

Authors' preface

The competition between the United States and the Soviet Union in the Cold War produced one of the greatest adventures of exploration in the history of humankind. As a by-product of military competition between the two countries in weapon delivery systems and laying claim to the propaganda 'high ground', both countries applied themselves to the conquest of space by attaching civil payloads to their rockets in order to conduct both human missions in Earth orbit (and to the Moon in the case of the US Apollo program) and robotic missions beyond Earth orbit to the Moon and planets.

This book describes the 20th Century history of the Soviet adventure in robotic exploration of the Moon and planets. Our chronicle includes just those missions launched by the Soviets into deep space whose objective was to explore the Moon or planets. It does not include missions sent into deep space to study the Sun or Earth-Moon space environment. Test missions launched beyond low Earth orbit with operating lunar or planetary spacecraft, such as the Zond series, are included. Launch tests carrying non-operating model spacecraft are not included. We have endeavored to provide a comprehensive and accurate account of all relevant missions conducted between the year 1958, the date of the first Soviet spacecraft launch attempt to the Moon, and 1996, the date of the last Russian deep space mission to be launched in the 20th Century. All missions that were assembled on the launch pad with intent to fly are included. Some launch attempts suffered explosions on the pad, or shortly after booster ignition, or at some point during the flight of the launch vehicle. The Russians were particularly beset by launch vehicle failures, most often involving the upper stages.

There are inconsistencies in the data reported both in Western and Russian sources on Soviet lunar and planetary missions. We have attempted to provide the best possible information based on the published data and on interviews conducted with Russian participants in the former Soviet space program. In some cases we have made judgments to select what appears to be the most accurate.

Wesley T. Huntress, Jr.
Mikhail Marov
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Huntress, JR., W.T.; Marov, M.Y.

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