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Volunteers begin virtual Mars 'space walk'

By *blade*

Created 14/02/2011 - 11:46

Two volunteers from Italy and Russia on Monday stepped out for their first virtual "space walk" on Mars, which came as part of an experiment to study the effects of a mission to the Red Planet.

Russian Alexander Smolejevsky and Italian Diego Urbina wore white space suits as they stepped onto a version of Earth's nearest neighbour, whose sandy surface was recreated in a Moscow research centre, an AFP correspondent at mission control reported.

The pair were later to be joined Chinese volunteer Wang Yue.

Monday's space walk comes around halfway through an experiment in which participants spend 520 days in isolation to test how humans would respond to the pressures of the long voyage to Mars.

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