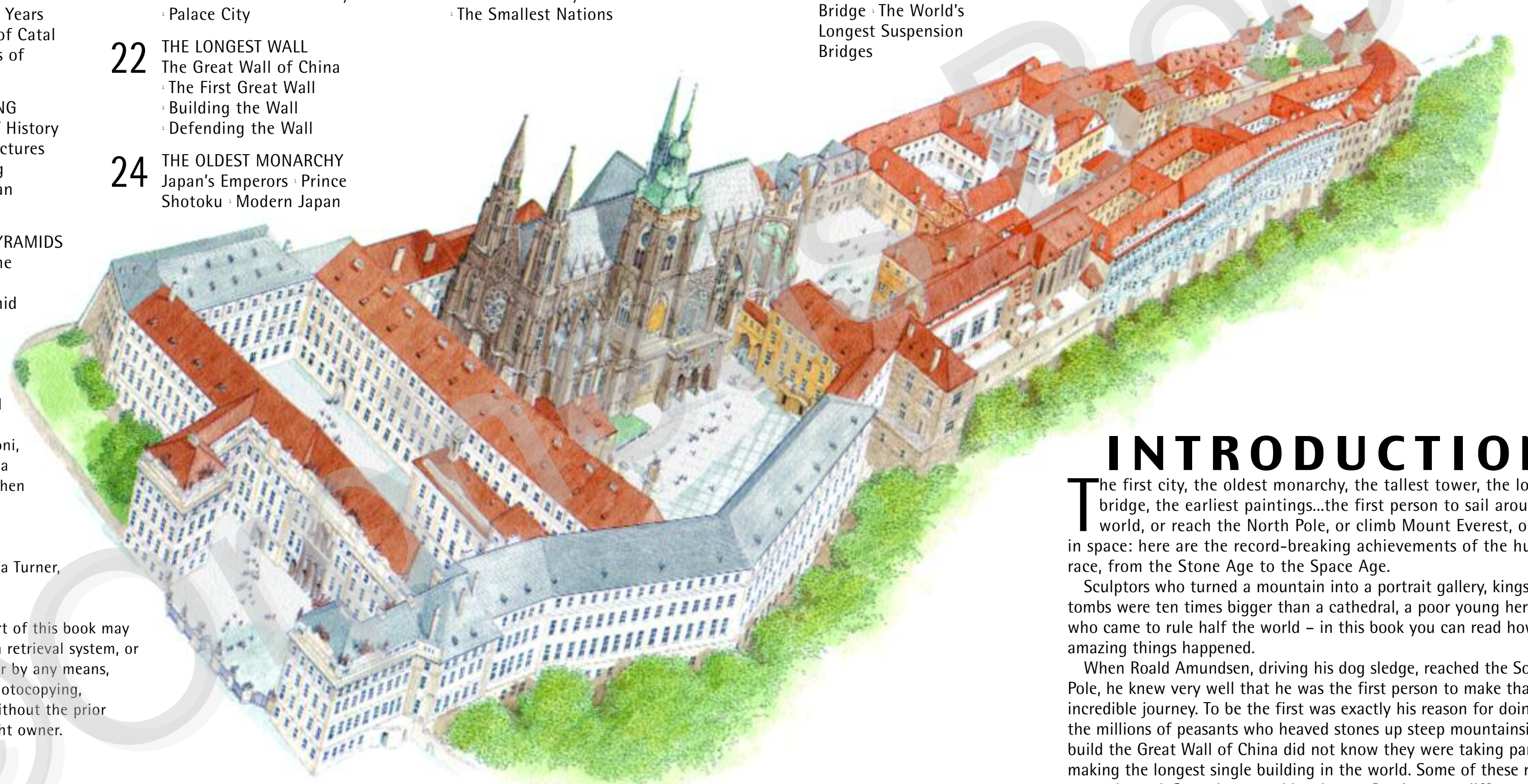


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INTRODUCTION

The first city, the oldest monarchy, the tallest tower, the longest bridge, the earliest paintings...the first person to sail around the world, or reach the North Pole, or climb Mount Everest, or walk in space: here are the record-breaking achievements of the human race, from the Stone Age to the Space Age.

Sculptors who turned a mountain into a portrait gallery, kings whose tombs were ten times bigger than a cathedral, a poor young herdsman who came to rule half the world – in this book you can read how these amazing things happened.

When Roald Amundsen, driving his dog sledge, reached the South Pole, he knew very well that he was the first person to make that incredible journey. To be the first was exactly his reason for doing it! But the millions of peasants who heaved stones up steep mountainsides to build the Great Wall of China did not know they were taking part in making the longest single building in the world. Some of these records were planned. Some happened by chance. But in many different ways they all show what astonishing things human beings can do.

People dreamed of travelling in outer space long before rockets were invented. In 1865 the French science-fiction writer Jules Verne wrote a story about travellers to the Moon. They got there in something that looked like a train!

The secret of space travel was the rocket – petrol or jet engines do not work in space. The first man who suggested that rockets might be used for space flight was a Russian teacher, Konstantin Tsiolkovsky, in 1903. No one took much notice then but the American scientist, Robert H. Goddard, built the first successful rocket, using liquid fuel, in 1926 (see pages 162–163).

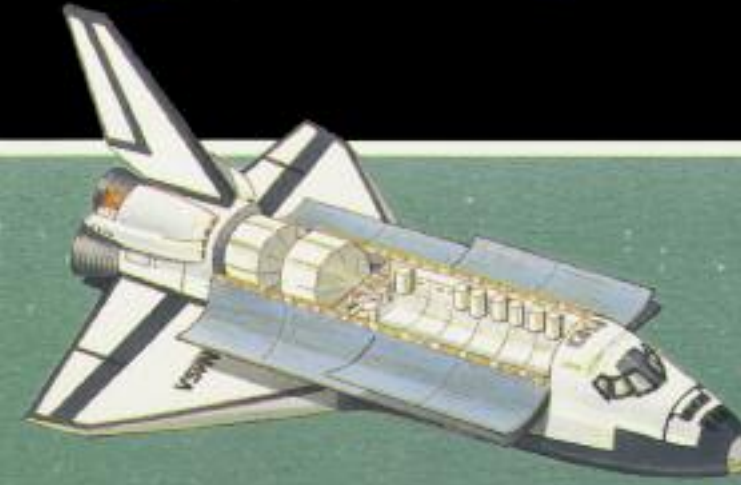
The Space Age really began on 4 October 1957 when the Soviet Union launched Sputnik 1, the first man-made satellite to orbit (travel around) the Earth. A dog called Laika was the first living thing in space, closely followed by the first human being, Soviet cosmonaut ('sailor of the universe') Yuri Gagarin, on 12 April 1961. His spacecraft, Vostok 1, made one orbit of the Earth in a flight that lasted 108 minutes. The descent capsule, which measured just 2.3 metres across, landed in Russia but Gagarin was not in it: he had parachuted out at 6700 metres.

Yuri Gagarin was the first human being to travel outside the Earth's atmosphere.

THE FIRST SPACE WALK

Aleksei Leonov, Soviet ex-fighter pilot, trained as a cosmonaut and became the first human to walk in space in 1965. He left his spacecraft, Voskhod 2, via an airlock. With the door to the spacecraft shut behind him, the airlock was depressurized. He then opened the exit hatch and entered space. Tied to the craft by a cable, Leonov spent ten minutes alone in space, taking pictures with a portable television camera.

In 1984, US astronaut Captain Bruce McCandless, was the first person to go 'outside' into space with no link to a spacecraft. He was the first human satellite. Together with Colonel Bob Stewart, they were out on 'extra-vehicular activity' for five hours, travelling in little vehicles like armchairs fitted with gas-powered thrusters. Thrilled at the experience, they called each other 'Flash Gordon' and 'Buck Rogers'!



A YEAR IN SPACE

In the 1970s the Soviets and the Americans began building large space stations. Much larger than the tiny capsules of Gagarin and Glenn, they allowed crews to spend time carrying out scientific research. In 1987–88 Soviet cosmonauts Musa Manarov and Vladimir Titov spent just short of 366 days in the Mir space station. Their record was broken by Valeri Poliakov in 1995. He now also holds the record for the longest distance travelled. On board Mir, he has flown about 400 million kilometres, well over the equivalent of a return trip to the Sun.

The first woman in space was 26-year-old Valentina Tereshkova from the Soviet Union (right). She orbited the Earth in Vostok 6 48 times in 1963.



SPACE FIRSTS

- 4 October 1957** Soviets launch Sputnik 1, first man-made satellite
- 12 April 1961** Soviet cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin makes first flight in manned spacecraft, Vostok 1
- 5 May 1961** First US astronaut Alan Shepard makes 15-minute flight
- 20 February 1962** John Glenn becomes first US astronaut to orbit Earth
- 16 June 1963** Soviet cosmonaut Valentina Tereshkova becomes first woman in space
- 18 March 1965** Soviet cosmonaut Aleksei Leonov makes first space walk
- 21 July 1969** US astronaut Neil Armstrong is the first man to walk on the Moon
- 7 February 1984** US astronaut Bruce McCandless performs first untethered space walk
- 1994–95** Russian doctor Valeri Poliakov spends a record 437 days in space
- 22 June 2007** US astronaut Sunita Williams sets the record, 195 days, for the longest space flight by a woman.

Soviet Air Force Major Yuri Gagarin (1934–1968) (right), a carpenter's son, made the first-ever manned space flight in Vostok 1 in April 1961.



Neil Armstrong, (right) the first person to set foot on the Moon

