

Entraînement - Compréhension écrite - Mines

Jeff Bezos, Rocket Man

Fifty-eight years after Sputnik, a new space race is unfolding. This time, instead of nuclear-armed superpowers, the protagonists are trash-talking billionaires. But the outcome may one day prove as electrifying as the moon landings.

This week, Blue Origin LLC, the secretive space company backed by Jeff Bezos of Amazon.com, launched an unmanned vehicle called the New Shepherd to the edge of outer space. A short time later, the rocket that propelled it parachuted down in the West Texas desert –four feet from where it took off, and all in one piece.

It was, Bezos declared, "a game changer." That's only a slight exaggeration.

Since the dawn of the Space Age, rockets have been treated as a regrettably disposable byproduct of getting a payload into orbit. The cost of this waste has been an impediment to expanding travel and business opportunities in space. A reliably reusable rocket could change that calculus drastically. Elon Musk – proprietor of SpaceX, one of Blue Origin's competitors – thinks it could reduce expenses by a factor of 100.

As clashes of billionaires go, this is a tame and encouraging one. And it comes at a propitious time. Space is suddenly brimming with commercial possibilities, spurred by a new generation of small and cheap satellites. A company called Planet Labs is connecting a network of satellites for use in agriculture and disaster relief. PlanetiQ wants to improve climate monitoring and weather forecasting. Other companies hope to validate insurance claims, analyze retail trends and offer worldwide Internet access from space.

Reusable rockets could make such endeavors far cheaper. They may even make more esoteric pursuits – from asteroid mining to colonizing the cosmos – more realistic. And their best uses probably haven't occurred to anyone yet. Bezos and Musk are at the vanguard of this revolution. They're exporting Silicon Valley's competitive ethos to outer space, spurring creative new industries and giving government space agencies a much-needed jolt. They'll surely have setbacks along the way. But that's how progress works.

<http://www.bloombergview.com>, November 25, 2015

Question 1 : According to the article, how are current developments in the space industry “a game changer “ . Answer the question in your own words. (80 words)

Question 2 : In your opinion, why does mankind continue to be fascinated by space ? Illustrate your answer with relevant examples. (180 words)