



## **A History of What comes Next**

*Take me to the Stars Book 1*  
**by Sylvain Neuvel**

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*“All civilization become either spacefaring or extinct” Carl Sagan*

This is a historical-technical-sci-fi book, which as a seasoned space-engineer I liked very much. It is a very well researched book about the after-Peenmuende life of Wernher von Braun and the genius Russian rocket engineer Korolev combined with a metaphysical story of how “Operation Paperclip” and the following Russian-American space-race could have happened – with the results we know.

The main story goes many generations back far into the past of a clan called the Kibu, with the quest to travel into space. The two current protagonists – mother Sarah and her daughter Mia – have the task to lure Wernher von Braun and his engineers to the American space program before the Russians capture them.

Interweaving the real V-2 development history with Mia’s fictional involvement is however not a straightforward narrative because of Mia’s metaphysical connection to her clan is driven by their desire to “take them to the stars” and to “preserve the knowledge” but is also haunted by an unidentified evil mystical figure, the “Tracker”.

If you are a little bit familiar with the early days of spaceflight and the rocket development you will be delighted to see familiar pioneers pop up in the story with their real achievements, for example Mia is befriended to Quian Xuesen (Tsien) of Caltec, the associate of rocket enthusiast Jack Parsons, co-founder of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory at Pasadena, California.

Having successfully completed von Braun’s surrender to American troops, mother Sarah and daughter Mia feel the Tracker closing in on them and they decide to move from Washington to Moscow for their own safety – but also to spurn a space race between the nations to accomplish their own goal to “built spaceships, because they are going up...”

So, Mia soon finds herself talking to Korolev in Bleichenrode where he is searching for German rocket engineers to work for the Soviet inter-ballistic rocket development program. She convinces him rather to focus on a Russian rocket program “not to build more bombs but put a man in space”. With the help of some 200 German engineers being “invited” to work and transfer their knowledge to Russian engineers for the next five years on a little island north of Moscow, called Gorodomlya, the Russians are recreating a V-1 morphing it into the R-rocket series.

In 1950 Mia is successfully improving R-2 test performance as a close confidante to Korolev at Kapustin Yar, “in the middle of 360 degrees of emptiness” – only to learn after her return to Moscow her close friend Billie has been imprisoned by Stalin.

Sure enough, Mia becomes intimately associated with Korolev during their work on the R-7 three stage rocket which later in 1957 will put Sputnik’s “beep-beep” into orbit.

Mia “dies” at the hand of the Tracker when inspecting the new launch pad at Kapustin Yar before

Sputnik becomes known to the world. However she is not dead, but loses the unborn child she is carrying. Relocating to America with her mother they follow Wernher von Brauns progress after the Vanguard failure. However they cannot escape the Tracker still on their heels.

After a wild chase ending up at the underground Vandenberg inter-ballistic missile range in California mother Sarah gets killed and Mia escapes, getting pregnant again during her getaway to Europe.

The final scene in the book is Mia and her unborn baby sensing the stars and Yuri Gagarin passing over them in expectation of what lies in the future...

Never mind the embedded sometimes gory sci-fi story of the Kibu including Sarah's and Mia's fate as the 100<sup>th</sup> generation of the clan – you might like it or not, but the historical facts about the rocket history are all true, therefore delightful for the informed reader, even adding-in some new facets.

Sylvain Neuvel's style and richness reminds me as a combination of Frank Schätzing's (*Die Tyrannei des Schmetterlings*) and Philip Kerr's and his Bernie Gunther stories.

You really appreciate the book and the talent of the author Sylvain Neuvel if you are able to distinguish fiction from facts –because a lot of facts sound like bad fiction.

I have listened to the audiobook, which opens a new listening pleasure because a narrators full cast represent all the characters perfectly through their professional voices.

Another peculiar feature of the book shall be mentioned: Each of the sixty chapters is headed with a title of a popular song of the era the chapter is related to. All the songs are collected in a playlist of Apple iTunes so you can enjoy listening to the song while reading the book.

Please don't miss to read or listen to the annex, where the author is providing a lot of very interesting background information not only about space-historical facts but also of possible historical connections of the Kibu clan.

A great book to while away the "Corona-blues", I enjoyed it very much because of its clever, realistic yet imaginative plot.

Thank you, Sylvain Neuvel for your meticulous research work.