Rewind to the 1950s and ponder: was America’s first satellite really built by a college student? How did a small band of underappreciated Russian engineers get pictures of the moon’s far side using stolen American film? As the 1960s progressed, consider: how the heck did people learn to steer a spacecraft using nothing but gravity? And just how were humans able to goose a spaceship through a thirty-year journey to the literal edge of our solar system?

Ambassadors from Earth relates the story of the first unmanned space probes and planetary explorers from the Sputnik and Explorer satellites launched in the late 1950s to the thrilling interstellar Voyager missions of the 70s that yielded some of the most celebrated successes and spectacular failures of the space age. Keep in mind that our first mad scrambles to reach orbit, the moon, and the planets were littered with enough histrionics and cliffhanging turmoil to rival the most far-out sci-fi film. Utilizing original interviews with key players, bolstered by never-before-seen photographs, journal excerpts, and primary source documents, Jay Gallentine delivers a quirky and unforgettable look at the lives and legacy of the Americans and Soviets who conceived, built, and guided those unmanned missions to the planets and beyond. Of special note is his in-depth interview with James Van Allen, the discoverer of the rings of planetary radiation that now bear his name.
Ambassadors from Earth is an engaging bumper-car ride through a fog of head-banging uncertainty, bleeding-edge technology, personality clashes, organizational frustrations, brutal schedules, and the occasional bright spot. Confessed one participant, We were making it up as we went along.

My Personal Review:
If you have even a moderate interest in the history of the space program, suit up, belt yourself in securely, and prepare for a fantastic ride. From the earliest days, both in the Soviet Union and the United States, Gallentine traces the history of space exploration in wonderful detail, scientist by scientist, development by development, scientific decision by political decision. And of course, failure after failure after smashing success.

You might think a book like this would be rather a dull history, but you couldn't be farther from the truth. Yes, Gallentine researched all those things to within an inch of their lives, so all the important details are here. But with his casual, conversational style and keen storytelling ability, he brings the events to life in a tale that is absolutely riveting.

Beginning with James Van Allen's discovery of the radiation belts around the earth, then backtracking to the first development of rockets by Germany, the Soviet Union, and the United States during World War Two, the tale soon splits into two main branches, following teams of scientists in the USSR and the US as they race to find ways of getting first a satellite into space, and then finally a living being. Much of the American history is well-known if you look in the right places, but Gallentine presents information from the Soviet side that nobody on this side of the Iron Curtain ever knew before. The book would be worth reading for that alone.

Yet even on "this side," the public never knew the hair-tearing frustrations so many scientists lived with as they wrestled to get rockets off the ground in the first place, then had to deal with budgets, radiation, fuel loads, and how to fit cameras and experimental equipment into the smallest space possible that would still let them work optimally. Nor did most of us know how much of the work was political, either struggling to get the politicians on their side or, sometimes worse, having them on their side and then having to live up to their impossible demands and deadlines. (Khrushchev wants a six-month already-impossible satellite schedule moved up three months to coincide with a significant Soviet anniversary? Piece of cake, right?)

Occasionally Gallentine's style gets just a bit too "gosh darnit" for comfort. But those brief moments are quickly forgotten as he sweeps you into the next big development, and then the casual style puts you right in the moment. He brings the main characters in the space exploration race vividly alive, and puts you on the edge of your seat as the story progresses, even while you already know how it turned out.
If you love the idea of space exploration, and have any interest at all in how the human race started with missiles and ended up going to the Moon and extending its consciousness into the farthest reaches of the solar system, you will want this book.

For More 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price:
Ambassadors from Earth: Pioneering Explorations with Unmanned Spacecraft (Outward Odyssey: A Peoples History of Spacelfight) by Jay Gallentine - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!