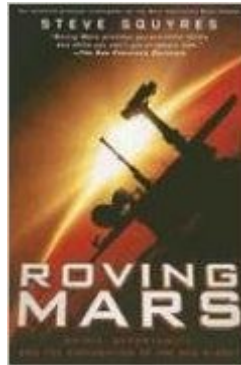


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Roving Mars: Spirit, Opportunity, And The Exploration Of The Red Planet



Synopsis

It's the age-old question: Is there life on Mars? Steve Squyres, lead scientist of NASA's Mars Exploration Rover mission, sets out to answer that question and relates his findings in this riveting first-person narrative account, now in paperback. Steve Squyres is the face and voice of NASA's Mars Exploration Rover mission. Squyres dreamed up the mission in 1987, saw it through from conception in 1995 to a successful landing in 2004, and serves as the principal scientist of its \$400 million payload. He has gained a rare inside look at what it took for Rovers Spirit and Opportunity to land on the red planet in January 2004 -- and knows firsthand their findings.

Book Information

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Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviews Â (51 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

(Let me start off by saying that I reserve 5 stars for books that are truly outstanding, not, like some reviewers, for any book that is just pretty good. For me, 4 stars is a VERY good rating.) I have felt some lingering jealousy watching the videos of the rover control center at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory. I support spacecraft for a living, but somehow what I've been doing hasn't seemed quite as exciting or sexy as working with rovers on Mars (and particularly not now, with Goddard's heyday apparently in the past.) Squyres' book both dulls and enhances the glamor. He spends some time talking about the long, hard slog he took to become Principal Investigator for a Mars mission, starting in 1989 with an effort to develop a camera to fly on a NASA Mars mission. He proposed sticking it on a mission called MESUR Pathfinder in the early 90's and was turned down. He tried again to develop a science package to go to Mars in 1998, and that was turned down. NASA

expressed interest again a few years later, he resubmitted, and it was turned down again. He put a lot of work into a complex set of missions set to start going to Mars in 2001, a program that was killed when Mars Climate Orbiter and Mars Polar Lander failed in quick succession. By 2000, though, NASA was looking for a glamorous mission to redeem its Mars reputation, and Squyres' rover seemed to fit the bill. Not only was his mission chosen, but he was asked for two of them. The schedule ended up being brutal, having to develop a complex mission inside of three years with the unforgiving, inflexible 2003 Mars launch window looming up ahead.

There's a book-length irony in *Roving Mars*. Early on, author Steve Squyres talks about the difference between scientists and engineers. Scientists want perfection, engineers whatever's "good enough." Scientists are inspiration, engineers perspiration. Scientists are idealistic, engineers are pragmatic. Steve Squyres is a scientist. In fact he's the chief scientist on the project. Yet, if ever there was an engineer's book, this is it. *Roving Mars* is far more about how Spirit and Opportunity were assembled than why. More about what the rovers found than what the discoveries mean. And a thousand times more about the minutest details of the two patches of Mars the rovers explored than the planetary big picture the terrain is part of. In other words, the book is relentlessly reductionist. Reading it feels like looking down a microscope for hundreds of pages. There's precious little context. It's virtually all trees, branches, leaves and cells, and almost no forest. Is this a fair complaint? That depends on who the book was "written for." Unquestionably it was written for a lay audience, not the scientific community. But which lay audience? If Squyres set out to write a book for people who are thrilled by the tiniest technical details about how many watts this resistor can bear versus that resistor, or how to wheedle your way through the labyrinth of NASA project approval, then he has succeeded brilliantly. But if he intended his book for people interested in the planet Mars, in thoughtful musings about why man explores and the significance of what he finds, or even just in some broader geological hypotheses around what the rovers are looking at, then he has fallen way short.

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