Dr. Space: The Life of Wernher von Braun

Von Bob Ward
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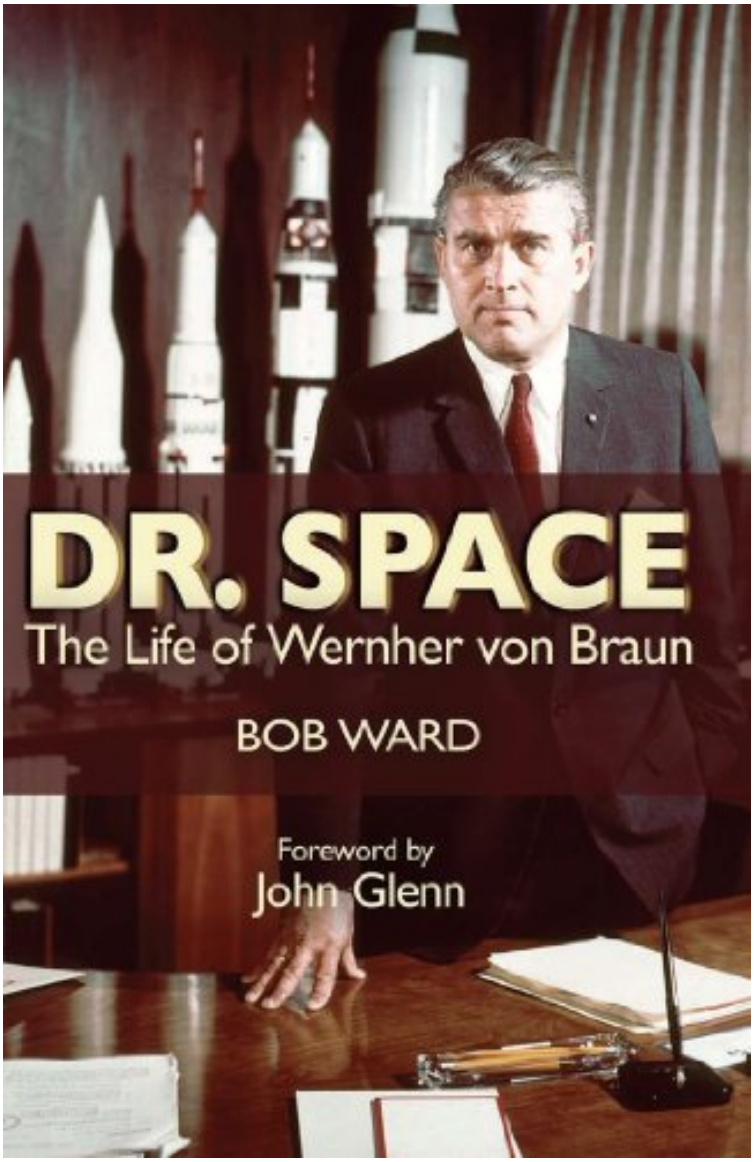

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Von Bob Ward : Dr. Space: The Life of Wernher von Braun before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Dr. Space: The Life of Wernher von Braun:

KundenrezensionenHilfreichste Kundenrezensionen2 von 2 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. My Best Birthday PresentVon Meks Librarian"Dr. Space" is a nickname that was given to Dr. Wernher von Braun, the German-born rocket scientist whose work was crucial in allowing the US to reach their goal of a manned moon landing within the decade of the 1960s, as set by President Kennedy in his memorable speech of 1962."Dr. Space" is also the title of

this biography about von Braun; a book I very much wanted and received as a birthday gift back in March from my sister.The author, Bob Ward, knew von Braun personally through work: he was a young journalist assigned to cover space flight topics for his newspaper, and von Braun took him under his wings, teaching him what he needed to know about the physics of space flight in order to get his facts right.Wernher von Braun was/is a controversial figure, and I am aware of what has been said and written against him as well as for him. Therefore, what I really like about this biography is that the author does not take sides. Instead, he collects whatever information he can gather about his subject, presenting it chronologically and in a manner neutrally enough for the reader to form his or her own opinion - as good, professional journalism should do.Bob Ward knew and interviewed personally many of the people who worked closely with von Braun, many of them being also close personal friends, not just colleagues. He does not quote or cite anyone without a reference; there is a long list of source material in the book.Also, there are two appendixes: one "Letter on Goddard Patents" and the other "Letter on Moral Responsibility in Hitler's Germany".Let me share two quotes from the book with you: "[The Saturn V rocket was] a machine the size of a cathedarl built to the tolerances of a microscope." "He preached individual responsibility and absolute perfection of product , having learned the hard way in the rocket and satellite business that near perfection is the equivalent of disaster."I have read many books and seen many documentaries about von Braun, and as he died in 1977 (so that nothing "new" could have happened recently), I did not expect great surprises. But I did indeed learn several new facts about von Braun's life, his work and his family. This is a book that will go on the "space shelf" of the book case in my bedroom, and I am very probably going to read it again at some stage.1 von 1 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. DR. SPACE THE LIFE OF WERNHER VON BRAUNVon Rajinder Singh Dr.Forty years ago German born Wernher von Braun and his team successfully launched Apollo 11 and landed the American Neil Armstrong on the moon. The present book Dr Space The life of Wernher von Braun is on the man. It tells a fascinating story of his success and downfall. For Indian readers it will be of interest to know that a number of times he visited India. He met Indias great politician Mrs. Indira Gandhi. He praised Indias SLV3 - Space Launch Vehicle. After seeing the Taj Mahal he said to his American colleague: We think we are doing this wonderful, enormous effort with the Moon-landing program. But these building projects in India long ago rivalled it, considering the resources expended and the technology available then (p. 147). At the 40th anniversary of the moon landing mass media has reported extensively. A number of books have appeared telling the story of the landing and of von Braun. Dr. Space - is one of them. It contains 22 Chapters, an Epilogue, Appendix A: Letter on Goddard Patents (showing that von Braun and his team did not stole Americans ideas on rocketry) and Appendix B: Letter on Moral responsibility in Hitlers Germany (in which von Braun justified: why he was not able to act against the Nazi-regime to save the lives of others). In the end the lists of books written by von Braun and on him are given. In Preface, the author Bob Ward mentions that he interviewed a number of people who came in contact with von Braun. The astronaut - John Glenn, who met Von Braun and found in him a deep religious scientist and a philosopher, wrote the Foreword.The first seven chapters are about von Brauns life in Germany. It is a well-known fact that prominent persons have not easy lives. Most of the time they are asked for autographs. In the first chapter That accursed blessing a number of examples, related to autograph stories, from von Brauns life are given. Due to his scientific work under Nazi regime, he was always a target for criticism. Ward writes, Despite such criticism, von Brauns celebrity and popularity remained high (p. 6). The next two chapters: To the manor born and Pioneering rocketry tell us about his family background and education. His idol in rocketry was the Romania born Hermann Oberth, who founded the Society for Spaceship Travel. Von Braun became its member. He and his friends made and tested rockets, with which they convinced the army of their military potential. Some of his friends were against the selling of their programme to the army for money sake. The author Ward writes At this point, von Braun, who was barely out of his teens, showed the persistence, leadership, and aggressive opportunism that were to become hallmarks of his operating style (p. 18). After two successful launches, German military came up with financial support. Twenty-three years old von Braun took the responsibility for an 11 million Reichmarks project. In his mid-twenties he was technical-director at Peenemnde the centre of research and development. In chapter Peenemnde priority we learn that in the beginning of the World War II Hitler and the military gave low priority to the project, as they were not convinced of the useful of rockets for war affairs. However, Peenemnde team continued its work. In the second half of the 1942 their rocket A-4 reached a height of more than fifty miles. In Encounters with Hitler reader learns about von Brauns ambivalent relation with Hitler, to whom he met four times. Before the personal meeting for von Braun Hitler was only a pompous fool with a Charlie Chaplin moustache (p. 31). However, direct encounter changed his views. He saw in Hitler first as a great man and later an unreligious person without any scruples. He recalled that Captain Walter Dornberger and he went to see Hitler in July 1943 after they have successfully tested A-4. They convinced him about the benefits of the new weapon. Not the latter, but Heinrich Himmler - Chief of the German Police and Minister of the Interior, Hermann Gring - Commander-in-Chief Air Force visited Pennemnde. After Pennemnde was attacked by British Air Force, the SS Schutzstaffel - German Police Force took control over the A-4 programme. As the programme was not running as the authorities wanted, von Braun was arrested. Soon he was released due to the interference of his well-wishers. What demonised von Braun and his team was the V2 - the Vergeltungswaffe, that is, the Vengeance weapon. Its story follows in chapter Comes now the V-2. The firing of V2

on London evoked mixed feelings in von Braun, who had spent some most unforgettable days in England, as he recalled later. The new weapons did not help much. By early 1945, Soviet Union, US and British troops were advancing Peenemnde. Von Braun and his team decided to surrender. In chapter 7 Bound for America the story has been told in detail. At the first instance military did not think that it has arrested an excellent scientist. Questing by technical intelligence team removed all doubt that the Americans had landed the real thing, writes the author (pp. 56-57). The US military decided to import 120 persons from the rocket team. Von Braun has proposed ca. 500 scientists. A small group with von Braun was brought to the USA.In the chapter A fort called bliss it is shown that von Braun and his team was brought to Texas under a work contract of one year, however, they had no visa and passport. Their presence was kept secret for about a year. The team launched a successful V2 in June 1946. The US Army judged the importance of the team and five-year contracts were issued. In the end of 1940s von Braun was allowed to attend scientific conventions within America. In the end of 1940s the Soviet Union tested atomic weapons and developed ballistic missiles. The Americans once again needed von Brauns team. The US Government decided to create a new centre at Alabama and uprooted the team. In New home Alabama we learn about the prejudices of the native Americans against the new comers. It took them a while to accept us. About five or ten years recalls a teams member (p. 77). The author quotes different examples showing that most of the people did not share von Brauns ideas of space programme. They called him a man not only teched in the head but godless, too (p. 77). In the next chapter 10 Early media trail we see that he propagated the military importance of a space station. He argued that From such a station, or stations, , the United States could observe, if necessary, punish errant nations by bombarding them from the ultimate high ground of space (p. 90). He was successful in the mission. As we see in the next chapter Toward the cosmos, in the beginning of 1956 for the US the top-priority mission was to develop intermediate-range ballistic missile. Von Braun was made the director of the Development Operations Division. American officials had known since the early 1950s of Soviet intention to launch Earth satellite. The author shows that the American politicians were not convinced from von Brauns plans to send a rocket in the orbit. Also they did not believe that Russia would be able to launch a satellite. In October 1957 Russian opened their eyes by sending Sputnik I in the orbit.The next chapter Nobodys perfect though very important to present von Braun as a man with personal failings, however, seems to be misplaced here. As all of sudden, von Brauns scientific activities are interrupted. He is shown to be a person with bad habits like: smoking, drinking, profaning, having no table manners, leaving it for others to pay the bills. Others noted him a person who tended to dominate small-group conversations. The author quotes the references given by different persons. One of them tells that The engineer-scientist was a klutz when dealing with everyday gadgets and machines like VCR and TV (p. 100). Another man recalls that von Braun worked the system to his advantage (p. 103). One of his assistants mentions: A devilish von Braun delighted in having fun at his associates expense (p.107).In New age of space we see that with Sputnik von Braun got another chance to come into the limelight. The author tells the circumstances, under which the news was received by the military and how von Braun judged the value of timing and soled his idea. He boldly said that he would be able to send the rocket into the orbit within 60 days after he got green light from the American authorities. In the late October 1957 he was invited to share his thoughts about Sputnik. Just a month later Russians launched Sputnik II. It took time till von Braun and his team got the signal. In January 1958 the first US satellite was successfully sent in space. Von Braun warned the Americans against the waiting for Russian reaction and suggested the government to start its own space programme. Congress passed the Space Act to create the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, which took control over US space activities. As the reader learns in chapter Challenge of the moon in July 1960 von Braun became the director of Marshall centre for launch vehicle development. While Americans were testing their sub-orbital unmanned capsules, the Russians announced that Yuri Gagarin had safely orbited Earth one full revolution. On May 25, 1961 President JF Kennedy spoke to the congress about the Americans goal of landing a man on the Moon and returning him safely to Earth (p. 128). Once again, the reader, who wants to know about space programme and landing of moon, feels interrupted with the chapter En route to victory. It is about Wernher von Brauns hobbies such as diving, hunting, piloting and travelling. He is shown to be a care-taking father and husband; an author who wrote for journals; a boss who took care of his subordinates and extended his working day with the boys to drink beer with them (p. 149). Also he is reported to be a decisive, action-oriented manager, but less than perfect.The chapter Lunar triumph is not only about the successful landing of a man on the moon, but also the changing priority of the American Government towards space programme. In early 1966 Washington begun to cut back the space program. Von Braun made it public and appealed for the support. He was convinced that 23 billion dollars spent by the taxpayers on the program were worth. In July 1969 the first man - Neil A Armstrong landed on the moon with Apollo 11. Americans celebrated it. Von Braun became a national hero. The rocket team had started its work in Huntsville. It was rather a agricultural place. Due to Germans contribution, it became a Rocket city legacy as the title of the next chapter suggests. It shows how new technologies can change the structure of a city. In 1963 von Braun asked for to create a Space and Rocket Centre in Huntsville. It was recommended. By 1969-70 the University of Alabama in Huntsville came into existence. The chapter also shows that von Braun was a social scientist. He supported the campaign to abolish Alabamas poll taxes. Before he left for Washington, the people of the Huntsville observed Wernher von Braun Day. The building of the von Braun Civic

Cultural Centre in recognition of his services was announced.The following three chapters: After Apollo, what?, D.C. and the Gods and Perigee in Washington are about von Brauns shift from Huntsville to NASA and a free fall of his career. In the NASA he occupied a challenging position. His boss Tom Paine and von Braun made a space programme plan for the US. Their twenty years plan included the building of a Skylab, Space Shuttle and unmanned mission to Mars. The Government authorities did not support it. In protest Paine left the NASA. With that started von Brauns free fall. People in Washington did not forget his Nazi past. Though, nominally he was the fourth-highest official in the agency, in most of the meetings he was not even invited. In one of the meetings he was told that he is not well come. As the author put it, , von Braun decided to end his free fall at NASA (p. 201). On May 26, 1972 he announced his retirement. None in the NASA tried to keep him. With that there was no end of his scientific career as we see in chapter On the private side. It is not about von Brauns private life, but working in a private organisation Fairchild Industries in Maryland an aerospace company making satellites. Ed Uhl Chairman of the company was responsible for this position. On page 204 we find, coincidentally, Uhl in German means owl, a wise bird. [Authors comment: Bob Ward is mistaken. The word Uhl does not exist in German. The world owl in German means Uhu]. Von Braun entered as vice-president for engineering and development. To sell the telecommunication satellite ATS-6 he was sent to Iran, India and many other countries. The last chapter Too soon dying tells that during his lifetime von Braun nine times narrowly escape his death. In 1975 doctors discovered an advanced tumour in von Brauns colon. It was removed. After operation he had become too weak. In January 1977 he resigned from the Fairchild. He spent the final weeks in the hospital in seclusion and silence. On June 16, 1977 he died. In Epilogue we find the reaction of the worlds press on the man who gave new dimensions to the space programme.In conclusion, it can be said that Bob Ward had written a well-balanced biography of Wernher von Braun. It is quite critical to use interviews, which are based on the memories of persons who came in contact with von Braun. Ward has verified and talked on the same issue with different persons. With that he is able to avoid possible mistakes. On the whole the present book is worth reading and recommended for general readers as well as historians of science.

KurzbeschreibungWritten by veteran aerospace journalist Bob Ward, who spent years investigating his subject, this biography presents a revealing but even-handed portrait of the father of modern rocketry. As he chronicles Wernher von Braun's life, Ward explodes many myths and misconceptions about the controversial genius who was a hero to some, a villain to others. The picture of von Braun that emerges is of a brilliant scientist with limitless curiosity and a drive to achieve his goals at almost any price from, developing the world's first ballistic missile used against the Allies in World War II to helping launch the first U.S. satellite that hurled Americans into space and the Saturn V super-booster that powered them to the moon. Along the way readers are introduced to the human side of this charismatic visionary who brought the United States into the Space Age.