

*One of the better historical novelists (and a long-time science fiction fan) here turns his usually trusting blue eyes on a problem looming steadily larger on our cultural frontier. . . .*

## INTERPLANETARY SEX

*by Jay Williams*

WITH SPACE TRAVEL PRACTICALLY around the corner, there has been a flood of scholarly articles on the various problems men will meet once they have launched themselves off the earth, from matters of space medicine to the tangles of interplanetary law. Even the average citizen, who doesn't intend to get any closer to the Music of the Spheres than the pool-room in Kelly's Bar & Grill, is well up on the methods of adjustment to weightlessness, or how to plant the flag on an uninhabited planetoid.

In only one field have the pundits avoided any real investigation, and that is the matter of what the intrepid pilot of the first rocket ship to Mars is going to do with his time during the monotonous no-day, no-night of his journey.

According to authoritative sources (*The Book of Knowledge*, vol. 9) the distance from here to Mars is something over thirty-five

million miles, which means that at the most breathtaking speed available now, it is going to take somewhere in the neighborhood of eight months, give or take a couple of weeks, to complete a one-way trip. When confronted with this fact, all the scientists I have spoken to have been inclined to blush and giggle and shuffle their feet, while mumbling, "Well . . . books . . . or solitaire . . . possibly games." It is high time, I believe, that some recognition be given to the fact that Man doth not live in bed alone.

The trouble is that both the scientists and the top brass who have been dreaming of colonizing distant planets, have a cockeyed notion of what the interplanetary explorer is going to be like. Their vision is of a kind of Boy Scout, clean, brave, loyal, reverent, trustworthy, and dewy-eyed enough to think that girls buy their clothes with bumps sewn into them so they can tell which is the front.



These notions come, I believe, from too much reading of advertisements which show Americans rollicking around among the pop bottles or munching candy bars.

It is high time the people in the Pentagon put down those women's magazines they are always reading, and faced the fact that most American men know all the four-letter words.

This general puritanical conception, while it may be true of certain military personnel—Regimental Executive Officers, for instance—never held true of any airmen I ever met. These gentlemen, while undoubtedly brave and trustworthy, were noted for the casual manner of their dress, their frequently intemperate language, and the fact that they enjoyed many of the minor vices such as drinking and women. This may have had something to do with the hazardous nature of their occupation, which led them to be rakish, devil-may-care, and just plain crazy.

When you come to think of it, any man daring enough to fling himself into outer space is probably also daring enough to hold hands with wenches. It is doubtful if more than a tiny handful of fliers still believe that the stork brings babies. It is difficult to imagine such men having a high old time during the better part of a year by playing lotto against a digital computer.

There is, of course, the strong possibility that the first space pilot may smuggle into his machine a small quantity of pornographic material: pinup pictures, old copies of *Playboy* which can be brought on board disguised as Operational Manuals, orgy sequences from Biblical movies, and the like.

But experience in remote outposts like the Aleutians, Midway, and Hattiesburg, Mississippi, has shown that while these substitutes have an undeniable value, it is only temporary; after about six months, the subjects are afflicted with edginess, a tendency to babble wistfully about past exploits, fist-fights, drunkenness, and an almost irresistible desire to start walking towards the nearest exit. It should be remembered that in outer space this last is impractical.

There has been some whispering in corners about the possibility of supplying interplanetary vessels with a machine, to be known as the Dame Compensator Mark I. As near as I can find out—nothing official, of course, since the project is Utterly Top Secret—when a space pilot felt an unbearable yearning for gentler companionship than the stars he would throw the switch on this machine, and at once he would be patted on the head, his necktie would be straightened, and a soothing feminine voice would tell him to go on out and mow the lawn and fix the storm windows and check the rock-



et exhausts like he promised to last week and for heaven's sake, George, to stop mooning around like a sick calf.

I submit that this machine, useful though it might prove in short hops like that to the Moon (220,000 miles) would have a limited value—even if its lubricating oil were scented with Chanel No. 5—owing to the difficulty of smuggling up to a train of gears.

It appears, therefore, that the wisest move the planners could make would be to include in the equipment of the first Mars-bound space ship a young and attractive female. It is possible that this proposal will cause apoplexy among the more strait-laced members of the congregation. However, everything could be very easily arranged—and legalized—by making the whole thing a security matter. To begin with, the Pentagon could put it on a bluff and hearty footing by establishing a T/O, or Table of Organization for space ships which would state matter-of-factly:

"All vehicles designed for interplanetary flight shall contain the following personnel:

- 1 each Major . . . pilot/  
navigator
- 1 each Sgt (WAC) . . . .  
clerk/typist"

Next, a paragraph covering all phases of the operation would be inserted in Army Regulations.

"AR 49976, Sec. 12: Procedure governing relationships of personnel on Vessels, Space, Outer:

a. There shall be no fraternization between commissioned officers and enlisted personnel on Vessels designed for interplanetary travel.

b. Paragraph (a) shall be suspended at the discretion of the Commanding Officer of the vehicle."

Paragraph (a) would, of course, silence the objections of the Legion of Decency. Paragraph (b) would silence the objections of the pilot. If the clerk-typist had any objections, they would have to be referred in quintuplicate through all conceivable channels, by which time the spaceship would be on Mars. If, by some chance, there were still bodies of citizens who objected on moral grounds, the matter would be referred to a Senate Investigating Committee, but by the time the ship got back from Mars there would almost certainly be a new Administration anyway.

I anticipate that many people will agree with this solution to the problem, but will insist that the whole thing could be simplified by having the pilot and his assistant get married before the voyage commences. There are several strong objections to this course of action.

If you take a young newlywed



couple and lock them in a cramped, metal room full of machinery, probably they will not be likely to notice, for the first couple of months, that it isn't the Pluto-crat-Hilton. Things will be different by the time they reach the asteroids, however. By the six hundredth serving of vitamin capsules and K-rations, the husband will begin talking about Mom's can-opener, and the wife will begin noticing that he doesn't bother to press his space-suit any more. By July, they won't be speaking to each other, and they would still be a considerable distance from their goal.

It would all be quite otherwise if they were unmarried. The first six months would be spent in pursuit, rather than conquest, which would be much more interesting than lotto. It is a well-known fact that when a man is dining with someone who isn't his wife, he doesn't pay as much attention to his food as if she is. There is something about a marriage license, too, which tends to bring out the worst in many women. For example, mistresses are rarely back-seat drivers. Think of the awful fate that would overtake a spaceship driven by a husband-and-wife team:

"My God, George, you're doing over three thousand miles an hour! Watch out for that meteor. There, you just missed it by a hair. I don't want to say anything, but I think

you're off-course again. Isn't that the sun? Don't say I didn't tell you. Look out, there comes another meteor—no it isn't, it's the Moon. What in God's name is the Moon doing out here? . . . Well, I *know* you didn't put it there, I was just . . ."

In this matter, the Russians may possibly have the edge on us. Russian naval and merchant vessels for years have carried women, whose jobs are those of stewardesses: house-cleaning, tea-making, bed-making, and (although this is not officially admitted, of course) bed-unmaking. If they carry the same procedure over to space ships, I predict that we were going to have a waiting list of defectors who will want to join the Russian interplanetary flights, even if the Red clerk/typists are somewhat dumpier than ours.

Another problem, and a serious one, which argues against husband-and-wife teams landing on other planets is the question not of *our* morality but the Martians' morality. We have no guarantee that they are going to see eye to eye with us. It is within the realm of possibility that among Martians the most indecent thing in the world is for two members of the opposite sex to be joined in matrimony. We are going to look pretty silly if our first emissary steps out on the sands of that planet and says, "Gentlemen, allow me to present my wife," and winds up be-



ing stoned to death for his dirty language.

All in all, we are going to have to devote a good deal of sober thought to the idea that things on other planets may be a little unfamiliar just at first. For instance, there's a school of thought which maintains that the Martians are giant brains with extremely feeble and attenuated bodies hanging from them. If this is so, our first explorers are going to have to be prepared for, say, gala receptions at which the most gorgeous woman present will be the one with four servants holding up her head. Our explorers will be taken to thinking parties, and to theatrical first-nights of the Martian equivalent of *Romeo and Juliet*:

Romeo: Let  $f(z)$  and  $g(z)$  be polynomials with rational coefficients and let  $f(z)$  be irreducible.

Juliet: An irreducible equation has no root in common with an equation of lower degree having rational coefficients.

Romeo: Ah, spite! The roots of an irreducible equation are all distinct!

(*Stabs himself. Dies.*)

Space travellers are going to have to be very cautious, and feel their way carefully to avoid giving any offense to their hosts. It wouldn't do to go talking about having a bad cold if the Martians

are filterable viruses. It would be a mistake to use expressions like, "You fracture me," if they are intelligent crystals.

To begin with, our explorers should try to find the nearest equivalent to a news-stand even before asking to be taken to the President. A quick glance at the extraterrestrial version of *True Romances* may give a more comprehensive picture of their mores than any number of sessions with sociologists and anthropologists:

"Gkwill drew himself up to his full height—all .24 centimeters. His pseudopodia quivered.

"'Do you mean—?' he shrilled.

"'Yes!'" he replied. He elongated himself and his nucleus divided.

"'You're beautiful,' he panted.

"Seizing himself by the cilia, he drew himself down to the couch. 'I love us,' he murmured."

It is clear that this sort of thing may lead to misunderstandings, to say nothing of trouble with the Johnson office.

Under the circumstances, a few brief rules for the use of future space travellers may be helpful:

1. Don't step on that thing—it may be sweethearts.



2. Once communication has been established, and you have learned the rudiments of the Martian language, don't put anything in writing.

3. The proper response when shown something with four tentacles is, "My, she is sweet, isn't she?"

4. Space ships have limited living space. Be courteous and considerate.

5. Under conditions of no-gravity you will always feel as though you're falling, so don't put anything in writing.

6. Don't take anything for granted. On Mars, the Eternal

Triangle may be a rectangle.

7. Outer Space has been kept clean for YOUR convenience. Let's keep it that way!

8. Express: only stops at Venus to take on passengers or Doctor Fanshaw.

9. It is virtually impossible to walk home from a space ship ride.

10. Every ounce of weight is a consideration in the design of interplanetary vehicles. Black lace underwear weighs almost nothing.

One thing is perfectly clear. Until this whole question is settled satisfactorily, they're not going to get me to go.



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