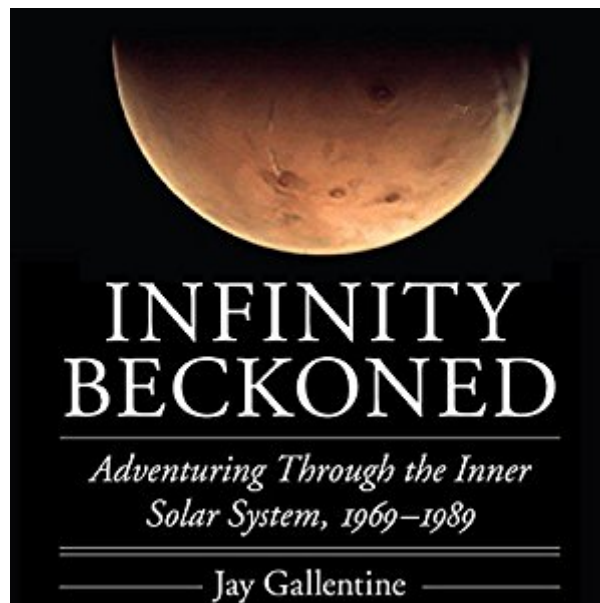




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Infinity Beckoned: Adventuring Through The Inner Solar System, 1969-1989



Synopsis

Infinity Beckoned illuminates a critical period of space history when humans dared an expansive leap into the inner solar system. Jay Gallentine conveys the trials and triumphs of the people on the ground who conceived and engineered the missions that put robotic spacecraft on the heavenly bodies nearest our own. Based on numerous interviews, Gallentine delivers a rich variety of stories involving the men and women, American and Russian, responsible for such groundbreaking endeavors as the Mars Viking missions of the 1970s and the Soviet Venera flights to Venus in the 1980s. From the dreamers responsible for the Venus landing who discovered that dropping down through heavy clouds of sulfuric acid and 900-degree heat was best accomplished by surfing to the five-man teams puppeteering the Soviet moon rovers from a top-secret, off-the-map town without a name, the people who come to life in this book persevered in often trying, thankless circumstances. Their legacy is our better understanding of our own planet and our place in the cosmos.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

First, let me heap much-deserved praise on Jay Gallentine. The research that has gone into this book is obviously extremely detailed, especially on the Soviet stories. Well done Jay; this book is a worthy follow-on to "Ambassadors from Earth". Thankfully, somebody has captured these stories while the main players are still alive. A couple of tips: you need to concentrate and devote your full attention to the story lines when reading this book. Do not make the mistake I did of picking it up, reading a few pages and putting it down again. It becomes very hard to follow if you do that, not

helped by the sometimes colloquial, conversation writing style. That writing style worked very well in "Ambassadors"; less so with "Infinity Beckoned" because of the added complexity of some of the subject matter. So you need to read this book in large slabs. A major theme running through the book is the life science experiment program onboard Viking. This is obviously an extremely technical subject matter, and the results of the experiments were inconclusive and subject to interpretation by different program scientists who had experiments onboard. By including Viking in the book, Jay had no choice but to tackle the monumental task of simplifying this very complex subject. Although (by and large) this has been done well, I still found it hard to follow especially when split across a number of non-sequential chapters. So pay particular attention this when reading this part of the book; you may find yourself flipping back to earlier pages to recall details that become relevant in later chapters. Another major story is the Lunakhod program. This is covered really really well, not only by describing the highly-secret Soviet system behind which the program operated, but also the trials and tribulations of the "sitting cosmonauts" who drove the Lunakhods remotely and on a time delay. This is one of the best aspects of the book, in my view. Also, the Venera program is detailed very well; less so the the Vega program in my opinion. If you have read Ambassadors, then you really need to read Infinity as well. If you loved Ambassadors (like I did), then it may take you a little extra time before you warm up to Infinity, but you will be rewarded for your perseverance in the end. Full marks to Jay for covering material that nobody has ventured near before. Really well done.

With 'Infinity Beckoned' the author has produced a worthy follow-up to his 'Ambassadors from Earth' — this time mainly concentrating on Soviet attempts to conquer the Moon and the more complex task of exploring the surfaces of Venus and Mars. Its slightly idiosyncratic wordplay might jar at first but once you get used to it, it really brings the missions to life. The book is also enriched by in-depth interviews with several Russian scientists who — survived —™ this intense period in unmanned spaceflight history.

If Jay Gallentine wrote the phone book, it would be a best seller. This is a wonderful book, and tells stories that have not been told before. Want to know what a Sitting Cosmonaut is? Read this book! If you think a book about unmanned spaceflight can't be exciting, you are wrong. This book will make you wish it never ended. Jay's sense of humor comes through brilliantly and his knowledge of the era and programs are just amazing. And what author would learn to speak Russian just to be able to research material for his book better? "Ambassadors from Earth" was great. This book is

incredible. You need them both.

Like many baby-boomers, my perception of the early days of space exploration was largely colored by the fact that the Space Race was a high-profile battleground of the Cold War. It seemed to me that this competition was taking place on an uneven field, with the U.S. efforts--successful and unsuccessful--being completely transparent to the public, while those originating in the Soviet Union were carried out under the utmost secrecy. We would learn only what the Soviet leadership wanted us to learn, and only when they wanted us to learn it. Indeed, I recall widespread rumors that the Soviets had suffered catastrophic failures--perhaps with some degree of regularity--that had been carefully hidden from the world. In doing research for this wonderful book, author Jay Gallentine clearly gained remarkable access to several of the key players in this exploration/competition from both sides of the former Iron Curtain. The detailed human stories that he has relayed now allow us to compare and contrast the systems of the two superpowers and the personalities that they produced. Perhaps most valuably, we can see how those individuals responded to the successes and failures of their own efforts as well as those of their adversaries. Among other things, the book has made it clear to me that while each side took the space race very seriously, they also developed a healthy respect and admiration for the often spectacular successes of their counterparts. This is an inside story that I think shouldn't be missed by those with an interest in space exploration and I am happy to have it in my collection of books on the subject. I think it will also be enjoyed and appreciated by persons with an interest in the Cold War, technology, and/or the workings of highly driven brilliant people.

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