

## QUESTIONS FOR BUZZ ALDRIN

BY DEBORAH SOLOMON



# The Man on the Moon

The astronaut talks about why the United States is losing the space race to Russia.

**Forty summers ago, the world was transfixed by the sight of you walking on the moon. Have we made any progress since the Apollo 11 flight?** Not a whole lot. We shifted our attention to low-earth orbit.

**Meaning the shuttle program, which is about to end?** We've been concentrating on the shuttle, the space station and laying the groundwork for returning to the moon. The disturbing part is that, all this time, Russia has been concentrating on Phobos, a moon of Mars, and a number of us have recently realized just how significant that would be as a stepping stone to Mars.

**Do you think Mars has more to offer than the moon?** Yes, much more. It's much more terrestrial. It has a thin atmosphere and a day/night cycle that is very similar to ours. It has seasons. Russia perhaps is still entertaining the possibility that the moons of Mars might have access to ice or water.

**Are you saying the moon has become passé?** It is not promising

for commercial activities. It's got science, it may have strategic values but I don't believe it's a requirement for Americans to be present to take advantage of the resources. Their viability can be determined by robots.

**Are the days of American pre-eminence in space over?** Yes.

**Is it true that Buzz Lightyear, the cartoon astronaut, was named after you?** Apparently, but there's no evidence in my bank account to substantiate that.

**Do you know Charles Bolden, the former astronaut who has been nominated by President Obama to head NASA?** I know him quite well. I was a little puzzled when I realized that his major champion is Senator Bill Nelson of Florida, who flew with him.

**Right, Nelson was a congressman when he flew on the shuttle. But isn't that a good thing, making it easier for Bolden to muster Congressional support for NASA? Why were you puzzled?** I'm in

favor of changing the destination of humans. There are a lot of manned missions that can be done, but not in the direction of the moon. I am not sure about Bill Nelson. I haven't heard him say, "Let's junk the NASA plan to send humans to the moon." He's not about to say that. That would not be very popular.

**You were the second person to walk on the moon, after Neil Armstrong. Was it annoying to second?** No. At that time I wasn't looking for more laurels.

**You gave yourself communion on the surface of the moon. Are you still a churchgoer?** No. My Sunday mornings are spent in a recovery meeting in Pacific Palisades.

**In your new memoir, "Magnificent Desolation," which comes out this week, you recount a period of ruinous drinking and clinical depression following your time in space. I inherited depression from my mother's side of the family. Her father committed**

suicide. She committed suicide the year before I went to the moon.

**Was your mother's maiden name really Marion Moon?** Yes. I didn't feel NASA needed to know that. Somebody would think I was trying to get favored treatment because my ancestors had the name Moon. And that's a joke.

**Do you find it odd that we're observing the 40th anniversary of both the moonwalk and Woodstock?** I don't think I'm going to journey to Woodstock.

**What sort of music do you like?** I just did a rap session with Snoop Dogg and a rap composition called "Rocket Experience." It's going to be an online video. The Web site is funnyordie.com.

**Do you actually sing on the video?** I relate. It's not singing, it's rapping.

**How old are you now?** On July 20, the anniversary of landing on the moon, I will be precisely 79 and a half. It's nice to be on this side of troubled waters.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRISTIAN OTH