one of the more important instances of US history was the prototyped machines used to handle the footage. An experimental scanner was used to convert the 65 and 70mm film into 8k and 16k footage.¹ In my opinion, this footage that has never before seen, along with the audio, made this such an immersive movie. The restored and updated film from the landing on the moon and the launch of the Saturn V was so captivating. As someone who has only seen older footage from the 60's regarding this launch, I was blown away by the work that these filmmakers did.

After seeing both *Apollo 11* and *First Man*, I would recommend *Apollo 11* to people, if I had to pick only one. The sheer amazement that I was left with after the movie alone made the prolonged duration of that movie worth it. The footage in *Apollo 11* was so spectacular and awe-inspiring that I would recommend this particular movie over its counterpart, *First Man*. These two movies connect to my pathway to Space because it showed off one of the most important moments in space history, the Apollo 11 mission. Both *Apollo 11* and *First Man* showed off the countless hours that went into sending people to the Moon and back. As a computer scientist, I understand that amazing accomplishments, such as Apollo 11 or any modern space mission, require a team of people to build the algorithms and software that will further our space exploration program. When I watched both of these movies, I kept thinking about how meaningful it will be to work on a mission like the one portrayed in the two movies. My inspiration for this paper came from NASA's approach to the Moon. NASA tried something new in order to send people to the Moon and back, so I wanted to apply that same principle. Usually,

¹ <https://www.space.com/apollo-11-documentary-featurette.html>

I would have designed a website that displayed facts about space or something of the sort, however, I wanted to try something that I had never done, hence, a film review.

Image Credits

Apollo 11:

https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/en/thumb/2/29/Apollo_11_%282019_film%29.png/220px-Apollo_11_%282019_film%29.png

First Man: [https://m.media-](https://m.media-amazon.com/images/M/MV5BMDBhOTMxN2UtYjllYS00NWNiLWE1MzAtZjg3NmExODliMDQ0XkEyXkFqcGdeQXVyMjMxOTE0ODA@._V1_UX182_CR0,0,182,268_AL_.jpg)

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