

Sex on the Moon: The Amazing Story Behind the Most Audacious Heist in History Study Guide

Sex on the Moon: The Amazing Story Behind the Most Audacious Heist in History by Ben Mezrich

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Plot Summary

"Sex on the Moon: The Amazing Story Behind the Most Audacious Heist in History" by Ben Mezrich tells the true story of a young man named Thad Roberts who masterminded the first crime ever to take place in NASA.

Raised as a Mormon, Thad was kicked out of his house when he confessed to having sex with his girlfriend. He married an early age and used his brilliant mind to get ahead in the world. He became a co-op at the NASA program in Texas. His brilliance and outgoing personality made him a favorite among students as well as mentors.

Thad specialized in geology but also had an interest in astronomy and physics. He hoped to someday become an astronaut. One thing Thad knew for certain was that he loved being the center of attention. He gained popularity by setting up exciting adventures for others and for himself. One time he sneaked into the flight simulator.

During one of his tours as a co-op, Thad learned about some lunar rock that was held in a vault. It was considered trash by NASA. He thought that was a big waste and began to scheme on how to sell some of it. After all, he reasoned, he could use the money from the sale to further educate himself. That way, it would all be for the good of NASA.

Thad placed an advertisement on the Internet with the help of a new friend named Gordon. A rock collector in Germany saw his ad and felt that something was amiss. He contacted the FBI back in the United States.

Thad viewed the sale as a game at first. While he was arranging the heist and the sale, he was developing a relationship with a girl he was totally in love with. His marriage had been falling apart, and Rebecca, who also worked at NASA, seemed to reach his soul. She became his catalyst and eventually his accomplice, along with his friend Sondra and Gordon.

They set up the heist and it went relatively smoothly until Thad realized that he was in an esteemed professor's office instead of at the vault he had initially intended to raid. He took the professor's safe of samples instead. Later, he realized the collection contained moon rock from each of the missions as well as the rock that proved there was life on Mars. He and his girlfriend, Rebecca, had sex on a mattress with a vial of moon dust from Armstrong's mission tucked beneath them, thereby having sex on the moon.

Thad believed things were going well as he drove to Florida for the sale. The man from Germany had been working together with the FBI to create a sting operation. Agents posed as buyers representing the man in Europe. Thad didn't suspect anything, right up to the moment they arrested him in the hotel parking lot. He loved Rebecca so much that he didn't want her incarcerated. He told her to say that she was coerced, and he took full blame for the crime. In court, he was charged with crimes against the country and received a sentence that included over 8 years of incarceration.



Thad was moved to a medium security prison and he wrote letters to Rebecca in order to stay sane and to share his love. He began to teach an astronomy class for fellow prisoners and studied some physics himself. One day he discovered that his letters were never received by Rebecca, and he lost his desire to live for a while. Eventually, he began teaching and studying again.

A former friend from high school visited him regularly. When Thad was released, he left the prison with his own written work on quantum physics under his arm. His goal was to go back to the university and continue his education.



Prologue - Chapter 8

Prologue - Chapter 8 Summary and Analysis

Prologue - Chapter 8

"Sex on the Moon: The Amazing Story Behind the Most Audacious Heist in History" by Ben Mezrich tells the true story of a young man named Thad Roberts who masterminded the first crime ever to take place in NASA.

The story opened on a dark, rainy night past midnight. Thad Roberts was in a car with Sandra and his girlfriend, Rebecca. He was driving slowly through the compound, keeping his speed at five miles an hour so that he wouldn't arouse suspicion. Even though he wanted to race out of the compound, he stopped at every red light and waited. The three shouted gleefully as they made it through the lights, past the guards, and out of the gates of the compound. The back of the Jeep, weighed down, was a 300 lb. safe. Thad had promised his girlfriend the moon, and he was about to deliver.

Chapter 1

Back in 1997, five years before the heist, Thad was looking through career folders in the University of Utah's career center. He was 20-years-old, had a wife, and didn't get along with his parents. He also had no money. What he did have was brains. Thad read through a folder describing what it would take for him to become an astronaut, and he decided that it was the career path for him. He just had to go back to school. Going home, he told his wife, Sonya about it, and she supported him in the decision.

Chapter 2

At the beginning of Chapter 2, 19-year-old Thad was sitting in his father's truck waiting for his father to come out of the house and kill him. He knew his father was angry enough to do it. Thad had been raised as a Mormon. When he was a freshman in high school, he fell in love with the beautiful Sonya. This was against his religion so he and Sonya set up a pretense that he was dating other people as well. That way, his parents wouldn't know it was so serious. Eventually, however, he and Sonya had sex. He was consumed with guilt over it.

When Thad was 19, he went for his two-year-mission as all Mormon boys did. While there, he discovered that he wasn't the only one carrying this guilt. He decided to confess, expecting sympathy or penance. Instead, he was sent home. This was why his father was so angry.

Thad became cold out in the truck in the snow. He went inside to talk with his parents. His dad gave him two months to live in the house. He was to live in the basement and not talk to or look at any other family member. Thad had to leave the house by 6 am and return after 10 pm. The only words his mother spoke to him were when she questioned



whether he would blame her for his road to hell. He married Sonya and his parents barely talked at the wedding. They left before the cake was cut.

Chapter 3

At the beginning of Chapter 3, Thad is cataloging inventory at the University of Utah Museum. It was tedious work, but he like to think about contributing to the museum. Also, he had signed up for the task to keep him busy that night because he had a phone interview at 8 am the next morning. It was an interview that could change his world.

Thad had spend two years studying hard and building up his resume, determined to become an astronaut. The interview was with the Johnson Space Center Cooperative Program. It was a highly competitive program.

As he was pondering the interview and his life, Thad noted a rock with a fossil in it. He thought about his own journey toward becoming an astronaut. Then he thought about the rock, surviving two million years only to end up in a box in a dark basement. He stole the rock.

The interview was short and simple. Bob Musgrove had decided to hire him even before calling him. Thad was officially on his way to becoming an astronaut.

Chapter 4

It was his first day on the job at the JSC (Johnson Space Center) campus in Houston. Something didn't seem right, though. Thad was stuck in a line with a bunch of kids in front of an attendant in bright orange garb. When he came close to the attendant he asked if he was in the right place. To his dismay, he discovered that he was in the amusement park next door.

When he made it to the real JSC campus, Thad got through the security gate. He drove to his allotted spot and was in awe of the rocket he was passing along the way. This was the real deal. He was going past many security cameras because this was big stuff. He was now part of a team that could help send people to space. The feeling was incredible, and he couldn't believe that he was the same guy who was folding laundry in Salt Lake City just a few days prior.

Chapter 5

Thad got online with others. He realized no-one really knew anything about him so he could take this opportunity to reinvent himself. It was an exciting thought. He observed that the majority of the co-ops were above-average looking. A girl turned to talk with him and he reflected on his social scene. He was pretty open, but not as social as those around him. He and Sonya only had a few friends back home, and they led a relatively quiet life.

Beginning to reinvent himself, he talked with others about his interest in paleontology and archeology. Most of the co-ops were engineers, but he had written that he was



more interested in geology. He didn't talk about how he worked at cataloging inventory, and he also didn't mention how he occasionally took a few rocks and fossils home with him, showing them off at dinner parties. In his mind's eye, he was doing what a museum would want him to do - showing off the amazing collector's pieces. It's a foreshadowing of what's to come as he begins to steal more items.

Thad and the other co-ops learned the history of the program. One of their lecturers was a real astronaut. Thad was blown away by the experience and pictured himself in the astronaut suit someday.

Chapter 6

When Thad entered the building he was supposed to work in during his first tour, he was thrilled. It was a scientist's dream. Since he wasn't an engineer, he was the only one in his group assigned to Building 31. He saw a man in the room, approximately his age, working with a phenomenal material that he later learned was liquid glass. Its technical name was aerogel, and it was extremely lightweight yet incredibly strong. They hoped to use materials like that on Mars someday.

Brain Helms, Thad's new co-worker, told him a bit about the program and what they were doing. They were learning to work with earth rocks before they moved on to more valuable moon rocks and meteorites. Helms had grown up in the area, and he filled Thad in on what it was like. The two decided to go to a pool party, and Thad was sure Sonya would want him to get the most out of the entire experience so she wouldn't mind if he went to the pool party.

Chapter 7

Thad was at the pool party and it was a great experience. He decided that if he was going to create a new version of himself, he wanted to be someone who really stood out. To do this, he created a challenge where they would do daring things then meet to discuss them. Thad said he would start by breaking into Building 5, known for its tight security, so he could get next to the Space Shuttle Simulator. This was a place only astronauts went.

The people at the party were into the idea, although Helms warned him to be careful so he wasn't kicked off campus. As they left the party, Thad couldn't help admiring some of the girls in bikinis, but he tried not to look too much. He was faithful to Sonya. The chapter ended with Helms reminding him of all the incredible opportunities the place had to offer, gently warning him not to get kicked out.

Chapter 8

Thad couldn't figure out how to get into Building 5. He had advanced security with his tour position, but not enough to get into the building. Helms, who grew up in the area, kept trying to get him to give up the idea, but Thad liked the feeling of popularity he had at the pool when he was the center of attention.



He walked into the building with his heart beating furiously. Asking for directions as if he belonged, he found his way into the flight simulator room. He realized that someone had mistaken him for a worker who was going to do a system check. It felt wrong to continue the deception, but it also felt good. He was invited into the simulator to his amazement. The rush was incredible and he felt as if he were really shooting toward Mars. Telling the story at the pool a week later felt almost as good.



Chapters 9-16

Chapters 9-16 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 9

Thad hit the moment of serenity when the act of science morphed into the art of science. He loved even the painstaking work and easily lost track of time while he was working. Helms came in to remind him about lunch and a lecture. They were going to hear the esteemed Dr. Draper speak. Thad idolized the man who had first discovered signs of life on Mars. He skipped lunch so he could get a good seat for the lecture.

Helms was impressed with the work that Thad was doing in the lab. When he commented on it, Thad said he had a bit of help and learned how to do the rest by reading Helms' notes and looking things up on the computer.

Thad was thrilled with the lecture. It had been a fascinating speech in which Dr. Draper had explained the importance and value of moon dust and other pieces of space debris. After the lecture, Thad made sure he made his way to the front so he could introduce himself to Dr. Draper. He talked fast, almost sounding manic, but couldn't stop himself, he was so excited. The chapter ended with the author making an observation about Thad - one he hadn't even yet learned about himself. Thad wanted to be the brightest star in the sky. He finished by saying that it didn't matter if the star was bright because it was the biggest of if with was nearly a supernova. This is clear foreshadowing indicating that Thad is on a path for disaster. The chapter ended with a note to Rebecca.

Chapter 10

In a little pseudo-Indian restaurant, Thad was having a meal with a group of elite scientists. He was now on his second tour and ate regularly with his heroes who appreciated his mind. One scientist had just come back from Antarctica where he found some interesting meteorites. Thad especially liked it when Dr. Draper joined them. He felt a special connection to the older scientist and liked to think that Dr. Draper somewhat envied him for his adventurous youth. Thad would tell stories about teaching the other co-ops the basics of outdoor living. He took them skydiving and hiking.

Thad loved life working with NASA, and he was soon finding other aspects of his life mundane. On his last visit home, there was a new tension with Sonya. He was hoping that would change when she joined him in Texas. He wanted to go explore Antarctica, and he could picture her with him as they looked for sky treasures. It would be so different from the modeling and club world she lived in at that point.

Chapter 11

Thad admired the power of the Saturn V rocket. He was filled with a rare sense of peace, losing track of his surroundings until he heard a clack of heels. Sonya had



arrived. She was complaining about the heat. He took her to his lab, and she was very impressed. Next, he took her to meet Dr. Gibson who invited them to lunch with them before he showed them some meteorites.

As Dr. Gibson went ahead of them into a secure room to get to a safe, Thad peeked in and noticed that it looked like the safe combination was printed on top of the safe. Dr. Gibson came back with a meteorite as a gift for the pair. The couple examined the gift in perfect harmony, all friction between them gone.

Chapter 12

As Chapter 12 opened, Thad was on top of a rock with a group of co-ops. They weren't supposed to be camping there, but he thought it was good to bend the rules a bit. Next to him, there was a mousy girl named Sandra who he wanted to bring out of her shell. He talked with her and patiently waited until she got the guts to talk back to him. When she did, he noticed that she had some spunk.

She challenged him to join her skinny dipping in the stream below. As they did so, he did his best to avoid looking closely at her, respecting her privacy, but it was difficult. Things had not been going well with Sonya since she left. All she talked about was her modeling. Thad talked with Sandra about his life, sharing more than he would have thought. She surprised him by bringing up the crazy contest he started and said she was going to win.

Chapter 13

Being social was a positive in Thad's work environment. He was able to work on projects for different departments because he talked with other people, and they included him in what they were doing. He was also a fast worker, getting his work done well ahead of deadline, freeing him for other opportunities. This was how he managed to get into the lunar lab. Dr. Cooper needed a volunteer to inventory samples. It was a dream job for Thad.

As they walked to the lab, he learned about the construction of the place. It was like going on to a submarine. He saw how tight the security was and learned that it held billions of dollars worth of moon material. Money didn't matter to the scientists who were more focused on what they could do with their experiments. However, Dr. Cooper referred to moon rock that had already been tested so it was deemed as trash. It was in its own separate vault. Thad could not let the thought out of his mind. It was 40 billion dollars worth of trash.

Chapter 14

Thad could not fall asleep that night. His brain was racing. He had seen the trash rocks in the vault. They looked normal to the naked eye. Money had never been a major factor in his life. He was always in debt, but it had never bothered him before. Perhaps it bothered him now because he and Sonya were distancing themselves from each other. He didn't know. All he knew was that he suddenly realized that it was highly improbable



that he would ever become an astronaut. Thad also realized that he lived in a fantasy that was now nudging him.

Chapter 15

Thad was back in Utah at the university. It was a rainy night so he was on the roof of the observatory ready to tell people that they wouldn't see any stars that evening. Sonya was off at a club. Their worlds were getting further apart. He had no desire to be with her, and she no longer joined him as he watched the stars. Thad really wished he was back at NASA.

A guy named Gordon showed up on the rooftop. He didn't care about seeing stars. He just wanted to smoke a joint and be outdoors. They talked for a long time, and Thad envied Gordon's relaxation. He learned that Gordon had a problem with the law in his past, and that Gordon had a Mormon upbringing as Thad did.

Later, they ran into each other a few times. Thad asked Gordon if he would be able to find buyers if he wanted to sell something. When Gordon asked what he wanted to sell, he suggested moon rocks. Gordon said he would research it, but he believed in conspiracy theories. Gordon didn't believe people really had been to the moon. Thad had forgotten to mention that he worked at NASA and knew the men who had been to the moon.

Chapter 16

Gordon ran into Thad as Thad was scurrying to a lecture on quantum physics. He told Thad to check his email so Thad changed his course. Gordon had done his duty, and there was a listing of people possibly interested. The message was a bit inaccurate so Thad knew he had to take over. Riding an adrenaline high, he crafted a message that would appeal to someone who would pay to hold the moon in their hands.



Chapters 17-24

Chapters 17-24 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 17

The email was sent to specific rock collectors such as Axel Emerson in Atwerp, Belgium. It came from "Orb Robinson." Axel was a deliberate man who loved to study everything. He had rituals for everything. After he read the email he was intrigued. The chance that it was a junk email was high, but he had some questions. If someone was selling fake moon rock, why would they choose to send it to someone who was a known rock expert? Also, what about the legalities? It was illegal to own moon rock, so surely selling it would be even worse. Axel did a bit more research and realized he was watching a crime take place. He believed strongly in right and wrong so he wasn't tempted to buy. Tracking down Orb became a puzzle so the man could be taught a lesson. Christel, Axel's wife, didn't want him to get involved. He replied to the email anyway.

Chapter 18

Thad received the email from the interested buyer, and suddenly it wasn't a game anymore. He was a bit uneasy but persuaded himself that he could use the money to become a better scientist, actually helping NASA in the long run.

Chapter 19

Axel imagined himself as a superhero as he weeded the garden. He was saving the good plants from the bad, similar to how he felt he was saving others by finding out who the lunar rock was and stopping him. That morning, he had emailed the FBI in Tampa warning them about the lunar rock email. Christel was upset that he sent it.

The same day he notified the FBI, Axel heard back from Orb. They began talking prices, and Axel realized that this was a large crime in the works. He didn't want to go any further in the dealings so he was grateful when the FBI contacted him, setting some plans in motion. He would introduce an investigator as his American representative.

Emails flew back and forth between Orb and Axel, with Axel forwarding them to the FBI. The FBI helped him craft responses. It soon hit a point where all communications would be between the "sister-in-law" who was really the FBI and Orb so Axel was out of the picture. He was thankful for that since he realized that a huge crime was about to take place. Axel realized his wife was right to be concerned, and he was glad he called in the FBI rather than taking matters into his own hands.

Chapter 20



On June 6, 2002, Thad was back at JSC. He watched in disbelief as an Extravehicular Mobility Unit (space suit) descended from the space shuttle. This was his third and final tour, and he was still in awe of the astronauts. Thad had been attaching a strobe camera to the station hull in the Neutral Buoyancy Lab (NBL). This assignment filled Thad with wonder. It was about as close to a moon environment as a place could achieve.

When Thad applied for this NBL tour, he didn't think he'd get in. He was up against Helms for the spot. Helms's mother, a NASA engineer had made some calls, getting her son an unusual fourth tour. Thad got the job, too, because the man who did the hiring happened to be the man whose wallet Thad had found and returned a week prior.

Thad considered Helms to be a good friend, and he was tempted to tell him about the emails and lunar rock deal. However, he knew his friend was too straight-laced so he kept the information to himself. He wanted to talk with someone about it. Sonya was out of the picture since their relationship was almost over.

Chapter 21

Thad was taking a group of co-ops to one of his favorite places, Galveston Bay. He met Rebecca on his way to the bay on the ferry. She completely intimidated him with her beauty, and he felt as if his world changed.

Chapter 22

Standing at the edge of a 50-foot precipice above a reservoir, Thad gave an inspiring speech, encouraging the co-ops to jump. In the middle of the speech, Rebecca ran forward and jumped. Thad watched her and realized that he had more than inspiration from her. He had a catalyst.

Chapter 23

Rebecca had jumped off the precipice because she wanted to be more like him. They talked in the water, and she gave him her phone number. Sandra, the shy girl he had skinny-dipped called him. They had become good friends. He told her about Rebecca, and she encouraged him to call her. It would be a great adventure.

She invited Thad over to her place that very evening. They chatted as they went out to dinner. It was a wonderful evening as they shared stories and interests. They went back to her apartment and made love. He was tempted to tell her about the emails, but kept quite about it.

Chapter 24

Sandra, still an intern, was explaining the Weightless Wonder to Thad. It was a machine that let users experience zero gravity for a short period. She was glowing from her experience in the machine. As they talked, she encouraged him to tell her his secret. She thought it was about Rebecca.



He was falling in love with Rebecca, but he didn't want to tell Sonya because he didn't want to hurt her. He thought she might suspect it, though, since she had stopped calling. Sandra was still pressing him for details of his secret. He told her that if she won a game, he would tell her. He thought the game was impossible to win. She won the game so he started talking. The chapter closed with a letter to Rebecca in which Thad mentions that she has moved on in a different direction, but he still loved her.



Chapters 25-32

Chapters 25-32 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 25

Rebecca and Thad were in her apartment talking about the amazing scientists who had gone before them. She noted that Thad distanced himself again and called him on it. He told her that he was considering doing something that was technically illegal. Just that morning, he had asked Gordon to do a check on Lynn Briley, the sister-in-law he was supposed to meet soon.

He took a deep breath and told Rebecca that he was thinking of stealing a safe full of moon rocks. Thad told her he wanted to give her the moon. She told him she thought it sounded romantic, and they should do it.

Chapter 26

The jarring ring of a phone woke Axel up on a peaceful morning. He hadn't been sleeping well with all the adventure in his life. At that point it had been 10 days since he had heard from either the FBI or Orb. The FBI agent was on the phone and told him what they had been up to for the past 10 days. He was told they wanted to tap his phone in case Orb tried to call him.

They asked him if he would be willing to testify. This got Axel thinking. He realized for the first time that the FBI thought the moon rocks might be real. He received an email asking what sort of questions they should ask to determine the legitimacy of the rocks. Axel wondered why they didn't use their own experts, then realized that the only experts they could go to were possible suspects.

Chapter 27

On a Friday morning, Thad was figuring out how to get by the security cameras. He put a special powder over the numbers on the cipher lock. The plan was in motion, and Phase One was complete. Now he was ready for Stage Two.

As he was driving, Thad thought about the emails. Lynn wanted to meet him in Florida, which was good since he couldn't take the contraband on an airplane. Gordon had looked her up and had not found much on her, but he did confirm Lynn's existence. In Phase Two, he switched vehicles with a co-worker from NASA. This gave him a Jeep, which had more room than his Toyota. It also had the NASA parking sticker on it. He told the co-worker they needed the jeep to help a friend move.

Thad switched license plates with a car from a parking lot 10 minutes away. After that, he went to a hotel room and set it up for everything they would need after the heist. He had already bought tools and a tarp.



Chapter 28

It was pouring as they sat in the Jeep. They had set up a Star Party as an alibi, but now no-one would show thanks to the tropical storm. Thad suggested that they pull off the heist right then, and Rebecca thought it was a great idea since the rain would make it difficult for the outdoor cameras to work. Sandra agreed.

Rebecca and Thad dodged security cameras as they went through the building. When Thad got through the door with the cipher lock thanks to his powder, he suddenly realized he wasn't in the lunar vault. He was in Gibson's office. Persuading himself that Gibson had enough time with the pieces and it was his turn now, Thad took the safe that held his valuable rocks. It was heavy, but he had brought a dolly.

Chapter 29

With the help of the two girls, Thad got the safe into the hotel room. He got out a saw and set to work, opening the safe. They blared the TV so the sawing couldn't be heard. When it opened, they got their other materials together. Thad's plan was to send everything they didn't sell back to NASA. As they were cataloging the items, Thad suddenly decided to keep a bit from each one. He also kept the sample from Mars.

The trio went out to breakfast as Thad mentally prepared for the co-op trip to the water park he arranged for the next day. It was another great alibi. He was going to go to Orlando five days later to sell the moon rock. At that moment his future looked beautiful.

Chapter 30

Thad had just come out of the shower when Helms came bursting in with the news that someone had stolen the moon rocks. Helms stated that he wished he had thought to do that, and Thad felt proud, but didn't give anything away. While Helms was talking, Rebecca called, hysterical. She didn't want the evidence in her apartment. She told him to come over to help her move it to a storage place Sandra recommended.

Chapter 31

For the next three days, Thad stuck to his routine then he headed out of town with Rebecca for Orlando. Sandra couldn't make it, but they were kind of happy about that, wanting to spend time with each other. Thad was hoping the whole time would be just the two of them, but he discovered that Gordon was going to meet them there. Rebecca questioned whether they should ask forgiveness as they talked in the car outside a church. Thad said there was nothing to be forgiven for. NASA didn't need the rock it considered trash, and Gibson should have backups of any of his work. They made plans in case they were caught stealing so Rebecca wouldn't have to spend time in jail.

Chapter 32

On July 20, 2002, Gordon entered the Sheraton Hotel in Orlando, Florida. He was completely stoned. He wanted to get his money from the deal and buy more drugs.



Thad and Rebecca joined him at 4:00 pm. They went to the hotel room, and Thad showed off the contents of a tackle box he was carrying. It contained the moon samples and the Mars rock. Gordon had problems believing man had ever even been to the moon so this really blew him away.

Suddenly, Gordon saw the import of what he had been doing. He realized the seriousness of the crime.



Chapters 33-40

Chapters 33-40 Summary and Analysis

Chapter 33

While Gordon went out for pizza, Rebecca and Thad showered. They had an hour until the meeting. Thad had a great idea. He took the moon dust vial from the Apollo 11 flight and put it under the mattress. The chapter ends with the sentence: Exactly thirty years earlier, to the day, Neil Armstrong had taken the first step - but right then, right now - Thad Roberts was the first man to have sex on the moon.

Chapter 34

Thad was on the way to the meeting. He tried his best to keep Gordon and Rebecca away. He didn't want to see anything bad happen to Rebecca if they were caught, and Gordon was a loose cannon. They finally agreed to show up ten minutes after he did and pretend they didn't know him.

This wasn't the meeting where they would exchange goods. This time, they were getting to know each other, building trust in each other. Thad was there first, and he waited for them. He recognized the woman from her description, and she recognized him from his outfit. He was wearing a dolphin pendant that Sonya had given him.

Lynn had not brought her husband, and that made sense to Thad. He realized that if her husband was Axel's brother, he might not even speak English. Trying to make Lynn comfortable, he suggested they eat then head back to the hotel to exchange the money. He was feeling calm and comfortable, but she seemed a bit nervous. He started riding an adrenaline high, and talked very quickly. He asked about her husband and told her that his partners were en-route to the restaurant.

Lynn, stepped outside to call her co-workers and let them in on what was going on. She pretended she was calling her husband. She readjusted her recording device and went back into the restaurant. Another agent soon joined them, acting as her husband. Rebecca joined Thad, and became bolder. He had a hard time keeping his eyes off the briefcase that held the money. At Rebecca's encouragement, he bragged about the meteorite from Antarctica.

During his story, Gordon came over in a drunken fog. He spouted odd information, making them uncomfortable so they hurried to get out of the restaurant. They headed back to the hotel to make the deal.

Chapter 35

The ride back to the hotel was very pleasant, and Thad wondered if they were forming a friendship that would continue after the deal. At the hotel, things changed drastically as



lights flashed, people ran toward him with guns drawn, a helicopter flew overhead, and Kurt yelled at him to get down on his knees. He wanted to die as he saw everything he worked for slip away from him. Then he saw Rebecca and Gordon getting arrested. He didn't care so much about Gordon, but he wanted to protect Rebecca, and he needed to be alive to do that so he just shut his eyes as the handcuffs clicked around his wrists.

Chapter 36

Axel had been busy with numerous phone calls. One was from the president of the mineral club. He told Axel there had been an arrest in the United States, and it was connected to their club. The next call was from a reporter from the Tampa Herald. He warned Axel that this was just the beginning since it was the first time a crime had taken place at NASA. He thought it might become an international story.

Axel's son said it looked like someone was building a spaceship outside his window. Axel checked and found the yard filled with television antennas, trucks with satellite dishes, and reporters. Axel was truly an international superhero.

Chapter 37

The police drove Thad from Orlando to Tampa, where the holding cell was. At the cell, he was able to talk with Rebecca, who was in a nearby cell. He told her to say she knew nothing about it, but she said she already told them everything. She also said her dad was coming and didn't want her to speak to Thad again. Thad just wanted her to be free. He knew he was going to prison, but he wanted her to be all right.

Thad had one phone call, and he called Sonya, who was furious. During the call he realized that she still cared about him. This heist put an end to that, because he had done it with another girl. He could get out until his trial if an adult without a record signed a release, but Sonya told him that no-one would do that. He realized she was right. He had no-one.

He was taken to a jail in Tampa known as the Submarine. It was a horrible place. His cellmates looked intimidating, and had to sleep on a metal bed with no mattress or pillow. He woke up and one of his cellmates showed him a newspaper with his story in it. He found out that Sandra had been arrested, too. In the prison cell, they gave him a new name - Moon Rock.

Chapter 38

Thad was called out of his cell to consult with a lawyer and people from NASA. They wanted to know how he did it. All Thad wanted to do was hear how Rebecca was doing. He didn't want to talk in front of the NASA people. His lawyer told him that when they questioned Gibson, he had been most concerned about the notebooks that held his life's work. He had planned to make them into a book during his retirement. Thad didn't remember any books, but didn't say anything about that. He just wanted to hear about Rebecca.



The lawyer told Thad he would get a maximum of three years in prison for their initial crime. He wanted to get Rebecca free, and his lawyer told him that they could claim that they had been coerced into the crime. If they did, Thad would get a longer sentence. He said this was what he wanted to do, and the lawyer reminded him that he had only known Rebecca for one month. Thad was still insistent.

Chapter 39

Surviving in jail meant that Thad had to learn fast. They said that it took about two years for a prisoner to really let go of their old life, and Thad believed that after one year. The prisoners gambled on his sentence. Rebecca had been sentenced to probation and 180 days of house arrest. Thad was thrilled. Sandra had gotten the same sentence. Gordon had run away so he received a stiffer sentence.

Thad became obsessed with getting a message to Rebecca and hearing back from her. He asked inmates who were released to find her and tell her he loved her. While he was waiting for a response that didn't come, he received divorce papers from Sonya. He had a brief conversation with Sonya on the phone and he felt extremely alone. The lawyer contacted him telling him that his court appointment was the next morning.

Chapter 40

He was taken to the courthouse at 3 A.M. The value of the rocks was less than what Thad knew it could have been so that part was good, but he realized that something was going very wrong. The judge was considering adding an enhancement to the sentence because his crime had shut down a branch of the government. It was a sentence generally reserved for terrorists. The crime was centered on the notebooks that Thad didn't even remember.

During the trial, Thad realized for the first time what suffering Gibson would have gone through as a result of his crime. Thad gave a monologue in which he apologized for his actions. It was to no avail. He was sentenced to 100 months. His cellmates didn't believe him when he told them. After watching the news that evening, they realized that he had not been lying.



Chapter 41-Epilogue

Chapter 41-Epilogue Summary and Analysis

Chapter 41

After his sentencing, Thad was transferred to a mid-level security camp. He also learned that Rebecca had been given permission to talk with him one last time. He couldn't call her right away since the time at the payphones was over. The next day he flew to the new prison, which was much nicer. He was using the toilet and was interrupted. The man who had walked in on him apologized. For the first time in over a year, someone treated him like a human.

Thad made the collect call and Rebecca hit the button that refused the call. He was shocked then redialed. She answered, apologizing because she had hit the wrong button. They both confirmed their love for each other. Thad told her to date others, and she said she didn't want to think about that then. He asked for a way to communicate with her. She told him her sister's address, and he promised to write daily. The chapter ended with one of his letters to her, declaring his love.

Chapter 42

Writing to Rebecca kept Thad sane over the next year. They helped bring out an inner strength that prevented him from losing his sense of self. Thad was inspired to do more, and he received permission to teach an astronomy class. He taught the prisoners, and as a class requirement, he had each one send him a physics book once they were free. This would help him further his own education. Thad became focused on the current state of the quantum theory. He started making his own theory. Life became tolerable in prison as he taught and studied and wrote.

One day he was told he had a lot of mail and he discovered all the letters he had written to Rebecca that were unopened. He felt as if he lost his sense of self as he literally collapsed onto the floor. The letter that ended the chapter was a letter of closure.

Chapter 43

Axel received a package in the mail from the United States. He had mixed feelings about Thad's sentence. The crime was bad, but the man was young and naive. The heist had been a horrible blow in Gibson. The great man had come and given a lecture in Antwerp. The package in Axel's hand was opened to reveal a wonderful gift. Gibson had made a request that was approved. An asteroid had been named after Axel. It was between Jupiter and Mars.

Epilogue

Thad served his time, marking the seasons. A former high school friend named Matt wrote to him and came to visit him. When he was freed on August 4, 2008, Thad had to readjust to the outside world. His first stop was to eat a real meal at Olive Garden with a former inmate. He made plans for his future, trying to get back into college.



Characters

Thad Roberts

Thad Roberts was 24 at the time of the heist. He was a brilliant man with a nearly photographic memory. He was raised in the Mormon tradition, but was excommunicated from his family when they learned that he had premarital sex. He married his girlfriend at a young age. Thad loved to learn and had three majors in college. He also became a co-op in the prestigious NASA program in Texas.

Thad loved to be in the spotlight and got an adrenaline rush out of trying new, adventurous things. He didn't respect rules and laws. Often, he created a rationale as to why the rules should be followed or broken.

The moon heist began as a challenge that wasn't completely real to him. It wasn't until a year after he was incarcerated that he began to understand the ramifications of his actions on those around him. Thad had an intense love for physics, astronomy, and geology. In prison he became a teacher and he asked for books as payment for the lessons. His goal, once he got out of prison, was to obtain more education.

Rebecca Moore

Rebecca Moore was Thad's 20-year-old girlfriend at the time of the heist. She was an up and coming biologist who worked on plant-life photosynthesis. The first time Thad met her, he was overwhelmed with her beauty. She looked small and delicate, but she was tough mentally and physically. She embraced challenges and adventures. She viewed the heist as a fun adventure and she looked forward to getting the money that came along with it. However, once they were caught, she unraveled. She told the judges that she was coerced, thereby avoiding incarceration. This was what Thad had told her to do and she followed through with it. She received permission to talk with him one time. During that call, she told him that she loved him. However, she never contacted him during his imprisonment. She said her father had told her that she was not allowed to contact him.

Axel Emmermann

Axel Emmermann was a rock collector who lived in Antwerp, Belgium. He received the email about the moon rocks and was greatly intrigued. The man lived a very orderly life with his wife, Christel and his two children. When he received the email about the lunar rocks, he was on leave from working at the polyethylene plant as a quality control supervisor due to a recurring injury. He knew that the person selling the lunar rocks was ethically wrong and he decided to hunt the person down. He also contacted the FBI. It was a game to him at first. When he realized how serious it actually was, he was happy that the FBI had taken over. After the arrest, he had mixed feelings about the whole



affair. He felt that the punishment was a bit harsh for the crime, but he also understood that what Thad had done was wrong on many levels. It had been especially harsh on Dr. Gibson whose life's work had been destroyed by the heist.

Sonya

This character was Thad's wife when he was 20. She was a model.

Bob Musgrove

Bob Musgrove was the co-op program manager at the Johnson Space Center Cooperative Program. He was the man who interviewed Thad for the NASA job.

Brian Helms

Brian Helms was Thad's first lab mate on his first tour and they became friends. When they met, he told Thad about the aerogel that he was working with.

Dr. Cal Agee

Dr. Cal Agee was the division chief for Thad's first tour.

David Draper

David Draper was the assistant to the division chief for Thad's first tour.

SA Lawrence A. Wolfenden

SA Lawrence A. Wolfenden was the FBI contact who responded to Axel's warning about the questionable moon rock sale.

Lynn Briley

Lynn Briley was the fictional name the FBI came up with for Axel's sister-in-law.

Matt

Matt was a former classmate who reached out to Thad while he was in prison. He became a friend.



Gordon

Gordon was a druggie that Thad connected with. He did internet research and helped Thad sell the rock online.

Sandra

Sandra was barely 19 at the time of the heist. She was an electronics specialist and accomplice to Thad.



Objects/Places

Salt Lake City, Utah

Salt Lake City, Utah was the city where the story took place and where the folders were kept.

University of Utah

This is the place that had the career center where Thad first realized he could get a career with NASA.

Mars

This was the place that NASA was interested in exploring since they had already been to the moon.

Syracuse, Utah

This was the place where Thad lived with his family before he was married. He called his home there a pseudo-farm.

University of Utah Museum

This is the place where Thad worked during the nights. He kept track of inventory.

Johnson Space Center Cooperative Program

Thad held a job here in the Clear Lake area of Houston, taking his first step toward his goal of becoming an astronaut.

Antarctic Glacier

This is the place scientists would visit since it had incredible natural collection areas.

The Neutral Buoyancy Lab

This was the largest swimming pool on Earth. It was considered the premier astronaut training environment in existence.



Lunar Rocks

These were the items Thad tried to sell over the internet.

Alvin, Texas

This is the town where the trio disposed the safe into a Dumpster after the heist.

Italianni

This is the restaurant where Thad went to sell the lunar rocks.

The Submarine

This is the jail Thad was sent to in Tampa.

Florence Federal Prison

This is the medium security prison in Colorado where Thad lived during his long sentence.



Themes

Relationships

Throughout the book Thad's actions were directly tied to his relationships. He married at a young age because he has been kicked out of his house based on his actions. He no longer had a relationship with his parents or siblings. Therefore, he had no support. He and his wife were a relatively quiet couple when they were together at the beginning of the book. It wasn't until he moved to Texas that he decided to force himself to become more outgoing because he wanted to develop a relationship with the other co-ops. This time, he wanted to be a leader in the relationships.

Due to his background, he was sensitive to those who were shy like Sandra. He worked hard to help bring shy ones out so they could experience the freedom that he felt as he too worked on bringing out his own character and achieving the respect of others.

Thad was also drawn to those who instinctively had a sense of adventure in life. This was shown in his relationship with Rebecca. He became obsessed with her, and he admired her willingness to try just about anything.

When he was in prison and talked with his wife on the phone, he was devastated when he realized that he didn't have any relationships. There was no one there to help him out because his actions had separated him from the few people that he had developed relationships with. He had stolen from his mentor, Dr. Gibson. He had cheated on his wife, and his only other friends were in trouble with the law because they were his accomplices.

Space

Thad loved geology and astronomy. Working at a job where he could combine his love of the two was an amazing experience. From the very beginning of the book, the reader was encouraged to develop a relationship with the skies.

Thad demonstrated the joy and peace that comes from sitting on top of a building and really looking at the stars. He expressed a wonder of the history of the universe and the stories stars have to tell about that history. Gordon, on the other hand, brought up the concept of conspiracy theories, denying that man had ever been to space. He had not known that Thad worked at NASA and had seen proof of the mysteries of space. He had seen moon rock with his own eyes and tested meteorites. He had even seen the rock that Dr. Gibson had found in Antarctica. It held proof that life existed on Mars.

It was Thad's goal to become an astronaut. He didn't just want to go to the moon. He wanted to really go into space, someday landing on Mars. Rebecca worked with plants, experimenting with ways for them to grow and thrive in space. Thad pictured them working together as a unit out in space some day.

NASA

Working at NASA was a dream job for Thad. Generally, people need money and a high education to work there. He didn't have either, but he was brilliant. Everything about NASA filled him with awe from the shuttle by the parking lot to the Neutral Buoyancy Lab. He revered the history of the place and had great respect for the scientific studies that took place on the grounds. Thad admired the men who had gone before him, walking on the moon. His friend who had grown up in the community once told him that his awe would wear off as he worked with the astronauts and scientists, but it never did.

Thad loved the fact that the moon wasn't enough for the NASA scientists. They were now on a quest to explore Mars, and that was a mission he wanted to join. The people at NASA welcomed him and respected his contributions. They strongly felt that the projects at NASA were a group effort. Single people didn't take credit for successes. It was all about team work - a conglomeration of brilliant minds working together.

Since they were dealing with future materials and ideas, the campus was highly secure. You had to have clearance to get onto the campus and even then, there were limitations. If you were an intern or co-op, there were buildings you could not enter. There were offices and vaults that needed security codes for entry. The security kept most people out, but Thad was able to bypass it.

Style

Perspective

"Sex on the Moon: The Amazing Story Behind the Most Audacious Heist in History" was written by Ben Mezrich. The author is known for his reputation as a "New York Times" bestselling writer who wrote "The Accidental Billionaires" and "Bringing Down the House" plus nine other books. Some of his books have been made into movies.

The author is known for his ability to write stories about average people who do extraordinary things. He spent many months interviewing the main characters in this particular story, interviewing Thad Roberts and talking with Axel and Gordon among others. The author's enthusiasm for NASA is acknowledged at the end of the story and it shines through the story as he writes. It's an institution he admires and respects and the wonder and awe surrounding the place comes through in the story.

Tone

"Sex on the Moon: The Amazing Story Behind the Most Audacious Heist in History" was written by Ben Mezrich is written as a dramatic and narrative account of a true story. The author took some liberties by writing actual dialogue, but he did so after meticulous research, which included interviews. In the author's note at the beginning of the book, the author comments on the fact that Thad was very generous with his time. He helped the author put the story together, and the author notes that many inferences are actually from Thad's perspective.

The book is written in third person, almost entirely from Thad's perspective. This helps the reader understand what is going on, vicariously becoming part of the heist, yet not feeling personally attached to the situation.

The descriptions in the book are detailed, making the reader feel as if they are touching things and smelling the air. For example, instead of just stating that there was a wall of shells, the author writes, "off-white and three-ringed, row upon row, rising up the skyscraper-like corrugated-metal shelving units that obscured all four walls of the cramped, nearly windowless first-floor room."

Structure

"Sex on the Moon: The Amazing Story Behind the Most Audacious Heist in History" was written by Ben Mezrich is comprised of a prologue, 43 chapters and an epilogue. The chapters range in length. The first seven chapters are each approximately six pages long then the chapters fluctuate. Some are approximately 10 pages and some closer to 15. The chapters become shorter again, closer to the end of the book.



At the beginning of the book, before the title page, there is an impressive list of other books the author has written, including two from the "New York Times" bestseller list. After a dedication page, the author writes a note to the readers explaining his methodology in writing the book. He lets readers know that it's mostly accurate and based on extensive research and interviews, yet some minor changes were made including names of some people at their request.

The prologue opens right at the heist then Chapter 1 takes the reader back to five years before the heist. Later in the book, the author takes the readers back to the heist, adding new information, then moves on to the aftermath. Several chapters end with actual letters Thad wrote to Rebecca from prison.

The epilogue focuses on Thad's life as he is released from prison and makes plans for the future. The book closes with several acknowledgements that now mean more to the reader since the reader has come to know the individuals throughout the book. After this section, there is a brief blurb about the author himself.



Quotes

"There was nothing like a two-million-year-old rock to put things in perspective. Chapter 3, *Sex on the Moon: The Amazing Story Behind the Most Audacious Heist in History*." (p. 20).

"Keep your eyes open every day," Musgrove concluded from the stage. "Because every day in this place, you'll see something that's going to open your mind in ways you've never imagined. And maybe, if you work hard, if you're lucky, if we're all lucky—one day one of you will be standing here in a blue uniform telling us what it's like to walk on Mars." Chapter 5, *Sex on the Moon: The Amazing Story Behind the Most Audacious Heist in History*." (p. 36).

"You'll be having lunch, and suddenly realize that the guy sitting next to you once flew the space shuttle. And then you'll go back to your Fritos. Back to your textbooks and test tubes—and you'll realize this place is a job, as much as it's a dream." Chapter 6, *Sex on the Moon: The Amazing Story Behind the Most Audacious Heist in History*." (p. 41).

"Twenty minutes ago, he'd finished an amazing day spent learning how to slice meteorites into tiny segments; now he was wandering around a secure building, contemplating a stunt that could get him kicked right out of the program - and possibly even arrested. Chapter 8, *Sex on the Moon: The Amazing Story Behind the Most Audacious Heist in History*." (p. 48.)

"He wanted to be the brightest star—the one everyone saw when he or she looked at the sky. And the scary thing was, it didn't really matter if that star was bright because it was the biggest—or because it was just about to go supernova. Chapter 9, *Sex on the Moon: The Amazing Story Behind the Most Audacious Heist in History*." (p. 64).

"Just a few feet from where he was standing, there was a little door that led to a safe containing forty billion dollars' worth of something NASA considered trash. Chapter 13, *Sex on the Moon: The Amazing Story Behind the Most Audacious Heist in History*." (p. 94).

"It was a reinvention, because deep down he was this shy, messed-up kid who'd been kicked out of his house, who'd gotten married too young, who wanted to be an astronaut but probably would never have the chance. Chapter 14, *Sex on the Moon: The Amazing Story Behind the Most Audacious Heist in History*." (p. 96).

"Fantasy had always been his true talent, the cloak he'd wrapped himself in to protect him from the things he couldn't control. Chapter 14, *Sex on the Moon: The Amazing Story Behind the Most Audacious Heist in History*." (p. 96).

"Any mission that took place in space began here, and now Thad was part of all that, working on projects that would one day be replicated in outer space. Chapter 20, *Sex on the Moon: The Amazing Story Behind the Most Audacious Heist in History*." (p. 145).



"Thad wasn't worried about any testing; he had yet to fail at anything he'd gone after. Chapter 20, *Sex on the Moon: The Amazing Story Behind the Most Audacious Heist in History*." (p. 148).

"Because in that moment—watching this beautiful young thing throw herself with pure and reckless abandon over the edge—he knew he had found something much more powerful than a simple motivation. Thad Roberts had just found his catalyst. Chapter 22, *Sex on the Moon: The Amazing Story Behind the Most Audacious Heist in History*." (p. 160).

"Rebecca, I want to give you the moon. I mean, a piece of the moon. Like the astronauts we just watched in that movie, the cowboys who took that crazy chance, all to set foot where only a couple of people have ever been—I want to give you that. I want to give you the moon." Chapter 25, *Sex on the Moon: The Amazing Story Behind the Most Audacious Heist in History*.' (p. 181).

"It was hard for Axel to believe that someone who worked at NASA was planning to steal moon rocks; not just because they were national treasures, but if you were lucky enough to work at NASA—in the same hallowed buildings where the Apollo program had taken place—how could you throw it all away for a hundred thousand dollars? Chapter 26, *Sex on the Moon: The Amazing Story Behind the Most Audacious Heist in History*." (p. 187).

"Exactly thirty years earlier, to the day, Neil Armstrong had taken the first step—but right then, right now—Thad Roberts was the first man to have sex on the moon. Chapter 33, *Sex on the Moon: The Amazing Story Behind the Most Audacious Heist in History*." (p. 242).



Topics for Discussion

Why was Thad thrown out of his house?

What affect did Thad's excommunication have on the rest of his life?

How did Thad's personality change when he joined the NASA program?

How did Thad feel about his work at NASA?

Why did Axel think the moon rock sale was like a game, and how did his feelings about it change?

Why did Thad want to go through with the heist?

How did Thad treat the people in his life and how did that affect him ultimately?

How did the moon heist affect Dr. Gibson?