



The Rock From Mars: A Detective Story on Two Planets

Kathy Sawyer

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In this riveting book, acclaimed journalist Kathy Sawyer reveals the deepest mysteries of space and some of the most disturbing truths on Earth. The Rock from Mars is the story of how two planets and the spheres of politics and science all collided at the end of the twentieth century.

It began sixteen million years ago. An asteroid crashing into Mars sent fragments flying into space and, eons later, one was pulled by the Earth's gravity onto an icy wilderness near the southern pole. There, in 1984, a geologist named Roberta Score spotted it, launching it on a roundabout path to fame and controversy.

In its new home at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston, the rock languished on a shelf for nine years, a victim of mistaken identity. Then, in 1993, the geochemist Donald "Duck" Mittlefehldt, unmasked the rock as a Martian meteorite. Before long, specialist Chris Romanek detected signs of once-living organisms on the meteorite. And the obscure rock became a rock star.

But how did nine respected investigators come to make such startling claims about the rock that they triggered one of the most venomous scientific battles in modern memory? The narrative traces the steps that led to this risky move and follows the rippling impact on the scientists' lives, the future of space exploration, the search for life on Mars, and the struggle to understand the origins of life on Earth.

From the second the story broke in Science magazine in 1996, it spawned waves of excitement, envy, competitive zeal, and calculation. In academia, in government agencies, in laboratories around the world, and even in the Oval Office—where an inquisitive President Clinton had received the news in secret—players of all kinds plotted their next moves. Among them: David McKay, the dynamic geologist associated with the first moon landing, who labored to achieve at long last a second success; Bill Schopf of UCLA, a researcher determined to remain at the top of his field and the first to challenge McKay's claims; Dan Goldin, the boss of NASA; and Dick Morris, the controversial presidential adviser who wanted to use the story for Clinton's reelection and unfortunately made sure it ended up in the diary of a \$200-an-hour call girl.

Impeccably researched and thrillingly involving, Kathy Sawyer's *The Rock from Mars* is an exemplary work of modern nonfiction, a vivid account of the all-too-human high-stakes drive to learn our true place in the cosmic scheme.

From the Hardcover edition.

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