



THE HUNDRED BILLION NEW-RUBLE TRIP A Russian Landing on Mars by Saunders B. Kramer Sr.

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Description

The “Hundred Billion New Ruble Trip” is focused on a successful expedition to the planet Mars and return to Earth by a Russian crew. The expedition occurs during the years 2013-2015 -- a real Mars launch window opportunity.

The U.S. is not competitive in this series of events, but rather follows the activity through its intelligence agencies with its collective nose pressed against the proverbial window.

Included in the story are multiple discoveries of solid evidence, in fact artifacts, of a prior visit to Mars by intelligent beings from another star system. During the return trip to Earth an encounter with a comet enlivens that portion of the expedition. Carefully woven into the web of the tale are several romances, the sort of occurrences that are bound to happen on so long an expedition with a highly motivated and attractive crew.

The details, of course, are in the Chapters. The author has the political, technical, scientific, and engineering background necessary to have laid the story in a realistic framework. Kramer has dealt firsthand with Soviet and Russian scientists, cosmonauts, and political (Embassy) personnel at a high level, and has thorough knowledge of their space activities.

The story opens in the quarters of the daughter of the American Ambassador at the U.S. Embassy in Moscow. Helen Kelley reflects with her lover Vladimir Kreminov on a daring space rescue recently completed. They soon make ready for a flight to Baikonur, the cosmodrome from which all crewed spaceflights for the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Russia in particular take place. From there they and the Mars crew observe the assembly of the Mars-bound spacecraft in low Earth orbit. At Baikonur Kelley meets the director of the Mars program and he is enchanted by her presence whereupon he explains in some detail the program for going to Mars.

Over the next few weeks the spacecraft is assembled on orbit along with detailed checkout procedures. The program director, General Georgi Chenkovolkov, accedes to a request for a presumed visit by Kelley to the Mars spacecraft.

She does not return to Earth before the spacecraft heads off for Mars, becoming the 21st member of the crew, and causes some considerable stirring in both political and social circles on Earth. Her presence aboard is finally announced by the President of Russia, Evgeny Derischev, at a large party specifically called for the purpose.

Through its widespread intelligence networks and various announcements by Russian authorities, the U.S. learns in some detail what is going on and thereafter follows as much as possible many of the details of the trip. There is a good deal of philosophizing in the upper ranks of the Mars program and by the political leader of Russia on why the U.S. did not choose to mount a trip of their own.

Four months pass without incident and the spacecraft arrives at Mars. After settling into orbit several unmanned probes are sent to the surface and through one of them the discovery of an array of caves comes about near the great

Martian canyon Coprates. That site is then selected for the landing of the crew.

As a fate would have it, the landing occurs during a meteorite shower, nearly ending the mission. After a successful landing the crew begins to explore the planet's surface and the newly discovered caves. Artifacts denoting the prior presence of intelligent beings are found in two of the caves and in the bottom of the canyon, along with what is believed to be a communications device from another life form. This information is transmitted back to Earth, whereupon, technical, sociological, and theological dialogues ensue en masse.

Adding to the excitement, a member of the exploration crew discovers indigenous "insect" life on the planet. As the world back home ponders the existence of life on Mars, and intelligent life from yet another unknown planet, the Mars crew prepares for the long journey back to Earth.

During the return leg of the trip, the crew discovers that a Comet will come dangerously close to the craft, leading to a hair-raising encounter involving suggested use of nuclear weapons launched from Earth. The manner of bringing the entire spacecraft back to Earth orbit creates a substantial technical surprise and more than a little admiration from all the onlookers on Earth.

President Derischev plans and holds a huge celebration and invites the President of the U.S. (who is a considerable player in this tale) along with the diplomatic corps from countries across the globe. The two Presidents discuss and agree to share a crew and machines to go back to Mars during the very next launch window. The story closes with extensive planning for another manned trip to Mars, and the very real prospect of finding and communicating with another form of intelligent life.