

FIRST-PERSON ESSAY

## The Truth is Out There

### *Putting the Wonders of Science Fact Into Science Fiction*

An essay by *Lunar Pioneers* author Robert A. Black. This essay may be reprinted as a whole or in part. For digital copy, contact us at [legal@windstormcreative.com](mailto:legal@windstormcreative.com)

I wanted to throw things at my TV set.

There I was, watching a children's science fiction TV movie (which shall remain nameless, to protect the offenders). The heroine was walking on the Moon, and had come across the "Moon Goddess," who had issued her an ultimatum. The Moon Goddess pointed to the Earth, which was slowly dropping toward the horizon, and told the heroine that all humans had to leave the Moon by the time the Earth set – or else.

Now, you might think I was upset by fact that this movie had a "Moon Goddess" character – but you'd be wrong. What bothered me was something a lot more basic. Something that was being presented as the truth, when anyone who looks up into the sky can see that it's not. The Moon Goddess gave the heroine until the Earth set to make everyone leave – but when you're standing on the Moon, the Earth *never* sets. It never moves in the sky! Because the Moon's orbit and its rotation are synchronized, the Earth will always appear in the same place when you look at it from the lunar surface.

That was the moment when I decided to write my book, *Lunar Pioneers*. I had already been thinking about it for a while, wondering about the challenge of writing a science fiction space adventure that was rooted in real science, without ray guns, bug-eyed monsters or any of the usual, less realistic story elements. Seeing that movie showed me that my idea could be more than just my own personal challenge – there was an important need out there that my book could help fill.

I've long believed that science fiction was capable of being more than simple escapism or entertainment. It can introduce its audience to new knowledge and new perspectives. It can give us a different look at the world we know, or a look at worlds we might never have imagined. It can educate, and it can inspire. But that can only happen if there are writers who make it happen.

In the past, authors like Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov and Robert Heinlein wrote stories that introduced readers to the basics of science and spaceflight. On television, Gene Roddenberry gave us a future we could aspire to with the original *Star Trek*. The kids who read those stories and watched those shows grew up to be the scientists and engineers who are changing our world today. They grew up to be the people who really *are* exploring strange new worlds and going boldly where no one has gone before, through the probes they've sent across the solar system. But who is inspiring the kids of today? Who is giving *them* the dreams they can take into tomorrow?

It's not as if we've run out of source material. Our knowledge of the universe has expanded immensely over the years. When Robert Heinlein published the last of his "juvenile" stories, no one had even flown in space yet. Today, we've actually been to the Moon, and our robotic emissaries have visited every major planet in the solar system. It's a weird and wonderful place. Even limiting myself to the Moon in *Lunar Pioneers*, I was able to touch on these curious facts of life:

- The Earth never moves in the sky (as I said before), and on the far side of the Moon, you can never see the Earth.
- Day and night each last for two weeks at a time.
- You have to live underground.
- When you leave footprints in the lunar dust, they'll stay there for hundreds of years (assuming no one steps on them).
- The one-sixth gravity allows you to jump several feet in the air, and hang there for several seconds.

Beyond the Moon, there are wonders that science fiction writers of the past could never have imagined. Sulfur volcanoes on Io, ice geysers on Enceladus, and hydrocarbon lakes on Titan. An incredibly complex family of rings and moons orbiting Saturn. An untold number of icy dwarf planets roaming around the outer solar system. Worlds even more fantastic circling around other stars. Meanwhile, here on Earth, we're discovering new ways to use the things we can do in space, and the private sector is learning how to do things up there without government help.

The truth *is* out there, and it's a lot more interesting than yet another round of bug-eyed monsters and ray guns. Who will be the ones to write about it? The future is waiting to find out.