

In spite of the recession and a price that is out of this world, a special book published last week to commemorate the anniversary of the Apollo 11 moon landing has been "selling well" at Easons.

The book, at €750 a copy, is one of the most expensive ever offered by the shop. No one knew if it would sell. But after all the publicity around the 40th anniversary of the first moon landing on Monday of last week, nine people bought copies in the following days. And it was still selling steadily this week.

The 348-page large format book is titled *Moonfire* and is one of the most stunning coffee table books ever published. It combines text by Norman Mailer with spectacular photographs from the archives of NASA and *Life* magazine.

But €750 for a book? Prices on that scale are nothing in the world of antiquarian and rare books where early editions of Joyce, for example, can make many thousands. To deal in old books, however, one needs to be an expert.

Over the last few years, in contrast, a market has emerged in "special edition" new books and the prices can be equally staggering. And you don't need to be an expert in old books, you just need to have money and an eye for a title with special appeal. *Moonfire* is the latest example of this growing trend — an area where book publishing meets lucrative investment.

The secret of *Moonfire* is that it is a limited edition of a very beautiful and unique new book and that makes it a collector's item. Only 1,969 copies of the book (1969 was the year Neil Armstrong became the first man to walk on the moon) have been printed by Taschen, the international publisher which specialises in very expensive art and photography books.

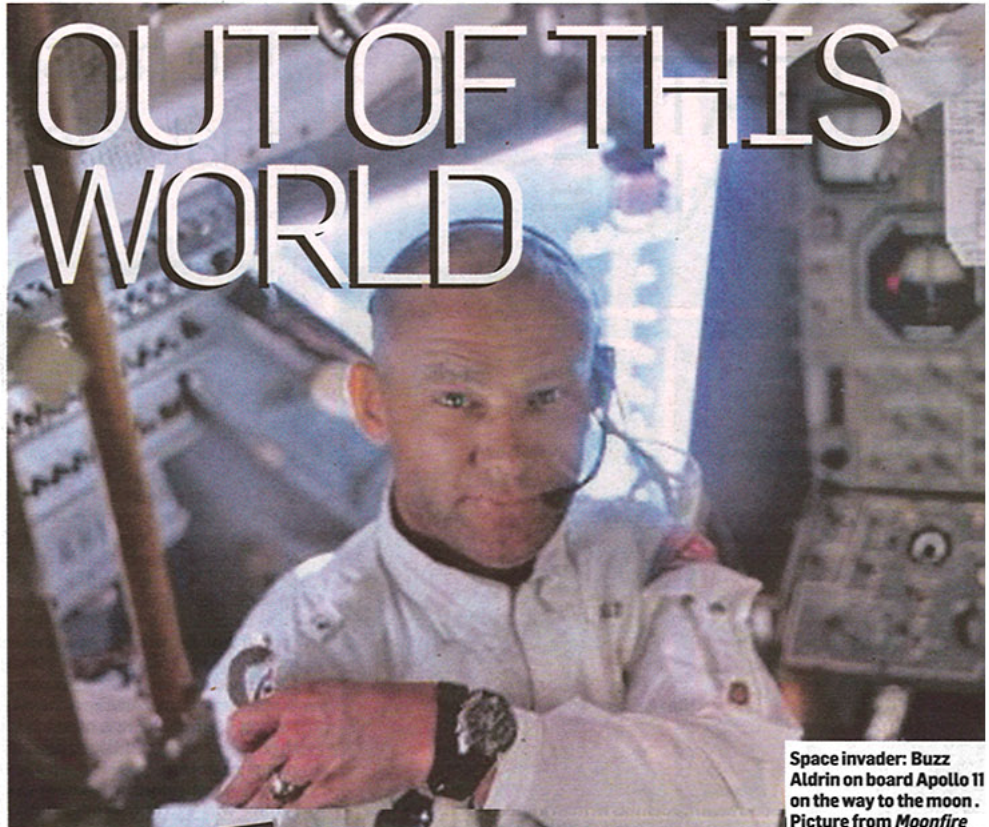
The books numbered 1 to 1,957 are priced at \$1000 in the US, £650 in Britain and €750 here in Easons. The book, which comes in a box with a plexiglass window, has foldouts and a framed photographic print signed by Buzz Aldrin who landed on the moon with Armstrong and contributes to this book. This picture of Aldrin standing on the moon, with Armstrong reflected in his helmet's visor, is one of the most famous photographs ever taken.

The final 12 books in the limited edition, numbered 1,958 to 1,969, are even more expensive because each one also includes a certified piece of moon meteorite — your very own tiny sliver of moon rock-sewn into the book binding. The prices of the 12 Lunar Rock copies will range upwards from an estimated £50,000, depending on the weight of moon rock in each one. And they can also be ordered from Taschen through Easons.

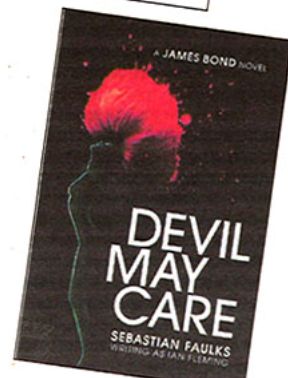
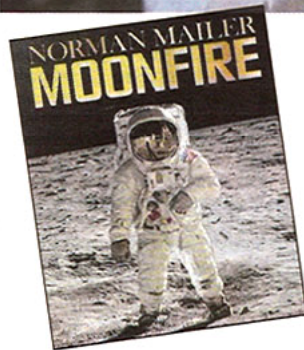
Maria Dickenson of Easons said this week: "We're delighted with the sales of *Moonfire* so far — it's great, even in the grip of a recession, to know that there are people out there who value books so highly. We must respect our customers' privacy but my guess would be that the majority of these book are bought by collectors, although the subject of the moon landing is so fascinating that it might just inspire the ordinary punter to splash out."

The basic €750 edition of *Moonfire* is not the most expensive book ever sold by Easons. That was another book which was called *Greatest Of All Time*, a £2,500 book on Muhammad Ali

John Spain on why buying special editions can be very a good investment



Space invader: Buzz Aldrin on board Apollo 11 on the way to the moon. Picture from *Moonfire*



signed by the man himself, published in 2004 also by Taschen. Copies of that book were on sale this week on the Abebooks.co.uk rare books website for prices up to £12,200.

"We sold 17 copies of the Ali book at the time," Maria Dickenson said. "It will be interesting to see if we can better that with *Moonfire*!" The book is not on display in Easons stores — it can only be bought through the website [www.easons.com](http://www.easons.com).

Limited edition new books have always existed but were generally produced by very small, very obscure publishers. What has changed in recent years is that major publishers are now getting involved and the market is expanding rapidly. Taschen was one of the first. Their collectors' editions have a track record of increasing in value, often dramatically, as with *SUMO* by the photographer Helmut Newton, published in 1999 and now selling for seven times the original price. Another Taschen book by the photographer Peter Beard has quadrupled its original price.

There are several Irish examples of the trend, with one of the most notable being the book on the artist Basil Blackshaw published in 2003 by the Northern Ireland reporter and art enthusiast Eamonn Mallie. Signed and limited to 1,000 copies, one copy was for sale on the Abebooks website this week for £1,738.

The internet has undoubtedly helped sales in this new market for "special edition" new books because the expensive books don't have to be stocked by bookshops but can be ordered via book-sellers or publishers websites.

An example of a major publisher getting involved is Penguin, which, in autumn 2006, to mark the 60th anniversary of Penguin Classics, published five limited edition classics. The books were selected and designed by major designers/artists and published in a limited edition of 1,000

numbered copies selling for £100 each. The books sold out within weeks of publication and are being offered today (barely three years later) on Abebooks and other websites for over £1,000 each. Among the most valuable are *Lady Chatterley's Lover* with a cover by fashion designer Paul Smith and *Madame Bovary* with a cover by shoe designer Manolo Blahnik.

Last spring Penguin published 300 copies of a limited edition of the new James Bond novel by Sebastian Faulks *Devil May Care* for £750, and they sold out within days. Several copies were on the American Abebooks.com website this week for prices up to \$3,000.

The Bond books, available originally via the Penguin website, were bound in leather sourced from the tannery which provided the hides for the Bentley cars driven by the man himself. The leather casing was stitched in the iconic diamond pattern from the old Bentley grille and the radiator cap design adorned the cover. The cover was also die-cut with a car-shaped hole into which a scale model of the modified R-type Bentley favoured by Bond was inserted.

These are just a few examples of a definite growing trend of the last few years and more publishers are entering the market. Adam Freudenheim, Penguin Classics publisher, says that he expects the area to grow "given the increased attractiveness of the physical book generally, especially in an increasingly digital world."

So maybe the people who shelled out a cool €750 to Easons in the past week for the new *Moonfire* book knew what they were doing. It's definitely a safer investment than the stock market or property and probably as good as buying gold. The trick is to pick the right new titles — and a book about the moon landing seems certain to be one of those titles.