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Dragonfly: NASA And The Crisis Aboard Mir

Bryan Burrough

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On February 12, 1997, two Russian cosmonauts joined an American astronaut on board the only permanent manned outpost in space, the dilapidated, eleven-year-old Mir space station. It was to be a routine mission, the fourth of seven trips to Mir that NASA astronauts would take as "dress rehearsals" for the two countries' partnership in a new International Space Station they were building back on Earth. But there had been bad omens: a Moscow psychic who predicted a mysterious disaster; a Russian doctor who warned that the crew was psychologically incompatible. Within two weeks the omens were borne out, as the three men were suddenly forced to fight the worst fire in space history.

This was only the beginning of what would become the most dangerous mission in the thirty-six-year history of manned space travelan epic, six-month misadventure that would climax in the most harrowing accident man has faced in space since Apollo 13. In *Dragonfly*, bestselling author Bryan Burrough tells for the first time the incredible true story of how a joint Russian-American crew narrowly survived almost every trauma an astronaut could imagine: fire, power blackouts, chemical leaks, docking failures, nail-biting spacewalks, and constant mechanical breakdowns, all climaxing in a dramatic midspace collision that left everyone on board scrambling for their lives.

Based on hundreds of hours of interviews with the cosmonauts, astronauts, Russian and American ground controllers, psychologists, and scientists involved, Dragonfly is the saga of a mission as fraught with political and bureaucratic intrigues as any Washington potboiler. Using never-before-released internal NASA memoranda, flight logs, and debriefings, Burrough vividly portrays an American space program in which many astronauts refuse to raise safety concerns for fear they will be frozen out of future missions. It offers an unprecedented look inside the rattletrap Russian space program, where the desperate thirst for hard currency leads to safety shortcuts and exhausted, puppetlike cosmonauts endure truly inhuman pressures from their unfeeling, all-powerful masters on the ground.

In *Dragonfly*, for the first time, the American astronauts who journeyed to Mir speak out bluntly about the failings of the program, from the rigors of training at Russia's Star City military base to the slapdash experiments they were required to perform in space. Yet through it all the men and women of the Russian and American programs persevered, forging friendships that will serve them well as the two countries prepare for the first launches of the International Space Station in late 1998. Theirs is a classic story of a triumph over adversity, destined to be one of the most enduring and widely celebrated adventure stories of our time.

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