

LUNATIC

(A Practical Guide to the Moon and Back)

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Wided Bouchrika

I am one
with the ebb and flow,
that's all I know

BROCKHAMPTON
Sweet





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IDENTIKIT OF THE MOON

WHAT

The moon is the only natural satellite orbiting the Earth, and one of the five biggest moons in our solar system.

HOW

The moon revolves around the Earth in 27.3217 days .

DISTANCE TO EARTH

between 357,000 km and 406,000 km

AGE

approximately 4.53 billion years old

CIRCUMFERENCE

10,916 km

DIAMETER

3476 km

MASS

$7,35 \times 10^{22}$ kg

MOON-GAZING THROUGHOUT THE CENTURIES

HOW THE MOON CHANGED IN SIGNIFICANCE AND MEANING
THROUGHOUT HISTORY

The moon has always enchanted us. As a muse, as a possible deity, as a convenient calendar, as a magical celestial body, as a destination that determines power or as a money maker: our fascination with the moon has been inspired for various reasons across the centuries.



Selene, the Greek goddess of the moon

AT FIRST GLANCE

The moon as a magical celestial body and calendar

As long as we can remember, the night has always been accompanied by a presence outlined in the inky sky. Sometimes crescent-shaped, sometimes a perfect disc, occasionally no more than a dim shadow of itself. It is not hard to imagine that special powers were attributed to this enigmatic phenomenon.

In various civilisations, the moon was depicted as a deity and a supernatural phenomenon, a subject of mythology and folklore.

The moon was seen as the counterpart of the sun, much like night is the opposite of day. In Greek and Roman culture, the sun and moon were depicted as male (Helios/Sol) and female (Selene/Luna). The Chinese saw the moon as the chill *yin* to balance the fiery *yang* of the sun. In part due to the monthly cycle of the moon, the satellite was also associated with the menstrual cycle and therefore with all that was feminine. However, not all lunar deities from all civilisations and cultures have been female. The Egyptians had various male moon gods, including Ibis, Set, Thoth and Khonsu; the Mesopotamians had Sin, while the Inuit visualised the moon through Igaluk.

The moon also played an important role in the development of astrology. Even in ancient Babylon, the observations of celestial bodies led to records of omens that predicted events about the land, the harvest and the fate of kings. Astrology continued to develop throughout the Middle Ages, and the moon was also used in occult practices: witches were alleged to use the different phases of the moon to power their magic.

The moon is also used as the basis for our calendars. The different phases of the moon – half-moon, full moon, crescent moon – were used to mark the passage of time. Archaeologists have found sticks and bones dating back as far as twenty to thirty thousand years ago that have different lines carved into them, which are believed to represent the different phases of the moon. Our thirty-day month is an approximation of the lunar cycle. A synodic month represents the moon's journey around the Earth in relation to the sun, and begins and ends with a new moon. A synodic month is 29.530 days.

MOON FACT

The time it takes for the moon to circle around the Earth relevant to a fixed point in the night sky and the time in which the moon rotates around its own axis is called a sidereal month. A sidereal month is 27.321 days.



Phases of the moon, engraving by P. Miotte

Even though our current calendar is based on the sun, the word we use for a period of approximately 30 days ('month' in English, 'maand' in Dutch, 'Monat' in German, based on the proto-German *mǣnōþh*) reveals that we used to base our timekeeping on the moon.

Today, many cultures and religions still use the moon as guiding principle. However, these lunar calendars are not all synchronised; the day considered the first day of the month often differs. Some, like the Jewish calendar, the Islamic calendar, the Chinese calendar and the Japanese calendar, start a new month approximately with the new moon. Others start with the full moon, while a few are based on phases between the full moon and the new moon. Just to keep it simple.

Scientific views on the moon have also evolved significantly over the past twenty centuries. Aristotle believed that the moon was part of the night sky; since all celestial bodies were superior to Earth in his world view, they had to be perfectly smooth circles. Galileo Galilei changed that perspective when he pointed his telescope at the moon and sketched the satellite's surface, adding it to the groundbreaking astronomical treatise *Sidereus Nuncius* or 'Sidereal Messenger', which caused an uproar in the academic world in 1610: the moon turned out not to be perfectly smooth at all, but uneven and rough with lower-lying darker areas and lighter mountainous areas. Early astronomers believed that those differences between light and dark must be the natural boundaries of some sort of moon continents, where the darker areas had to be *lunar maria* ('moon seas'). Until well into the 19th century, people expected that the moon might be host to vegetation and life.

However, our view of the satellite took a drastic turn when interest in the moon expanded beyond astronomers and astrologers; suddenly, world leaders also wanted a piece of the action.



Engraved chiefly from Observations by Richard Hooker Esq.

The phases of the moon, engraving

the moon is not only beautiful
it is so far away
the moon is not only ice cold
it is here to stay

CATPOWER
The Moon

In the mid-20th century, the moon became a political asset. During the Cold War, the USA and the USSR were in a state of constant rivalry, each attempting to surpass the other to consolidate their status as world powers. Armaments and aerospace were key pawns in the global struggle for dominance.



Neil Armstrong strums a ukelele after the return of Apollo 11

THE RACE FOR SPACE

The moon as a scientific and political object

Not that those world leaders were actually interested in exploring that white-gold crescent in the sky, as such. However, space travel required a programme to develop rocket science, and rockets were considered very useful in fortifying their military position. Satellite technology also progressed in leaps and bounds, making it easier for both sides to spy on each other and keep track of any atomic bombs that might be heading their way. Quite convenient.

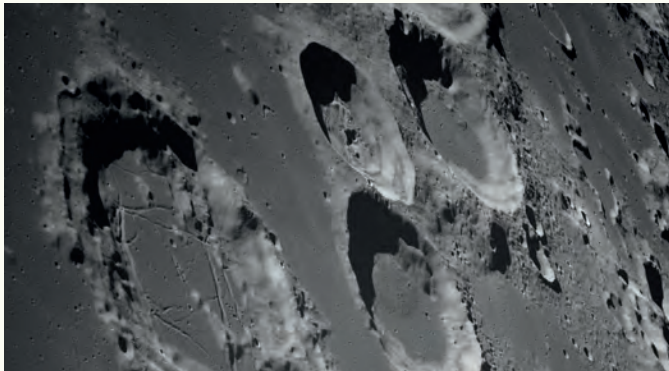
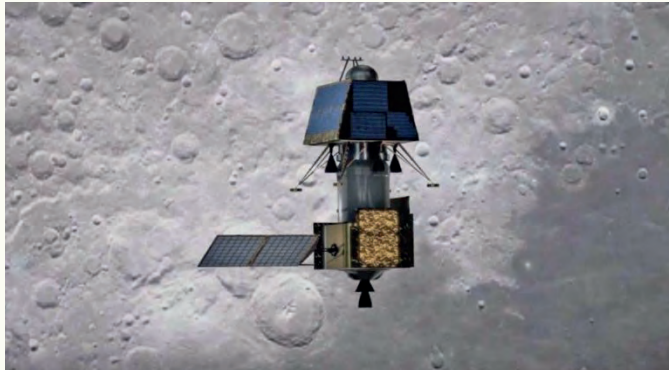
The first move on the space chess board was made by the Russians, when they launched the unmanned satellite Sputnik 1 into space in October 1957. That was a bitter pill for the Americans to swallow. After all, they were convinced that they had the upper hand in every area, especially after the defeats suffered by the Soviet Union on the Eastern Front during World War II. Adding insult to injury, only a month after the first satellite returned to Earth, the Soviets launched a second one, this time carrying a living creature on board. Data indicated that the dog, named Laika, survived the launch, but died seven hours later due to overheating and stress. Not a surprise at all. It wasn't the animal's suffering that most concerned the Americans, but the loss of face they suffered in the eyes of their people.

This jump-started a veritable 'space race'. The first man in space had to be an American; as Vice-President Lyndon B. Johnson would later say to President John F. Kennedy: *In the eyes of the world, first in space means first, period; second in space is second in everything.* NASA and its space programme were established in 1958, yet it was once again the USSR that beat the USA to the punch when Yuri Gagarin returned a hero from his space trip in 1961.

More than ever, the moon had become the bullseye, the coveted target for the first nation to reach and walk on this mysterious satellite that stood vigil over the sleep of every person on Earth. Six weeks after Gagarin's orbit, John F. Kennedy, then President of the United States of America, addressed the US Congress. Before the decade ended, he proclaimed, America would put a man on the moon (and bring him home safely again). He repeated that statement a year later, in a speech he gave at Rice University in Houston, Texas, speaking the iconic words: *'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.'*

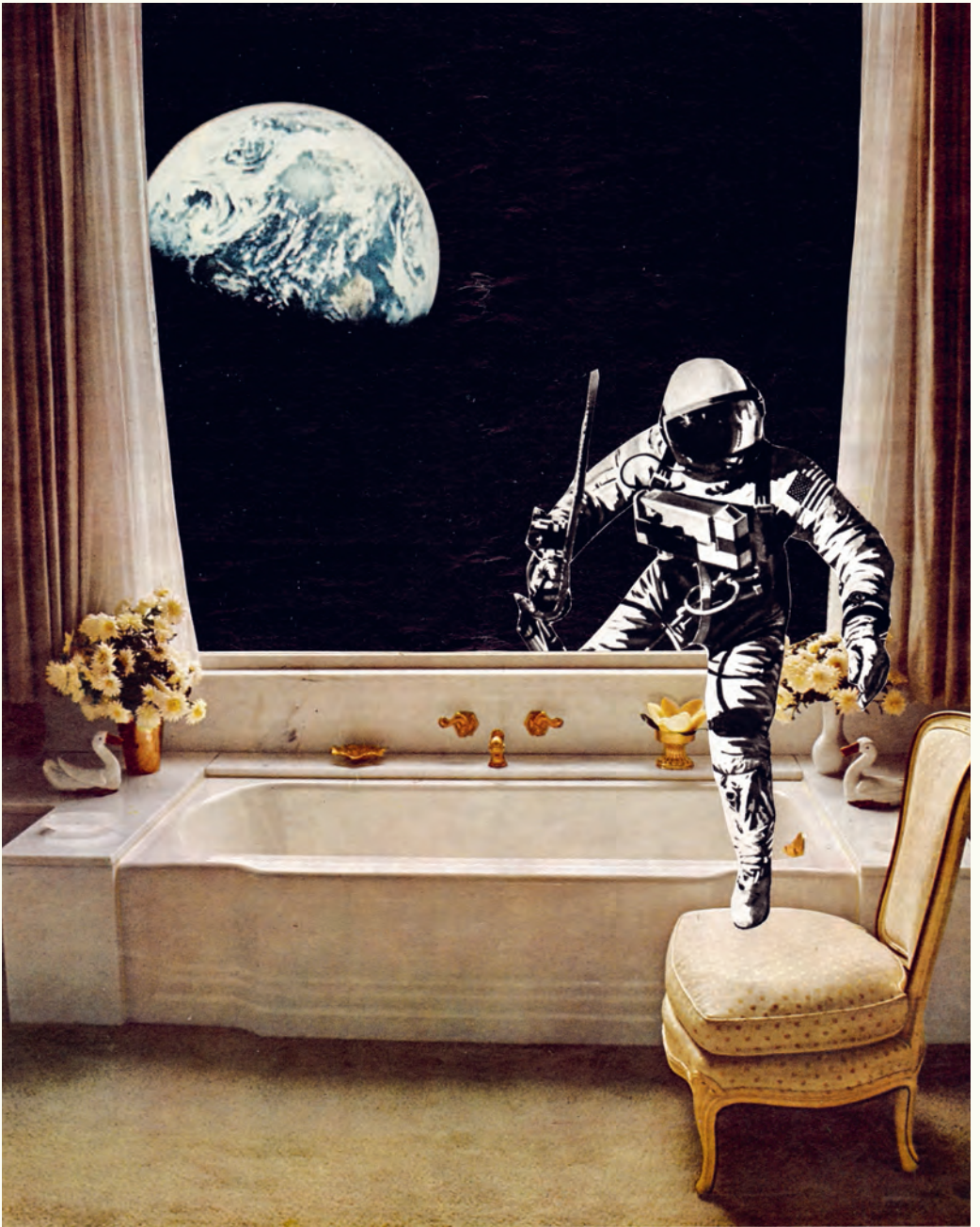
That does sound mighty inspirational, and many a Tumblr post might have featured this quote on a sepia background, but to Kennedy the moon was just a way to prove the superiority of the Americans – science or magic be damned. At that point, the American people had lost their initial eagerness and were no longer so supportive of these extra-terrestrial excursions that cost tons of money. But after JFK was assassinated, the Apollo programme almost became a tribute to the popular fallen leader.

Despite its fairly rocky start – in 1967 the Apollo 1 capsule went up in flames during a test launch, killing the three astronauts inside – interest in the project, and therefore the moon, remained significant. The continued interest was due in no small part to the fact that the Russians were encountering at least as many problems and starting to lag behind. On 20 July 1969, the Americans won the space race when Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin stepped out onto the moon's surface to take a stroll. If you ever feel like a fifth wheel, know that Michael Collins, the third astronaut on the Apollo 11 mission, never even set foot on the moon, since somebody had to stay behind on the mothership. A matter of perspective.



The Artemis Lander (above), ISRO Chandrayaan (middle), the lunar surface (below)





In recent years, stargazing has been on the rise again. Not to resolve political conflicts, or answer any pressing scientific questions, or to know what time it is, but to find meaning in life, to seek comfort and to get control. The moon was recast in its mystical role and astrology returned from where the hippies had left it in the 1970s, all wrapped up in batik cheesecloth.

NEED FOR MYSTICISM

The moon as a tool for self-care and connection with nature

According to market research institute IBISWorld, the industry of palm readers, tarot readers, aura analysts and other metaphysical services grew by 2% between 2011 and 2016. The sector is currently valued at two billion dollars a year. Let that sink in for a moment.

The most important shift, though, is not the fact that interest in the moon has undergone a revival, but *who* is interested. Back in the 1970s, such New Age practices were reserved for slightly stale, flighty types who held shares in the patchouli market, but these days it's far more fashionable to occupy oneself with esotericism. From the app developer in Silicon Valley who smirkingly shares on social media that he absolutely won't date Capricorns and the influencer in your Instagram feed who had the moon tattooed on her shoulder, to the teenage girl who describes herself as a witch and thirty-somethings who celebrate the purchase of their first home by waving smoking sage in every room to cleanse the energies of their personal space: practically everyone, including your mum, is interested in astrology these days. Well, especially your mum, since she had to look up your birth certificate so you could read your astrological fingerprint right down to the minute.

After all, the astrology hype goes far beyond just looking at your horoscope in some free newspaper in the train in order to find out whether a Scorpio will or will not have a run-in with a colleague, and why an Aries should steer clear of banking matters today. Whereas most people usually know what astrological sign they are – corresponding to the position of the sun when you were born – quite a lot of people can describe their entire birth chart these days. That means that they know where planets such as Mars,



Coat by Vetements, inspired by the signs of the Zodiac

Venus and Jupiter were in the sky at the time of their birth and the influences they believe those positions had on their personality. They take the phases of the moon into account when they schedule appointments and take courses in Ayurvedic cooking. On surf and yoga vacations, they allow the waves to guide them and have local healers remove the bad energy from their bodies.

MOON FACT

The moon plays an important role in your birth chart. The position of the moon at the time of your birth determines your moon sign as well as your inner self. If your sun sign represents how you present yourself to the outside world, then your moon sign represents your subconscious, your emotions, your deepest feelings. Discover on page 157 how you can find out your moon sign and what the various signs mean.

Astrology has become part of the lifestyle of modern twenty- and thirty-somethings, and companies play that angle perfectly. Amazon sends shopping horoscopes to its Prime Insider subscribers. Mystic Lipstick, a spiritual subscription service that puts together boxes containing healing crystals, reiki bath salts and 'spiritual aids', reported a 75% increase in its subscriber base in 2017 over the year before. Even *The Cut*, the lifestyle section of the prestigious *New York Magazine*, saw clicks on their articles about horoscopes increase by 150% in 2018. Astrology apps, podcasts and vlogs popped up everywhere over the past few years (you can find a list with all of our faves on the final pages of this book). Trendy parties in New York offer a chance to have your aura photographed, while fashion brands such as Agent Provocateur, Valentino and Vetements presented collections inspired by the signs of the Zodiac. As we write this book, type in the word 'astrology' on the Urban Outfitters website and you will get 69 hits. From pillowcases printed with constellations, dowsing rods as pendants on necklaces, and T-shirts with texts like 'Scorpio Energy' to coffee mugs with lunar cycles and gorgeously designed tarot cards. Astrology is so omnipresent that we wouldn't be surprised if

Starbucks launched a StarSign Latte at some point, or if you were soon expected to buy tampons not based on your monthly flow, but based on your *monthly flow*.

The fact that you are holding this book in your hands probably already means that you are exploring mysticism yourself. You may be asking your Tinder matches about their Venus sign to figure out if you're compatible, or perhaps you've massaged toxins out of your facial pores with a rose quartz roller, possibly even postponed an important phone call because an app on your phone told you that Mercury was in retrograde, and blamed a night of bad sleep on the full moon. Or maybe you just wanted to know what all that 'moonsplaining' is about lately, why all your friends' Instagram stories are bulging with astrology memes, and why they are suddenly exclaiming 'big Taurus mood' over coffee. And it's all Donald Trump's fault.

Or maybe it is, just a little. In turbulent times packed with economic uncertainties, political upheavals and widespread polarisation in society, we are flocking to find something to hold onto, some form of comfort and control. Maybe just a simple app that says: 'Hey, it is perfectly normal that you feel drained today, but in four days there will be a new moon, and you'll have plenty of energy again after that.' Or a lifestyle that tells you what's good for you ('don't sign contracts when Mercury seems to be turning away from the sun') and why things seem bumpy between you and your loved one ('people with their moon in Aquarius are just not able to channel those types of emotions'). Banu Guler actually got the idea for Co-Star after Trump was voted into the White House, inspired by a sense that she needed to do something useful for the world – that astrology could be a bandage on the wound, a form of self-care, a simple tool in a complicated society.



my moon, my man
so changeable and
such a loveable lamb to me

my moon's white face
what day and what phase
it's the calendar page again.

FEIST
My Moon, My Man

COLOPHON



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