PRAGUE -- When the Space Shuttle Endeavour lifts off in April, joining the astronauts on board will be an
unlikely passenger: Krtek the Little Mole.

The Little Mole -- actually, an eight-inch plush version engineered to meet NASA specifications -- will be
making one giant step for Czech pop culture during a two-week voyage to the International Space Station.

Krtek, pronounced KUR-tek, was created in the 1950s by Czech animator Zdenek Miler and quickly became
a children's cartoon favorite, spreading across the Communist world, from Eastern Europe to Cuba, Vietnam
and China.

By the late 1960s, Krtek, which his big eyes, a red nose and three strands of hair sprouting from the top of
his head -- had vaulted over the Iron Curtain to Western Europe, and animated films featuring the Little Mole
became a major source of hard-currency earnings for Czechoslovakia.

Astronaut Andrew Feustel, whose mother-in-law was born in Znojmo, a small town near the Czech
Republic's border with Austria, decided to bring Krtek along next month as one of the handful of personal
items crew members are allowed to carry into space.

"My hope was to select an item that would capture the attention of both children and adults," Mr. Feustel
says. "Krtek has delighted the imagination of the Czech people for many generations."

On his last trip into space, in 2009, Mr. Feustel carried a book of 19th-century Czech poetry, titled "Cosmic
Songs." The book didn't generate as much buzz for space exploration among young people as the
Astronomical Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences had hoped. "We hope that younger generations
will be inspired by [Krtek's] adventure and recognize that their dreams are within reach," Mr. Feustel says.
The institute and the U.S. Embassy in Prague blessed the plan.

Krtek and his 62 films have been a success in markets from Japan to France, but he has never found a
foothold in the English-speaking world. "Krtek's space flight may help popularize him -- even in America,"
says Jana Mala, head of Moravska Ustredna, a manufacturing cooperative that is the exclusive maker of
Krtek plush toys in the Czech Republic. Last year, the company sold $1.5 million in stuffed Krteks, she says.
The Krtek franchise generates millions of dollars a year for its creator and the small number of companies
that own distribution rights and licenses to make Little Mole merchandise.

Moravska Ustredna produced the lighter and smaller version of a Krtek hand puppet that will travel aboard
the Endeavour. Shuttle crew members are allowed to bring up to 20 personal items, which must weigh a
total of less than 1.5 pounds and fit in a Personal Preference Kit the size of a paperback book.

On past missions, astronauts have carried things ranging from flags and old school memorabilia to Luke
Skywalker's light saber and a Boston Pops conductor's baton. Much of this stuff ends up in museums and
display cases.

The Endeavour flight will be Krtek's first voyage outside the Earth's atmosphere. But it won't be his first trip
on a rocket ship.

In "Little Mole and the Rocket," from 1965, Krtek flies around the world before crash-landing on a small
island. Local animals help him reassemble his craft and fly home.

"I never imagined anything like this for Krtek," says his creator, Mr. Miler, now 90 years old and living in an
assisted-living facility. "But I think the character has earned it himself, and it's a big honor."

**Krtek** was born after Mr. Miler's bosses at a state-owned film company told him to make an animated movie to teach children how clothing is manufactured. Mr. Miler says he racked his brain to come up with an animal that hadn't already been used by Disney.

"I decided to go for a walk," Mr. Miler says. "I told myself that if I couldn't figure it out by the time I finished, I would call it quits." In a meadow, he stumbled over a mole hill and found his concept.

In "How Little Mole Got His Pants," from 1957, **Krtek** learned how linen was made and then fashioned into the overalls -- with two large pockets -- that he has worn ever since. The film won the Silver Lion at the Venice Film Festival that year.

Aimed at children under 5 years old, the **Krtek** films that followed have largely avoided spoken words, relying instead on onomatopoeic utterances such as phew, brrrr and oof, making them accessible to children around the world.

**Krtek** cartoons differ from many of their American counterparts, lacking the fast-paced action common in shows on American TV. One Little Mole cartoon has **Krtek** helping a lost rabbit find its way home. In another, he cares for a bird with a broken wing.

"Besides Miler, only a few other authors wrote plots and stories for **Krtek** and Miler filtered them very thoroughly," says Jiri Kubicek, who studies animated films at the Film and TV School of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague. "He was absolutely against any kind of violence."

There have been no new **Krtek** animations since 2002, when "The Little Mole and Little Frog" was released. No new books have been published since 2004. It is unclear whether **Krtek** will have any new adventures after his return from outer space.

"I'm 90 years old, so I don't know how much longer I'm going to be here," says Mr. Miler.

**License this article from Dow Jones Reprint Service**

Document J000000020110322e73m0002b
Not 'the commie's mole.' There was surely no insult implied. Not that I could see. Just a reference to the fact that he was a cartoon character from a satellite nation of the Soviet Union. Surely Krtek didn't discuss his politics much. Kids don't like politics. No, I don't think the adjective 'commie' was meant for the creator of Krtek, it was meant for the mole himself. The commie mole. Not 'the commie's mole.' There was surely no insult implied. Not that I could see. Just a reference to the fact that he was a cartoon character from a satellite nation of the Soviet Union. Click to expand I have never thought you could interpret it that way. Space Shuttle Stowaway Is a Commmie Mole. Google News (60+ hits). Krtek [mole, pronounce “cur-tack”] plush toys had to be redesigned to meet the NASA criteria for passive astronauts. But I am sure that Krtek [little mole, pronounce “curteh-czech”] is ready for his mission which may include some work on the Alpha Magnetic Spectrometer (AMS) designed to study cosmic rays. The author of the locally renowned Czech cartoon character, Mr Zdenek Miller, is 90 years old. Feustel hopes that the mole and its peaceful values may find some fans in America. The mole is also a big friend of the fossil fuels - which may be found politically incorrect by some people but very appropriate by others - as showed in the cute episode The Mole and the King Coal. Films set in outer space are often on a quest for meaning, filling the vast unknown of the galaxy with humanity's basest anxieties. Stowaway, directed by Joe Penna, pushes a crew of space explorers to moral and physical extremes when an unexpected passenger accidentally compromises their oxygen supply. Despite its futuristic musings, the film's greatest weakness is its approach to the stowaway. His presence forces the other characters to reckon with whether he should live or die, thus the film asks, How does anybody make an impossible decision? What the film should be asking is, How do two white women and an Asian man decide whether a Black man should live or die? A Venerable Czech Cartoon Character Infiltrates NASA. When astronaut Andrew Feustel blasts off for the International Space Station in April, he'll be taking along a special friend: a Czech toy called Krtek the Little Mole. WSJ's Leos Rousek reports from Prague. By Leos Rousek. Updated March 22, 2011 12:01 am ET. The Little Mole, actually, an eight-inch plush version engineered to meet NASA specifications, will be making one giant step for Czech pop culture during a two-week voyage to the International Space Station. Krtek, pronounced KUR-tek, was created in the 1950s by Czech animator Zdenek Miler and quickly became a children's cartoon favorite, spreading across the Communist world, from Eastern Europe to Cuba, Vietnam and China. Much of the deep space action feels like a stage play with a cast of cold characters. May 17, 2021 | Rating: 2/4 | Full Review… Tom Meek. Although the film's main focus isn't zero-g action or space adventure, Stowaway gets suspenseful, including a heart-pounding set piece outside the ship. May 12, 2021 | Full Review… Cynthia Vinney. More rumination on difficult choices than space thriller, but it does provide food for thought. May 10, 2021 | Rating: C+ | Full Review… Frank Swietek.
Space Shuttle Stowaway Is A Commie Mole --- A Venerable Czech Cartoon Character Infiltrates NASA. By Leos Rousek 948 words 22 March 2011 The Wall Street Journal J A1 English (Copyright (c) 2011, Dow Jones & Company, Inc.) PRAGUE -- When the Space Shuttle Endeavour lifts off in April, joining the astronauts on board will be an unlikely passenger: Krtek the Little Mole. The Little Mole -- actually, an eight-inch plush version engineered to meet NASA specifications -- will be making one giant step for Czech pop culture during a two-week voyage to the International Space Station.

The book didn't generate as much buzz for space exploration among young people as the Astronomical Institute of the Czech Academy of Sciences had hoped. Not 'the commie's mole.' There was surely no insult implied. Not that I could see. Just a reference to the fact that he was a cartoon character from a satellite nation of the Soviet Union. Surely Krtek didn't discuss his politics much. Kids don't like politics. No, I don't think the adjective 'commie' was meant for the creator of Krtek, it was meant for the mole himself. The commie mole. Not 'the commie's mole.' There was surely no insult implied. Not that I could see. Just a reference to the fact that he was a cartoon character from a satellite nation of the Soviet Union. Click to expand I have never thought you could interpret it that way. The Mole (in the Czech original called Krtek, or, for little mole, Krtekek) is an animated character in a series of cartoons, created by Czech animator Zdeněk Miler. The premiere of the first short film with the Mole was on Venice Film Festival in 1957.[1] Since its inception, the cartoon won itself an enormous popularity in many Central European countries, as well as India, China, Kazakhstan, Croatia, Finland, Russia, Ukraine, Iraq and Japan. YouTube Encyclopedic.