



## Moonfall

*Jack McDevitt*

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## **Moonfall** Jack McDevitt

It's the 21st century, and all is right with the world. Or so it seems.

Vice President Charlie Haskell, who will travel anywhere for a photo op, is about to cut the ribbon for the just-completed American Moonbase. The first Mars voyage is about to leave high orbit, with a woman at the helm. Below, the world is marveling at a rare solar eclipse.

But all that is right is about to go disastrously wrong when an amateur astronomer discovers a new comet. Named for its discover, *Tomiko* is a "sun-grazer," an interstellar wanderer with a hundred times the mass and ten times the speed of other comets. And it is headed straight for our moon.

In less than five days, if scientists' predictions are right, *Tomiko* will crash into the moon, shattering it into a cloud of superheated gas, dust, and huge chunks of rock that will rain down on the earth, causing chaos and killer storms, possibly tidal waves inundating entire cities...or worse: a single apocalyptic worldwide "extinction event."

In the meantime, the population of Moonbase must be evacuated by a hastily assembled fleet of shuttle rockets. There isn't room, or time enough, for everyone. And the vice president, who rashly promised to be last off ("I will lock the door and turn off the lights"), is trying to figure out how to get away without eating his words.

In *Moonfall*, McDevitt has created a disaster thriller of truly epic proportions, featuring a cast of unforgettable characters: the reluctant Russian rocket jockey entrusted with the lives of squabbling refugees; the woman chosen to be first on the moon; the scientist who must deflect the "possum" (POSSible IMPactors) knocked from orbit or witness the end science itself. And at the center of it all is Charlie Haskell, the career politician who discovers his own unexpected reserves of only himself and his country, but for all humankind.

*Moonfall*, is a spellbinding tale of heroism and hope, cowardice and passion played against the awesome spectacle of human history's darkest night.

## **Moonfall Details**

Date : Published September 1st 2000 by Eos (first published 1998)

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Author : Jack McDevitt

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Genre : Science Fiction, Fiction, Space, Apocalyptic, Post Apocalyptic, Science Fiction Fantasy, Adventure, Fantasy, Space Opera, Abandoned

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## From Reader Review Moonfall for online ebook

### Dan Evans says

great book which departs from the authors normal extinct alien species and focuses on a disaster here on earth (and the moon). His otehr books are great but this one tops it for me.

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### Brendan says

I went into this book with high expectations - I really liked McDevitt's Academy novels, but something about this just didn't click for me. Over 100 pages in, I hadn't found a character I could like, and the plot was completely unsurprising - I felt like I knew where the book was going, and didn't see much point in continuing. Moonfall doesn't have the elements of the Academy novels that grabbed me, and it felt like a rehash of Deepsix, minus those elements. I'll still give McDevitt's Alex Benedict series a try, but this one's getting traded.

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### Thomas says

Asteroid collision stories usually have one of two focuses: how do we keep it from happening or what do we do after it hits. Moonfall takes a third approach—what can we do to limit the impact. It also deals not with a direct hit on the earth but the effects of a large, very high-speed hit on the moon. The book is in the tradition of Clarke, Pournelle, Niven, and Bova. Like many near future space stories, it is a bit optimistic about how far along space exploration will be in 50 years. But given the tech it posits, the story is plausible. Published exactly a year before the Twin Towers attack, it describes a political world in which the only opposition to space exploration comes from the Christian right and white militias. I wonder how the novel would have changed if it had been written one or two years later.

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### Dave says

The story is excellent, but several details spoiled the entire book for me. I didn't mind the tremendous number of around fifty character, but for even the smallest "bit" players, McDevitt provided in the text, a minimum of a paragraph, and usually three or four along with a page or two of backstory. Some got killed within the next few pages. After several of these, I skimmed every backstory. In addition, although I could see where McDevitt tried to make all the names different, after the first twenty, they all began to blur together. At least he refreshed the reader's memory until the character became well established.

His non-science and bad geography really blasted me out of the book. His explanation for the incredible speed of the incoming comet worked, or at least made the extreme speed plausible. But many I could not ignore. I'll leave what I consider the worst one for last.

Far too many passive verbs. For an action thriller, the author must use active verbs to provide dynamic action. Several of McDevitt's sentences-in-row, sometimes for a couple of paragraphs, used no active verbs, just passive "was," "were," "had", and "have" over and over again.

Tsunamis--I know he couldn't see the excellent footage of last spring's (2011) tsunami that devastated Japan because the book came out in 1998. Even so, his knowledge lacked crucial details. He had the water flood in, but it didn't wash back out right away, leaving deep water for a day or longer. Some of his waves seemed far larger than possible, but I guess chunks of the Moon falling into the ocean could generate such waves. At least, he had the speeds within acceptable ranges.

Great Central Valley of California--He called it a desert. The west side is one, but he's talking about one of the richest fruit- and vegetable-producing regions of the world. After tsunamis wash into it by going over the Coast Range of mountains, it remains a gigantic lake. No way! All the water north of the Kings River drainage would flow out through San Francisco Bay. None of the earthquakes in his book destroyed the Golden Gate or blocked it, although the waves took out the bridge.

Los Angeles--washed away and devastated. Possibly, but unlikely.

Baja California--he had waves wash over the peninsula and flood the Gulf of California and travel northward, but didn't have them go over the low rise separating the gulf from the low-lying Imperial Valley and the Salton Sea. Now that probably would remain a lake.

Sequence of a solar eclipse--McDevitt's times of the eclipse are crazy. His first viewers saw it in the eastern Pacific Ocean at 5:21 AM, (9:21 EDT) at dawn. Eclipses can occur at sunrise. The next people to see it in Mexico, watched it at 6:43 AM (8:43 EDT). Here, McDevitt says the path of totality moved generally northeast (it would move westward). Essentially, 5:41 and 6:43 are about the same time of day based on their time zones, but 9:21 EDT and 8:49 EDT are an hour different, which is wrong. From here on, McDevitt gives no times, but moves steadily eastward. The eclipse would be seen along most of the path at about the same actual time and higher in the sky as one moved eastward. None of the observers on Earth but one ever figured into the novel after their first appearance.

Were the editors sleeping when they prepared this novel for publication?

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### **Pat says**

I just finished Moonfall and it was a terrific science fiction thriller about a pre-apocalyptic event in which a comet is hurdling through space and is expected to hit the Moon. In this future, the US has established a Moonbase which will be destroyed by the comet so the research facility needs to be evacuated. However, the question becomes what happens when the Moon is hit? How bad will the damage be? And what impact will this have for Earth? This book has a complex group of characters which I found difficult to keep track of but once I decided to just read the book and let it 'fall into place' (no pun intended), it was a very good thriller/suspense tale.

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### **Marley says**

I really wanted to like this book. It was recommended to me by a friend who met the author, so I feel almost disloyal not liking this book. The book isn't *bad*. It's just not good.

I looked up the dates, because I couldn't shake the feeling that I was reading something that was supposed to be a movie (and a movie I'd seen several times). Shoemaker-Levy smacked into Jupiter in 1994. Everyone got excited about the "What if?" factor. The question constantly being asked by the news reporters was

"What would happen if something that size hit Earth?" Suddenly cheap documentaries were getting cranked out with doomsday scenarios of comets and asteroids threatening the world. I remember a cheesy TV movie called *Asteroid* (Feb 1997), followed a year or two later by *Deep Impact* (May 1998) and *Armageddon* (Jul 1998).

*Moonfall's* first hard-cover printing is listed as April 1998, putting it right in the middle of that the-sky-is-falling publicity hype. If it hadn't already been done so many times, it would probably make a decent disaster movie. Unfortunately, it's a fairly dull book.

The action takes place all over the United States (with occasional reminders that the rest of the planet exists), the Moonbase, and a dozen different space vehicles. I didn't make a list, but as you're reading it you feel like there must be hundreds of different named characters to keep track of, hardly any of whom have any importance on the story yet when you re-encounter them two hundred pages later, you're expected to still remember who "Amy" is. (A movie version could have shown us vignettes into ordinary people's lives without bothering to name them or waste much time on them.) The first two hundred and fifty pages are set-up. It's a disaster "movie" book in which no one dies until around page 275. The disaster scenes that followed might have been more exciting if I'd actually read the book when it first came out before I'd seen *Deep Impact* and *Armageddon*, let alone real news footage of the deadly 2004 tsunami. As it was, even the "exciting" parts of the story felt formulaic and anti-climactic.

The real problem is that I never connected with any of the characters. Even the main characters that you encountered often enough to keep straight in your head still felt a little two-dimensional to me.

I should at least give the author credit for coming up with a slightly different scenario than the other stories. The story is set a few decades in the future instead of the present day. In *Moonfall*, a giant comet hits the moon, not the Earth directly, but the rocks-are-falling consequences work out the same way. (By the end, I was kind of cheering for the rocks.)

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## Terry says

Not an easy book to review at first glance. Taken at face value this is a firm two-star affair in terms of narrative. However the main plot pushes this in to a fairly enjoyable page-turner three-star. That said if you go in to this expecting anything more than the main plot;

Comet smashes in to moon and causes problems on Earth;

you'll be very disappointed. The problem is the author. The book mostly reads like a collection of unexpanded authors notes. As such there is a very annoying show and tell problem. Character development is by way of backstory and personality trait exposition for an otherwise very 2D cast. Worse still is that every introduced character, however minor, has to have their half paragraph exposition.

By the end I got the feeling that this was meant as a first-draft treatment for the next major Hollywood disaster movie. Unfortunately after *Armageddon*, *Apollo 13*, *Mars*, and *Independence Day*, this feels like Hollywood flogging a dead horse so it was hastily published in this "Novel" format instead.

The story has far too many POV characters. Had the story been written from Charley Haskell's POV it could have been a true classic of the genre.

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## **Kirsten says**

Imagine if Quinn Martin were still alive and making disaster films today... that's what you'd get if someone were to make a movie of this book.

I used to just love disaster films. Such a guilty pleasure. This book feeds that love. A comet hits the moon, the moon breaks apart and Earth is bombarded. The Vice President is on the moon at the time. Crazy RWNJs take advantage of the disaster to try and make things even worse! I love it!

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## **Kathi says**

7/10 stars.

It's a page-turner and the cast of characters is huge (sometimes unnecessarily so), but before long the main characters take over most of the action. I just kept picturing the story unfolding on the big screen with lots of special effects.

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## **Willis says**

I grew up in the 1950s and 60s and was a big fan of science fiction and particularly "space operas". I loved movies like "The Forbidden Planet" that tried to speculate what it would be like to be in a spaceship in Outer Space and to visit other planets, loved TV shows like "Star Trek" and "Lost in Space". I loved books by Isaac Asimov (the Foundation trilogy) and Frank Herbert (the Dune series). Then science fiction became almost all "fantasy" - magic, make-believe worlds without any scientific basis, fairy-tale creatures (like Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings" series). As humanity took our first steps beyond our planet it seemed that no one wanted to write fiction that featured science and technology.

"Moonfall" is a pretty good "space opera". It is about a colony base on the Moon, space stations and preparing for the first manned flight to Mars. But then a weird comet suddenly appears and is on a collision course with the Moon (I guess this is the "magical" or "fantasy" part of the book). Now the story is more about the coming disaster than it is about science and technology (although there are still plenty of those thrown in).

While McDevitt has a very readable writing style, the format that he uses in "Moonfall" is like the TV disaster movie-of-the-week with an all-star cast! I can almost pick out which actors McDevitt had in mind for each character. He jumps from one short scene on the Moon to another short scene in an observatory on Earth to a scene at the White House to a scene in the boonies in Virginia, etc. It is very difficult to get to know the characters because the author jumps around so much from locations, characters, perspectives and concerns. The characters become one-dimensional and almost cartoonish. I found myself not caring whether a certain character died or how another character felt. It reminded me very much of the movie "The Towering Inferno". I can understand why he chose this structure for the story but it didn't allow me to connect with anyone in the book. I did not even connect with the most sympathetic character in the book, the Vice President of the U.S. who traveled to the moonbase.

I think this story is really more of the author's attempt to vent on the excesses and failures of government to act. Indeed he seemed to get most carried away by his story when he was writing about the angry militiamen plotting to overthrow the government or the pompous professor throwing the blame onto the President and his administration for the pending natural disaster.

It will hold your interest but not inflate your passion.

## **Violet says**

Ah, hard science fiction, how I've missed you! Your paper-cutout characters, your massive scope, your meticulously researched and detailed science! It's been far too long since I've read a good hard SF book, and Moonfall fits the bill.

If you enjoy hard SF, then you'll probably like this book. It moves a bit sluggishly at first, but once things start getting put into motion, the pace picks up dramatically until the very end. I was thoroughly entertained!

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## **Jack Burnett says**

McDevitt is a niche author. He writes what is sometimes erroneously called "hard sci-fi"; what it is really is the imagination of certain plausible events and asking "what would happen next"? Moonfall is my favorite of his books and among my favorites of all books. A comet or some such is going to hit and destroy the moon, and there are people on it. That's it, that's how you start, and if you're as good as Jack McDevitt, you make an outstanding book out of it.

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## **Nathan says**

This is a really good book that exceeded my expectations. Jack McDevitt has always been a talented author that does real well with academic or mystery science fiction but I've never been a fan of the "Earth Disaster" aspects of his books. He and I aren't necessarily on the same page with things like global warming and global government. But, I can enjoy his work without agreeing with him because his beliefs are background to the story, not the point.

I digress...

This book was a page-turner, a story of desperate heroism, likable characters, and ends, despite disaster, with hope for humanity.

This is a "Goodread".

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## **James says**

Moonfall

At first glance, Jack starts in by showing an eclipse, then we get a preview of an unknown comet from another galaxy, invisible except for the eclipse leads to its discovery. What follows is at first a bit of a slow tale with over explanation of vignettes and way too much minor detail, but ends up as a page turner that will grip you to the end.

This story is how people react to stress and unsolvable life threatening situations. A large rock is falling onto the planet from a broken Moon. How do you react?

Some rise to the occasion, some run in fear. Others threaten the discoverer of the comet, somehow blaming her. And some are heroic and pull out at the last minute a solution that saves the planet.

How would you respond to a major disaster? Would you help and rise to the occasion? Or take advantage and steal and try to take over and start a revolution?

It's a good question and one not normally asked in disaster stories.

Recommended. Can't wait for Jack's last Academy book being released this April 2018.

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## **Nathaniel Turner says**

This book was, in a word, chaotic. And in a second word, preachy. It's actually very difficult to determine which of those two descriptors was more upsetting, as I went through the book. Around three-quarters of the way through, I had had more than enough, and I only finished reading to give the book a fair shake.

In all honesty, I rather wish I hadn't.

Let's start with how it was chaotic. This issue should be relevant to any reader, regardless of your philosophical bent.

The chaos begins with simple organization. It seems Mr. McDevitt wanted to have titled sections, but he also wanted smaller breaks within the story. His choice on how to resolve this? Ten titled "chapters" with anywhere between 3 and 13 smaller, enumerated breaks in each. Except that those enumerations restarted with each chapter. So either you had to read eighty pages at a sitting or remember both chapter number and section number, at which point, it would be easier just to dog-ear the page and stop whenever you want. This might not matter at all to some, but it's hardly conducive to a good reading experience, in my opinion. It's just a little sloppy.

But that is probably the least of McDevitt's crimes against fiction in this work. He introduces - and kills off - more characters than most movies have extras. In fact, he introduces so many that it's almost impossible to keep up with them - which is proven by the fact that McDevitt in fact does *not* keep up with them all. There are a few characters, introduced sporadically, which he mentions again only once or twice, or perhaps never returns to. And he kills so many characters over the course of the book that he finds himself in need of new ones about halfway through, and starts introducing more. Not only does all this make the book a crowded mass of names, places, and biographies appropriate for a dating site, but it cheapens the characters that do survive. Since anyone could die at any moment, whether they had been a narrative influence, present from the beginning of the book, or seemed integral to the story, I quickly stopped caring for anyone. The romance in the book is irrelevant and emotionless, because one or both characters could die at any moment, with neither drama nor reflection.

Tangential to that point is this one: Mr. McDevitt begins the book with a small number of characters and a setting to which he only returns twice in the entire remainder of the book, and only for a paragraph each time. Perhaps I am alone in my thinking here, but I have always believed that the first chapter, the first paragraph, the first character in a story has either a pivotal role or thematic importance. The characters in Mr. McDevitt's opening scene have neither. They are, to put it bluntly, completely irrelevant to the entire book.

Finally, let us examine the prose. For the most part, the book is in third-person omniscient - presumably so

we can relate to characters who will soon be dead. But Mr. McDevitt does not appear comfortable writing death scenes, so nearly every death in the book is from an observer's perspective: "So-and-so never saw it coming," "She was dead before she knew it," "He died in the middle of a sentence." If Mr. McDevitt wanted us to care about any of these characters, he should have made their deaths more interesting. Instead, much of the book reads like a historical account of the time when the moon was destroyed by a rogue comet, and this list of people died, and this list lived, and that other list should have been executed for their religious fanaticism.

Which brings me to my second primary point: how the book was preachy. Mr. McDevitt evidently lacks the capacity to understand the mind of a person who has religious faith. For one thing, he asserts that religious people live easier lives than the non-religious, that this ignorance (as McDevitt sees it) is bliss, and that the biggest challenge a Christian must face is explaining away bad events as divine providence. Churches are ridiculous, and things which must be escaped. (See pages 330-331 for these points.)

Furthermore, there can be no intelligent religious people. McDevitt cannot imagine someone being both intelligent and religious; the two descriptors mutually exclusive in his mind. After all, the one religious character who is neither a terrorist nor laughably short-lived is Chaplain Mark Pinnacle, who became a pastor not because he had faith, but because he was rebelling against his father, and Pinnacle had plenty of doubts about the truth of religion. (See pages 160-161.)

Perhaps most telling is how Mr. McDevitt concludes this little escapade. Almost every character in the book, even staunch agnostics (which seem to be the majority of the population for his characters; there are few staunch atheists and no staunch religious protagonists, in spite of every character's concerns about what the silly, religious voters would think), was praying in the final chapter that the mission would succeed... and yet, in the end, the important thing for Charlie Haskell (probably the primary protagonist of the book) to remember is that failure in the mission would mean going back to "inventing religions to give meaning to disease-ridden, violent, pointless lives, and then becoming subjugated by the religions," going back "to refight all the battles against war and disease and superstition," when, "finally, the common effort was bearing fruit." (See page 531.) And of course, success led to the formation of a universal bond among all humankind "that transcended national and religious identities," so much that "even in Jerusalem" (that wretched hive of warmongering, according to the underlying tone), "at long last, an accommodation seemed to have been reached." (See page 544.)

And what's the basic principle of all this? That religion is, at best, backwards, barbaric, ignorant, and foolish. And at worst, it's both malicious and evil, and it seeks to destroy humanity with wars and death, and we need a "common misfortune," brought about not by any god or religious cause, not by karma or dogmatic punishment, but by chance, by Lady Luck, so that we can all come together and achieve world peace.

See? Preachy. And chaotic.

Another humorous quibble is with Mr. McDevitt's ability to predict the future. Writing this book in 1998, he was four years late on his estimation of the first African-American President, and his view of the future of the Internet and other technologies is somewhat lacking... not to mention the sad issue of NASA's defunding, pressing, not the government, but a wide range of private companies into the reaches of space. But of course, he can't be faulted for any of that. It's just fun to note.

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