



Mars500 by Mary Huber

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Space travel captures people's imagination. Back in the 1960s, the USA's Apollo missions **spawned** a huge number of science fiction films and television programmes. As Star Trek fans know, space is "The Final Frontier". In the popular imagination, cosmonauts and astronauts are brave and courageous superheroes.

However, some space missions are more dangerous and record-breaking than others. For example, when the Mars500 spacecraft first embarked on its experimental simulation mission, the success of the project was uncertain and unclear. But Mars500 is no ordinary mission. Indeed, Mars500 is an entirely new **concept** in space travel. In fact, the six crewmembers of Mars500 will never leave the Earth's atmosphere or take off from the ground! Instead, the astronauts are sealed inside a spacecraft in an old hangar outside Moscow at the Russian Institute of Biomedical Problems (IBMP). However, this mission is heralded as the longest "space mission" ever attempted – 520 days! Beginning 3 June 2010, the mission simulates 250 days travel to Mars, a month landing on the Red Planet, followed by 240 days travel back to Earth ending on 5 November 2011. The mission's aim is to calculate and assess whether the six crewmembers have the psychological **grit** and stamina to withstand almost 18 months of isolation.