



MARS

A RINGSIDE SEAT ON NASA'S MOST AMBITIOUS VOYAGE

Mars is relentlessly red—rust-hued rocks and dirt, ruddy hills, even the sky is pink. It is a monochrome world. In this regard, I suppose it is not unlike *The Citadel*, which—to outsiders at least—is monotonously gray. And like *El Cid*, Mars engenders a certain curiosity, maybe even fascination.

For four months during early 2004, I lived virtually on Mars. It was not my first trip. As a member of NASA's Mars Pathfinder science team, I had the opportunity to visit the

red planet in 1997, but this was different. This time I was a co-investigator for the Mars Exploration Rovers (MERs). The twin MERs are golf cart-sized monsters compared to the tiny Pathfinder rover. The MERs drove considerable distances, unlike the Pathfinder, which could only circumnavigate its lander. And the MERs bristled with scientific instruments designed to photograph, probe, scratch and sniff rocks and soil.