



Tilted Planet Press

www.tiltedplanetpress.com • 807 Brazos St. Suite 406 • Austin, Texas 78701 • 512-236-9655

The Last Launch of Atlantis

—a primer

by *Robin Cravey*

I shot out, top down, straight for morning sun.
From Houston, called Space City, Highway Ten
rolls east along the Gulf Coast bottomlands
to Florida's Atlantic surf and spray.
Due south lies Cape Canaveral, called Space Coast.

The roads ran patched and crumbling all the way.
The countdown for Atlantis had begun,
and dwindled toward the shuttle's last launch day

I raced through southern forests, brackish swamps
where centuries ago explorers roamed.
They came as voyagers on sailing ships
to find a strange new land beyond the sea.
There later pioneers blazed westward trails.

Now midwest floods flow south like prophecy,
and global warming threatens to submerge
the relics left by old discovery.

I reached the flowered land whose sandy arc
fends off the vast Atlantic from the Gulf.
The cape brought forth the nation's new frontier,
where heroes blasted off to do or die,
and pantheons of rockets roared and rose.

On Highway Ten, crosswinds blow hot and dry
with smoke from nearby drought-parched forestlands
consumed by wild infernos under sky.



I recollect the thrilling Space-Age Dawn,
when Kennedy declared, and Armstrong leaped.
The moon was just our stepstone to the stars!
But then we set our sights on orbits low,
and shuttles built a new space station there.

Today the smart and zealous launch teams know
they'll soon be with our millions unemployed.
And the moon is just a place we used to go.

I stepped out at Canaveral National Shore.
A million people thronged the coast to watch
a routine launch— except it was the last.
A low gray ceiling hid the vaulted blue.
A flash lit earth, a spark flew up, was gone.

The watchers on the beach said what they knew:
Three decades spent in wearing out the fleet,
and no new spacecraft ready when they're through.

Our times are sunk in vicious selfishness,
when small men shout down every plan and dream.
The can-do country can't do any more.

Is this our nation's fate— to waste away
bound down by threads of ignorance and greed?
until we're pushed aside by history?

When will we rouse ourselves to dream again?
Remember how to hold ambition high!
I'll be there when the next launch clears to go.

© 2011 by Robin Cravey
rev. 022112

