



Space Race: The Epic Battle Between America and the Soviet Union for Dominion of Space

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The story of the race into space is marked by the greatest superpower rivalries, political paranoia, and technological feats of the twentieth century. But until now, we have known only half the story. With the end of the cold war, decades of secrets have been exposed, bringing with them a remarkable opportunity: the unmasking of the true heroes and villains behind one of the most exciting races in history.

At the center of this exhilarating, fast-paced account are Wernher von Braun, the camera-friendly former Nazi scientist who led the American rocket design team, and Sergei Korolev, the chief Soviet designer and former political prisoner whose identity was a closely guarded state secret. These rivals were opposite in every way, save for one: each was obsessed by the idea of launching a man to the Moon. Korolev told his wife, "In every century men were looking into the sky and dreaming. And now I'm close to the greatest dream of mankind."

In attempting to fulfill this dream, Korolev was initially hampered by a budget so small that his engineers were forced to repurpose cardboard boxes as drafting tables. Von Braun, meanwhile, was eventually granted almost limitless access to funds by an American government panicked at the thought that their cold war enemy might take the lead in the exploration of space. Korolev, whose family life was destroyed by his long sentence in the Gulag, was constantly aware that any false move would finish his career or even his life. His rival, on the other hand, enjoyed remarkable celebrity in America and was even the subject of a 1960 biopic.

In this extraordinary book, Deborah Cadbury combines sheer adventure and nail-biting suspense with a moving portrayal of the space race's human dimension. Using source materials never before seen, she reveals that the essential story of the cold war is a mind-bending voyage beyond the bounds of the Earth, one marked by espionage, ambition, ingenuity, and passion.

Space Race: The Epic Battle Between America and the Soviet Union for Dominion of Space Details

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John says

If you are a Junior Space Cadet (First Class) like me, you'll love this book. Cadbury follows the parallel careers of Wernher von Braun, celebrity former Nazi rocket scientist, and Sergei Korolev, the Soviet Chief Designer whose identity was kept secret from foreigners and countrymen alike until his death. This is a really good story that collects the triumphs and failures of each man as they both reached for their dream of putting men on the Moon. It's filled with amazing details of both the US and Soviet space programs that I did not know. I found the number and quality of the one-off tricks pulled by the Soviets to demonstrate superior progress in space, and the American response, especially amusing. While often lighthearted, the book is also a window into the homicidal madness of the Nazis and the grinding fear, oppression, and deprivation of Soviet totalitarianism. I imagine most people would like this book - it's not just for Moon junkies like me. Check it out. (The book is supposed to accompany a BBC documentary on the same topic - which also aired on the National Geographic Channel, which I don't receive. Anyway, the book stands on its own, and I'll look for the DVD, or maybe I can find a bittorrent.)

Kirk Morrison says

If you want an in-depth look at the science behind the Space Race- this isn't your book. If you're interested in the technical aspects of the missions you'll probably be disappointed as well. The author is really attempting a human-interest story about the roles played by the U.S. leader Werner Von Braun (including his past as one Nazi Germany's designers of the V-1 rockets) as well as the parallel story of the USSR's Sergei Korolev (who would remain almost completely unknown to the Western world). Their stories are quite interesting and the very different ways the 2 nations approached the Space Race are fascinating. For someone like myself who doesn't have a particular interest in astronomy- or even really science- this was a breezy way to encounter a topic i'd might otherwise not read about. If you're a big reader of astronomy titles though, you might want to pass it up.

Mike says

Perhaps you have to be of a "certain age" or inclination, but this book (developed/based on a concurrent BBC TV series) is a really good look at the origins of the "race", how it developed in each country, and how it ended (failure of the Russian's "moon rocket" vs. success and fleeting glory for the American effort.)

The origin, of course, does not begin in either country. (Ok that's an over-simplification: Robert Goddard's work on liquid-fueled rockets was both the inspiration and underpinning of those who followed in his footsteps.)

Germany is where our tale begins. Where dreamers met to think of space flight (like Goddard), but after initial success on their own, were co-opted (some more willingly than others) into the German military

machine. Both their brilliance and their cooperation and support of that cannot be doubted.

After the war, both men and machines were prime targets for the reigning superpowers. How they were treated, used and given work are a study in contrasts.

This book has a lot of in-depth coverage of the native Russian expert, the "Chief Designer" whose name and existence were only widely known after his death in 1966. His early years, conviction and banishment to a gulag are covered, but the information is thin. Probably both because records are sketchy, but also because it is not the main focus of the book.

The "rivalry" between the Chief Designer in both countries: Korolev and von Braun is the main theme. Like a game of cat-and-mouse the book follows their striving for space and being first to achieve.

For myself, one of the areas where the book should have more content is when the Russians are launching probes and robot missions in the mid-to-late 60s. No details of how these devices were planned and constructed are offered. They just appear in launches. Likewise the destruction of the N-1 rockets is linked to the failure of KORD the engine control system, but no details of it are given, while faults and tests and the improvement of the F-1 engines (1.5 million pounds of thrust apiece!) is written into the story.

But despite my personal wishes, this is a really excellent tale and one that every boy and girl should read.

Cameron says

I really enjoyed this book - it is a well written, and easy to read! It is well researched and quite balanced without getting bogged down in the technicalities of rocketry.

Having read and watched a fair bit about the American side of the space race, I have always been more interested in the moon and lunar modules, so had taken the rocket development for granted as "the easy bit". I also had treated the line "the space race was about ICBM development" as throw away criticism by moon-hoax believers. There is certainly some truth in the parallel development of the 2 rocket systems, but after reading this I would have to say lunar, cryogenic fuel rockets were developed also inspite of the ICBM acid fuel long range, long storage rockets.

The personal stories had many big surprises for me - Korolev's because of the secrecy and his shameful treatment by communist military dictatorships, and Von Braun's because he and his core German rocket team's past is so grubby it leaves a nasty human stain on a great achievement that it is almost in the interest of the on going manned space exploration to not talk about.

Korolev's story and the amazing party tricks he was able to conjure from nothing was fascinating. More compelling than fascinating was the back history of Von Braun - "A man whose allegiance; Is ruled by expedience" - truly the Robert Johnson of space exploration, he practically lived at the cross roads at midnight.

Given that it had an accompanying TV series it could have had some more photos. A timeline showing Korolev and Von Braun main events and another showing the USA / USSR rocketry and space achievements

would have been useful.

Miranda-Hermione says

Cadbury's books are always very readable; they are informative without being dry. In Space Race she follows the lives of the two competing scientists that lead the space programs for America and the Soviet Union. With Cadbury's approach, the story of the space race is not some abstract, military-driven power struggle between capitalism and communism, or even a tale of adventure and heroic patriotism on the part of the astronauts and cosmonauts. It is the story of a personal battle between two men who, although they never met, shared a dream of reaching the stars. A fascinating read.

Jason says

There are kids who dream of Space almost out of the womb. They love space ships, astronauts, distant planets, the whole thing. My daughter falls into this category. I did not. Perhaps it was my blaise interest in science, or my generally risk adverse nature, but I have been more comfortable exploring Tomorrow Land, than the actual frontiers of tomorrow.

That's a long way of saying, while I have always had a fair grasp on the general history of our space program, its not something I have really ever understood in detail. I knew about Sputnik, the Germans, dogs, cats, monkeys in Space, and then Kennedy comes around and the US lands on the moon. The end.

Well, not so much. Cadbury's book really attaches a human component to a story that might otherwise get bogged down in technological detail. While not billed as such, the book is almost a parallel biography of Wernher von Braun and Sergei Korolev. Von Braun was in some ways the father of western rocketry -- first for Nazi Germany, later for the United States. Sergei Korolev was a homegrown Soviet genius who oversaw the Soviet Union's early success.

The book begins with "Operation Paperclip" which was the US effort to nab all the German scientists associated with the V2 and affiliated Nazi weapons programs. There is a lot of interesting skull drudgery as Cadbury leads us through the world of cloak and dagger that accompany's the imminent demise of the Nazi Germany. Of course, all of this is being carried out between erstwhile allies -- even Anglo-American relations are strained in this arena. The American's score big, and are able to scoop the lion's share of Germany's brain power up for themselves. But the Russians are no dummies, they collect as much of the second tier talent -- the technicians -- as the possibly can, and score a couple of minor coups themselves. However, the genius of the Soviet program will have to come from Soviet minds.

Fortunately, they have such a genius. Only one problem, he was purged to the gulags during one Stalin's fits of insanity. Wisely, he is rehabilitated, and put to the task.

The contrast between Korolev and von Braun could not be greater or more interesting. Von Braun is everything that Korolev is not. He is suave and refined, a member of Germany's elite, when he moves to the United States he basically becomes the public face of the US Space program. Eventually, von Braun will

command the immense resources of the United States towards his efforts. Yet for all of that, von Braun is still an alien, and vaguely resented for being a scientist from the recently defeated Nazi regime. Furthermore, his role in the death camps that serviced his V2 rocket production would become an issue in his lifetime. Its not an issue that was ever fully resolved. However, von Braun's enormous accomplishments will always be tarnished by his association with the monsterous German policies of slave labor.

Korolev, by contrast, was nearly killed by his government, yet still managed to return to the system and perform as well as any man could be asked to. He seemed to truly love the Soviet Union. While von Braun was a public figure, the Soviet's insisted that Korolev toil away in anonymity for fear of western assassination.

Korolev faced extraordinary odds in his efforts. Everything was in short supply in post-war Russia. Pitting multi-billion projects against the needs of Soviet defense (then without the aid of a delivery system to target the United States) seems a fool's errand. But Korolev's tenacity and vision eventually won out. His great ally was Khrushchev's love of showmanship. Koroloev gave Khrushchev a much beloved tool to rub the west's nose in Soviet accomplishment. Without it, its unlikely the Soviet program would have gotten as far as it did.

The race itself is a study in contrast. The Americans with large resources, followed a relatively steady but cautious path. After the tragedy of Apollo 1, the Americans were even more dedicated to the slow but certain path. The Soviet program, by contrast, was constantly running on a seat-of-the-pants and duct tape mentality. So long as Korolev was in charge, it seemed to work. The great surprise of Sputnik and the triumph of Gagarin were testaments to his work.

In fact, up until the very end, the Soviets were able to maintain an illusion that they were ahead. But so much of the edifice rested on Korolev's shoulders, the weigh and the pressure of it all finally killed him. At the clinch point of the space race, the Soviets lost their brightest star. It is hardly clear that had he continued to live the Soviets could have beat von Braun and the Americans. They certainly had the edge. But after his death, the great drive behind the Soviet program was gone. One calamity after another seemed to follow with the untimely death of Gagarin and the tragedy of Vladimir Komarov in Soyuz I.

As you can discern from this write up, you can't help liking Korolev a bit more than von Braun. He's the underdog. He is not the child of privilege, and to the best of anyone's knowledge, he should not have been tried for war crimes. This takes nothing away from our accomplishments as a nation. It surely does not diminish the work of the amazing men chosen for having "the right stuff." But it does make you realize that genius, tenacity and vision are not uniquely American gifts, and the Soviet system, for all its faults, could produce greatness of its own.

In short, if you are not already an expert on this element of Cold War history, I recommend Cadbury's work without qualification. It benefits from the vast additional information now available from the Soviet archives, which also allows for a human touch which makes all the difference.

Artur Coelho says

É história, mas lê-se como um romance. A história da era espacial é aqui contada através de duas figuras de charneira, Von Braun e Korolev, focando-se nos seus esforços para abrir o espaço enquanto nova fronteira. Por detrás estão as potentes máquinas políticas e militares da guerra fria, que viram na corrida ao espaço uma

forma de desenvolver poderio militar e prestígio político. Uma história que começa nos escombros da Alemanha no final da II Guerra, passa pelo desenvolvimento dos primeiros foguetões capazes de ultrapassar os limites terrestres e das primeiras missões tripuladas, e termina com Neil Armstrong a deixar a primeira pegada humana na Lua.

Necessariamente superficial, o livro não deixa de tocar no passado controverso de Von Braun, na violência da vida de Korolev num sistema opressivo, e as peculiaridades da Guerra Fria. Percebe-se o longo e tortuoso caminho, feito de mais falhanços do que sucessos, até a astronáutica se ter tornado rotineira (mas não cem por cento fiável, como somos recordados sempre que um lançador explode ou falha a órbita). Ler as suas lutas e desventuras é perceber o quanto o sonho de ir ao espaço é incompreendido e tido como inútil, apesar de todo o progresso científico e económico que proporciona. Uma sensação que se mantém hoje, onde os orçamentos para a exploração espacial são muito limitados, e a percepção generalista pende menos para o fascínio da descoberta e mais para a ideia de que é inútil torrar dinheiro em foguetões enquanto na Terra persistem tantos problemas. Opiniões geralmente escritas e partilhadas utilizando dispositivos computacionais dependentes da precisão trazida pelo GPS, dando um pequeno exemplo da incongruência.

Wade says

Balanced intro to the space race

A thoroughly enjoyable mission through the space race from sputnik to the Apollo missions. I was riveted the entire time, and couldn't put the book down. Most enjoyable was the glimpse into the soviet program, and a close look at korlovev. This Russian amazed me with his determination. His sad life at complete odds with his gigantic legacy for humanity. A must read for anyone easing into space race history.

Wendy says

A spellbinding history of the race to the moon that actually started during World War II, it is ultimately the story of two equally brilliant rocket scientists: Sergei Korolev, the humble Russian gulag survivor who was drafted into greatness that he would never enjoy, and Wernher von Braun, the flashy, media savvy American star with a secret Nazi past. It is also the story of the astronauts: Yuri Gagarin, the sweet-natured farm boy who became the first man in space, and the square jawed, all-American heroes who captivated a nation. While both sides are given equal time, Cadbury paints a particularly moving portrait of the Russian team, especially the now-legendary "chief designer" Korolev and his friend, the tragically short-lived Gagarin. What they managed to achieve in spite of a lack of funding and deplorable conditions is nothing short of astonishing. Sure, we won the space race, but this proud American has a new respect for the Soviet space program and its amazing men.

Malte says

A nice overview of the space programs of the two countries and the debt they owe to the development of rocketry in Nazi Germany. However, some very basic errors in spelling make wonder as to the quality of the editing (example: a location named Gad Sachasa is mentioned - only after some deliberation did I identify this as Bad Sachsa). These small errors always introduce in my mind the possibility of bigger mistakes

elsewhere in the book that are not as easily identified.

I also doubt that putting the actual degree of von Braun's involvement with Mittelbau-Dora in a separate, postscript-like chapter at the end is a good idea. This should have been dealt with chronologically.

Thomas Christianson says

A very informative and enjoyable read.

Peter Kobryns says

A very engaging book written with a superb balance of scientific detail and pace, alternating the life stories of Von Braun and Korolev the two men at the heart of the space programmes of the USA & USSR from the late 40s all the way through to the race for the moon in the late 60s

The author balances the political and pure science imperatives in a finely nuanced fashion not shying away from trying to shine as much light as possible on von Braun's work for the Nazis in WWII and the use of forced labour for his programmes that he seems to have been complicit in.

The urgency of both the Americans and Soviets to capture German engineers and scientists as the war came to an end blurred a number of lines and the efforts of all parties is well reflected here.

The lives of Korolev & von Braun post war and their attempts to drive on their nation's space programmes under political pressure and lack of funding, often at the same time is fascinating.

Korolev, the genius workaholic whom was sentenced to the gulags by Stalin yet still remained devoted to the Motherland is a fascinating character, he clearly worked himself to an early death and after his demise the Soviet programme fell away as von Braun's Apollo missions raced towards the Moon.

The added bittersweet element to Korolev's life being that while alive the political hierarchy of USSR feared his assassination so kept his identity secret, only in death was he celebrated for the genius he was rather than being anonymously referred to as The Chief Engineer.

The incredible bravery of the cosmonauts and astronauts , some who made it, some who were killed despite being fully aware of the risks at play shines through. Gagarin blazes across this story like the star he was, everyday man of the land transformed into Star of The Soviet Union as he became the first human to orbit the earth, prevented from flying in space again to protect the hero of the nation, he died piloting a jet fighter in 1968 another huge blow to the USSR prestige.

After the Apollo triumphs in landing on the moon it seemed the roles of two main players were set by the success , Korolev destined to be forgotten, von Braun celebrated, but in a turn of history well written by the author she reflects on the increasing scrutiny that von Braun's wartime activities have been exposed to after his death in 1977, to the extent that one of his close associates chose to renounce US citizenship rather than face a case relating to forced labour.

All of this while Korolev's legacy has emerged from the shadows.

A fascinating, detailed and engaging book

Tom says

A good, easy to read introduction to the space race between the USSR and the USA. Like any good book, 'Space Race' makes me want to learn more about the history of the space programs of that time.

Jeffrey Williams says

This is a very well researched and pieced together book about the dynamics of the space race between the U.S and U.S.S.R. Contains good bibliographical references.

Cadbury, in this volume, presents an interesting look at the Cold War through the eyes of the respective space programs. Not only does she examine the evidence of what was happening with the respective programs, but provides a contextual backdrop with other events that were happening during the Cold War. This book further enlightened me to the importance of the Space Race on the outcome of the Cold War.

Chris says

I don't give 5 stars lightly. This book is a tremendously exciting story of the race into space by the two superpowers of the time, Russia and the United States. It explores the history and development of rocketry, concentrating on the German, Wernher von Braun, and the Russian Chief Designer Sergei Korolev, culminating with Apollo 11 and Neil Armstrong's steps on the Moon. Throughout the book there is almost unbearable tension as each side tries to outdo the other, with all the successes and failures along the way. The book is very readable and absolutely fascinating, uncovering previously little known details about the Russian developments, and uncovering the people and personalities involved.

If you have the slightest interest in the development of space travel throughout the 20th century, I highly recommend this book.

David R. says

The subject of the space race between the US and the USSR through the moon landing in 1969 has been taken up by many writers. But Cadbury finds room for something new. She gives a great deal of attention to the first efforts in Germany under Von Braun that is something between adulation and condemnation -- in fact, she's often rough on Von Braun's shady SS connections. She also breathes life into the work by Korolev on the Russian side, illuminating his struggles from the gulag to surprising early space successes. In fact the book brings into focus the remarkable parallels of Von Braun's and Korolev's frustrating dealings with political authority focused on weaponry. The writing is well paced and the storytelling is engaging throughout.

Sara G says

Oh my goodness, I can't even explain how much I loved this book. It's basically a dual biography of Werner von Braun and Sergei Korolev, and their joint but very, very separate struggles to reach space with their rockets. I've spent a lot of time dreaming of the stars myself, and I can see how it would turn into a lifelong obsession. The facts and details are decent, but what really turned this one into a five star book for me is how the book presented the men's parallels so smoothly. I felt myself tearing up that Korolev never achieved his life's goal.

On a side note - anyone interested in Korolev should check out the graphic novel *Laika* by Nick Abadzis. It's phenomenal.

Tim says

If there's one thing more difficult than making history interesting to a general audience, it's writing a history of scientific achievement. While Deborah Cadbury's *Space Race* is not a perfect work, it does a worthy job of telling the history of the race between the United States and the Soviet Union to achieve supremacy in space. Cadbury makes this more than dry scientific history by looking at the two programs from the standpoint of the two men leading the projects.[return][return]*Space Race* is a companion to a television series of the same name that aired on the BBC in 2005 and on the National Geographic Channel in the U.S. in 2006. Cadbury tells the story by alternating in each chapter between Wernher von Braun and the American program and the Soviet program during roughly the same time period with a focus on von Braun's Soviet counterpart, Sergei Korolev. While von Braun was appearing before television cameras and gracing magazine covers, Korolev was unknown even in his own country. The Soviet obsession with secrecy meant that he was known only as the "Chief Designer." In fact, when Yuri Gagarin was honored in Red Square for being the first man in space, Korolev was not on the balcony or at the head table for the celebratory events. In fact, he never even made it to Red Square because his car broke down.[return][return]Cadbury uses this approach to take us from Korolev's imprisonment in the Soviet gulag during the Stalinist purges and the race to find Nazi rocket scientists as World War II came to a close to Korolev's death in 1966 and the ultimate success of America's lunar program. Where Cadbury excels is in taking us inside Korolev's life, work and struggles. Using some of Korolev's personal archives, Cadbury helps us learn not only about the successes and failures in the Soviet program but also in the life of the man who directed it.[return][return]On the other hand, von Braun's history is an area in which *Space Race* seems to suffer. The work often refers to von Braun's Nazi ties and details the conditions of the slave and concentration camp labor used in the Nazi rocket program. At the same time, there is little definitive about the extent of von Braun's involvement. Similarly, while Cadbury tells a compelling tale of the search for the Nazi rocket scientists at the close of the war, there is little on the deals that were struck or the records that may have been destroyed as part of Project Paperclip, the name for the operation that brought Nazi rocket scientists to the United States. Perhaps no one really knows those details. If that is the case, Cadbury needed to be more clear, rather than throwing out sentences like, "Von Braun's own secrets have only recently been unraveled." [return][return]The fact *Space Race* is a companion to a television series also works against it at times. Television series episodes occasionally require repetition to remind viewers of what they saw in a prior installment or to educate new viewers. In the written word, though, material stays in memory or it is easy to look back. Thus, for example, in discussing the ongoing difficulties faced in building larger rockets, it may not be necessary to tell the reader numerous times how the failure of fuel components to adequately mix can cause explosions in the fuel chamber and disastrous consequences.[return][return]In the greater scheme of things, however, these problems are minor

compared to the way Cadbury personalizes this Cold War-fueled rivalry. While educating the reader on the technological and political problems facing these space programs, von Braun and Korolev serve to exemplify the struggle between their nations and the real people behind the programs. Particularly with Korolev, we see the single-mindedness and personal price exacted in this race and a perspective with which very few in the west are aware.[return][return]Originally posted at <http://prairieprogressive.com/2006/05...>

Monty says

A very good documentary history of the frenetic extension of the Cold War between the US and USSR to achieve superiority in spaceflight and land a man on the moon. The background and experiences of Werner von Braun and Sergei Korolev are compared and contrasted with an interesting re-evaluation of the men and their contributions to mankind's adventure in leaving the planet earth. Both men and their respective countries attacked the problems inherent in spaceflight from different perspectives and with different tools. These details are well described in this book without being reduced to physics problems. The World leaders of the era and their contributions to spaceflight are also described (Eisenhower, Stalin, Khrushchev, Kennedy, Johnson, etc.) within the context of the narrative. Personal details of the principals, including family issues and illnesses are also included. This is a good read on the topic without being too dense for the non-scientist. This would make a good choice for a book club unafraid to venture into non-fiction.

Karen says

This tells the story of Sergei Korolev who despite doing time in one of Stalin's Gulags became the Chief Designer of the Soviet Space Programme and Wernher von Braun who despite his Nazi past became the father of the U.S Space Programme. This was a really interesting read about the race to be the first to put a man in space, and of course land on the moon.

Despite my love of the space programme I have a big problem with von Braun's part in it. I know that not everybody who joined the Nazi party did so because they shared their beliefs many were just trying to protect their families, but in von Braun's case he did it because he believed that joining the party would help with his space flight ambitions. There was plenty of evidence that von Braun knew all about the slave labour that was used to build his V2 rockets, and about the 20,000 who died building them. Instead of being tried and executed as a war criminal he was spirited out of the country and his past was covered up because the powers that be thought he might have knowledge that was useful to them and they didn't want Stalin getting his hands on it. Moral of the story if you are going to be a war criminal please make sure you have skills and knowledge that are valuable to the winning side and then you will not only get away with it you will be encouraged to pursue your own ambitions.
