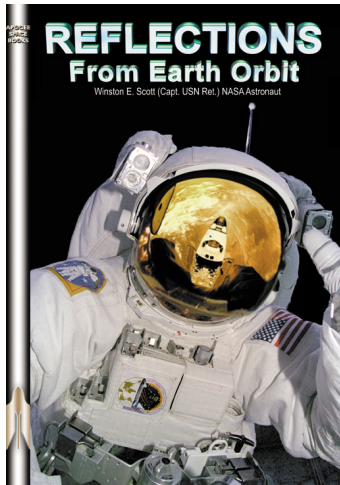


# Online Book review August, 2005 at

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*Reflections from Earth Orbit, Winston E Scott, Apogee Books (<http://www.cgpublishing.com>), 2005, 128pp, £16.95, \$23.95, \$30.95CDN, ISBN 1-894959-22-1 [softback]*

You know the one about waiting ages for a bus, then two come along at once? Well, it seems books with astronaut's names on the cover are like that too. The difference with this one by Winston Scott appears to be that he wrote it himself (though where ghost-writers abound it is always difficult to tell). Moreover, this book is billed as "not your typical 'how to go to the bathroom in space' book", but as an attempt by Scott to "share some of the experiences that drove him to overcome his life's obstacles and become one of a select few" to go into space.

As an autobiographical account of his rise to astronaut status, and to Earth orbit, Scott's book will be an inspiration to many budding astronauts in the US, not least because he is black. America makes much of 'equal opportunities' for 'disadvantaged minorities' and no doubt Scott is a exemplar among these communities. Some of his early story is a classic tale of a black boy in a predominantly white world and his coming to terms with it. But the story is wider than that: it is about self-belief and hard work; and it is also about acknowledging the breaks received along the way (Scott recounts how

a phone call from a teacher got him a university place, despite his relatively poor grades).

Moreover, it would be a grave error to categorise this simply as an African-American success story, since the colour of Winston Scott's skin is irrelevant. There is, after all, a much greater chance of an average American citizen reaching orbit than a highly-qualified European, simply due to national status. This is, perhaps, one of the key 'breaks' that American citizens fail to acknowledge.

An interesting aspect of Scott's story is that it is not entirely chronological: for example while recounting his first shuttle mission, he reflects on a dream he had as a child - a dream in which he was flying - and intersperses this with the transition to weightlessness. Although he hesitates to psychoanalyse, he muses on the dream (which many people have) and its significance: "Perhaps my dream foretold my future - a future of unusual achievements in unusual places".

Indeed, 'Reflections From Earth Orbit' is an excellent title on several levels: Scott reflects not only on his space experience, but on his life and career that took him there. And reflecting on the mention of ghost-writers, it is worth mentioning the quality and clarity of the text: if Scott himself is responsible for the style and content, then I would give him an A\* for this one! <<<

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