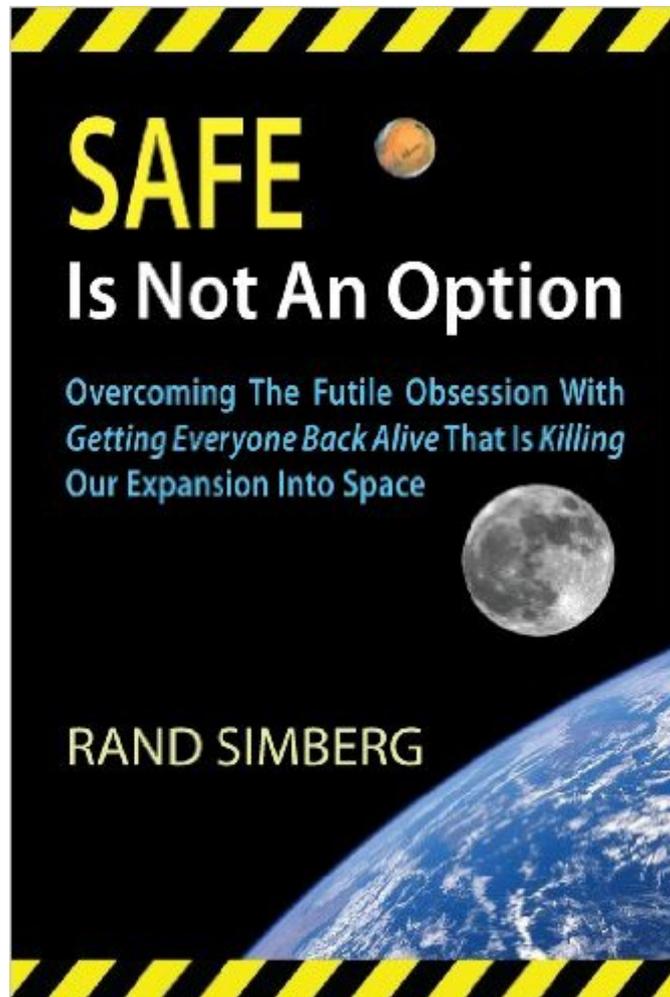


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Safe Is Not An Option



Synopsis

The history of exploration and establishment of new lands, science and technologies has always entailed risk to the health and lives of the explorers. Yet, when it comes to exploring and developing the high frontier of space, the harshest frontier ever, the highest value is apparently not the accomplishment of those goals, but of minimizing, if not eliminating, the possibility of injury or death of the humans carrying them out. For decades since the end of Apollo, human spaceflight has been very expensive and relatively rare (about 500 people total, with a death rate of about 4%), largely because of this risk aversion on the part of the federal government and culture. From the Space Shuttle, to the International Space Station, the new commercial crew program to deliver astronauts to it, and the regulatory approach for commercial spaceflight providers, our attitude toward safety has been fundamentally irrational, expensive and even dangerous, while generating minimal accomplishment for maximal cost. This book entertainingly explains why this means that we must regulate passenger safety in the new commercial spaceflight industry with a lighter hand than many might instinctively prefer, that NASA must more carefully evaluate rewards from a planned mission to rationally determine how much should be spent to avoid the loss of participants, and that Congress must stop insisting that safety is the highest priority, for such insistence is an eloquent testament to how unimportant they and the nation consider the opening of this new frontier.

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Customer Reviews

This thing ought to be required reading for anyone considering a career in manned spaceflight, and especially anyone wanting to do business with or work for NASA, and, really, anyone wondering

why we haven't sent people out of low Earth orbit since the 1970s. To the general public, NASA is synonymous with manned spaceflight innovation, the place for anything truly groundbreaking or envelop-pushing. Thing is, that hasn't really been true for decades. About the size of it these days is that NASA has an ownership stake in the International Space Station, the biggest, most complex structure ever assembled in space. But the agency no longer has its own manned vehicles, has no real plan for sending people beyond low Earth orbit, and is crumbling under the weight of its own bureaucracy. Let me just add the caveat here that I'm taking specifically about the manned program. NASA and its partners continue to do grand things in the unmanned arena and is still unmatched there. And there are true innovators in NASA's manned program. Witness the brave souls fighting for the life of the commercial crew and cargo program. By partnering with the best of the commercial spaceflight companies, NASA is indeed on the verge of reclaiming the high ground in space with its manned program. But that's in spite of the bureaucracy that gets the bulk of the funding and press attention. Why is NASA's manned program a shadow of the organization that sent people to the moon and damn the risk? The reasons are many and varied, but Simberg, who is a former NASA contractor and a veteran of the Shuttle program, makes a compelling case for one major culprit: an institutional lack of nerve that is reflected in a policy of placing an infinite value on human life.

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