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So you decided to emigrate to Eldritch. Tales of colony life in a new .37-gravity settlement took root in your imagination and with every ride into the office you wanted to bust out of the roof like Charlie in his great glass elevator, get a decent orbit going, and look down on the verdant marble of the Whole Earth. But mostly you did it to stop having to come up with rent that's too damn high every month and to make that jolt change you knew you needed before you turned forty. The terms were great, basically retiring early, and they'd be paying Martin for the kids' child support without you having to slog off every day to the agency with a shit for brains handwringer boss driving you bananas with her constant backpedaling.

What sold you was that all you'd have to do at Eldritch is farm—contractually for no more than four hours per day on a two-year deal—and consume a diet of organic food in a dense central apartment-like biosphere inflatable compound, sans normal terrestrial gravity.

And file a report about it once a week. Total no brainer. Back to the land, but in space.

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1972 was the last time a man (never a woman) walked on the Moon.

In June 2011, NASA's final Space Shuttle mission will launch into the Earth's orbit.

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Dome life on Mars is claustrophobic, everyone gets high all the time with Roger's open secret shroomiculture project 'cause there really isn't shit to do. Nothing to shave your legs for, and you've already screwed everybody halfway decent in this biopod. Fuck if something hasn't changed in the policies back home, not as many groms are being incentivized into the Terra Ares temporary colonization program. Hardly even any tourists come up to the outback farms except for folks older than dirt that still have a quaint idea of life on Mars as some kind of kibbutz slash frontier existence. Ever since they opened up Space Skicrafting vacations in the asteroid belt, everyone's using Galetown on the meridian for

porting out anyway. The only road out of the monotony is to save credits for a one way and break your contract, and you'd be damned if you'll give in and go back older and poorer than when you started out.

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In 1977 Stewart Brand published the volume *Space Colonies*, a collection of essays, interviews, and debates about the plausibility and merits of inhabiting extraterrestrial sites.¹ Space exploration was a divisive issue; many felt that scarce resources could be better allocated to helping people on Earth than to fueling geeky techno-conjectures about the colonization of

"WHY HAVEN'T WE SEEN A PHOTOGRAPH OF THE WHOLE EARTH YET?"

what Brand called "free-space." In particular, some argued that the extension of the logic of the Cold War arms race would lead to the militarization, and privatization, of space. But others, including Brand, were enthusiastic about transcending the limits of Earth's atmosphere.

It's fitting that Brand, the consummate seeker, would

¹ Stewart Brand, ed., *Space Colonies* (New York, 1977).

initiate this discussion of life in space—back in 1966 he was wearing and distributing a homemade button that asked "Why haven't we seen a photograph of the whole Earth yet?" Brand later explained that the image would be a powerful symbol, that it "gave the sense that Earth's an island, surrounded by a lot of inhospitable space. And it's so graphic, this little blue, white, green and brown jewel-like icon amongst a quite featureless black vacuum."² He was fascinated by how much could be done in and with that big black vacuum.

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Everybody's spending credits like mad on the new Scottcard shoot 'em up. Easy to see how we got sucked in, too. It's more than awesome blowing up that old space junk spinning around Earth, using those nimble retinal-directional control drone units. Especially now that they enhanced the public pilot cam and added kicking audio effects. Everybody who's hooked spends hours preparing—scouring routes, planning efficient itineraries, practicing eye exercises—in preparation for the time trial sweeps

and the big tournaments. The dome pool has you at a no. 3 rank this week, up from seven last time. You're on fire, you badass. You utterly annihilated second-ranked Angela Rigoletto in the big Formics round robin last week.

But some rumor got started, this one probably launched by that stoner Pat you took up with a while back, since his got-it-together bro works in Comtravel. There isn't anything to do all day but speculate about random shit anyway, but in spite of the biopod's uber remote location a surprising proportion of the rumors end up having strong basis in fact... Anyways, talk is that all this Scottcard stuff is more than entertainment for Eldritchers. That the game is just an excuse, that they're using you up here, a simple convenience for bigwigs Earthside to get rid of a little problem. Word is the luxury cruisers have been complaining that the flotsam satellite detritus obstructed the earthrise vistas they pay top dollar for. But you also heard it from Darla that they may shut down the Scottcard since the explosions are freaking people out in the near orbit bases. You'll tell Pat that the next time you see him.

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Matt Mullican's work *Planetarium* (2010) models a flight through our solar system at up to five and a half the times the speed of light. Mind you, the fastest manned spacecraft—the Apollo 10 reentry in May 1969—was clocked at 24,791 miles per hour, while unmanned craft have reached speeds of about 157,000 mph. Remember, the speed of light, the maximum speed at which anything can travel, is 186,282 miles per second, more than 670 million mph. So a person would have to miraculously go 149,000 times faster than anyone's ever traveled before to attain the velocity Mullican's piece offers its user. Even with this superhuman vantage, it takes nearly an hour sin-

EASY TO SEE HOW WE GOT SUCKED IN, TOO. IT'S MORE THAN AWESOME BLOWING UP THAT OLD SPACE JUNK SPINNING AROUND EARTH.

gle-mindedly navigating a direct course in Mullican's animation to travel from the Sun to Neptune. That's a terrifying amount of featureless black vacuum.

Planetarium is schematic: the Sun, the Earth, and the

² Stewart Brand, interview by Jennifer Leonard, *Massive Change Radio*, November 25, 2003, broadcast March 2, 2004. *Massive Change Radio* is a project by Jennifer Leonard, Bruce Mau Design, the Institute without Boundaries, and CIUT FM, Toronto. Interview available at www.massivechange.com/media/INF_StewartBrand.pdf (accessed November 17, 2010).

W other celestial bodies are simple
I colored disks (the Earth blue,
L Mars red, the Sun yellow, etc.)
D given only the roughest spheri-
cal contour. In the vastness of

S space, when you really put your
K pedal to the metal and get up to
Y maximum speed, long periods
of what seem like glacial move-
ment come to abrupt end as
your target whizzes past. While
it seemed you were directly on
route, even a minute divergence
will send you zooming at an
oblique angle into the empti-
ness of space. Also disorienting
is the addition of the z-axis; you
can move in any direction up,
diagonally or side to side. So
you can do backward loop-de-
loops, for example, waiting a
remarkably long time for your
reference points to come back
into sight (realizing that most of
our movement on Earth is ori-
ented to the 180 degrees of our
horizontal footing, not the big
360 degrees of empty space).
As Mullican wrote of the proj-
ect, "If you take away all ob-
jects, you're left with space
itself. But without those ob-
jects, and without time, there's
no sense of change, no varia-
tion..."³ And in that time gap,
you are driftless. You could be
right next to something huge
like Jupiter, and when you turn

your back on it, so to speak, you
recognize that it takes up only
a small part of the visual field
of the whole universe that sur-
rounds it.



You can talk to the kids on
Skype as much as you like, but
the connection from Eldritch is
mostly shit. Martin continues to
act really hurt and petulant when
he picks up. Rosa and Ivan are
doing great from what you can
tell, they smile a lot and tell you
they love you. Still at the phase
where their mom's being up on
Mars earns them brownie points
in the cool kid social hierarchy.

You miss them more and
more, and wonder if their out-
look toward you will change and
if they'll soon adopt a moodier
stance, if a bitter note will enter
their communication, if they'll
come to see you as a horrible
mother, abandoning them to
Earth, and though their future
therapists will spend years get-
ting them to acknowledge it, the
withholding of your physical
touch and immediate presence in
their lives will make them trou-
bled and lonely. The guys with
kids up here don't seem to carry
this guilt; they're just doing a
job. But you've talked about it

with other mothers and the sense
of burdened resignation is per-
vasive. It's only parents under
forty on this mission; something
about how they want a control
group in this biopod. In space,
is Mom the same as Dad? You
miss them powerfully, you want
to comb Rosa's hair once again
without a sense of the demands
of time, to feel her smooth long
locks run through your fingers
and to press your lips to the
crown of her head and feel her
silky hair glance your cheek as
though accidentally. You want to

THERE IS POWER IN A SUNSET WHEN YOU CAN'T SEE WITH YOUR OWN EYES.

play tickle bug with Van to hear
him squeal with delight and see
him unfold his face into the glee-
ful handsome grin you were so
lucky to have birthed.

You always hawk the ether-
cam nearest the southside
window banks. Not that it mat-
ters much; Earth's so far away
it's impossible to see it as more
than a speck even when it's
skyside over Eldritch in the
mornings and evenings. Luck-
ily somebody reflected on this
problem of distance and es-
trangement. In the corner of
every etherscreen call is a small

³ Matt Mullican, in-
terview by Alexander
Provan, *Triple Canopy*
10, [http://www.
canopycanopycanopy.
com/10/planetarium](http://www.canopycanopycanopy.com/10/planetarium)
(accessed November
17, 2010).

box you can maximize that
spools a video of a recent sun-
set that happened in the place
you're dialing, once you type
in the terrestrial zip it pops up.
Somehow that works wonders,
attaching you to their mundane
experience down there. Some-
times you play the same four-
minute sunset over and over
again in the course of one call.
The sun is so much brighter on
Earth, you miss those sunsets,
even though their long orange
light always managed to give
you a headache when you were
still on Earth.



There is power in a sunset when
you can't see with your own
eyes. Walid Raad's around
seven-minute video *I Only
Wish That I Could Weep* (2001)
depicts footage of a series of
sunsets over the Corniche, a
West Beirut boardwalk and
popular hangout. According to
a text accompanying the piece,
the recordings were ostensibly
filmed by a state security em-
ployee who each day trained
a camera on the sunset rather
than conducting surveillance
on suspects meeting on and
traversing the seaside prom-
enade. In his youth, Operator

#17 wasn't able to see the sun
set over the sea, for during the
war years he was in landlocked
East Beirut. The video begins
with a still plausible wide shot
of the activities on the board-
walk, the activity sped up with
the sun setting in a manner of
seconds in the background.
As the footage progresses the
camera zooms in for closer
and closer shots of the sunset,
until eventually nothing else
enters the frame.

Is Operator #17 beguiled by
the sunset, or merely bored, or
perhaps even disgusted with his
duties as a minor state intel-
ligence agent? Raad's supple-
mentary text states that in a later
interview the operative claimed
his detours to the setting sun
were brief, that he would return
to normal duties once he thought
the sunset had ended. Even so,
in the fiction of Raad's piece,
Operator #17 was dismissed
from his duties. The state secu-
rity's effort to scrutinize illicit
activities along the Corniche,
by putting cameras in eighteen-
meter intervals along the coast-
line in a net of total surveillance,
are foiled by one agent's refusal
to participate fully. His footage
of these silent sunsets, with
human activities accelerated
while the sun slowly and in-

exorably descends, becomes a
kind of meditation on the lost
peace of his childhood.



Low gravity is cool. Rarely
bad. Most people use the psi-
locybin "treatment" during the
work slots; at least in your ex-
perience weightlessness in the
greenhouse combined with the
shrooms gives the greenery a
super twinkly around the edges
look, and helps you cope with
the fact that all the plants are
growing upside down on mul-
tiple decks, and in reduced
gravity pogo-ing by them is
pretty disconcerting. Once the
tomatoes seemed like huge
roulette balls, neon orbs, spin-
ning into the atmosphere as
large black women pumped the
lifeblood of Las Vegas into the
gleaming florescent grow lights
overhead, but you made sure
never to do a quad again 'cause
that shit was just too hard to
pass off as workaday blues.

HIS FOOTAGE OF THESE SILENT SUNSETS, WITH HUMAN ACTIVITIES ACCELERATED WHILE THE SUN SLOWLY AND INEXORABLY DESCENDS, BE- COMES A KIND OF MEDITATION ON THE LOST PEACE OF HIS CHILDHOOD.

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The main greenhouse is essentially a massive hanger with artificial illumination, but there's a smaller atrium with fields of hybrid strawberries that is strictly Mars light. You can see so far into the sky but encounter so little: even though it's like a third as bright as Earth here it's perihelion time now and so you really can't see any stars and at night it's just too bright without a decent atmosphere to block out the sunlight. You remember your intro astronomy class in college, when you asked the TA did the galaxies and nebulae really look as luridly psychedelic as all the posters on the wall? Like how did they know, if these are all radio telescope pictures anyway, that galaxies are lambently color-saturated swirls of cotton candy, dude? And he said they assigned the colors afterwards, and you said like arbitrarily, and he said yeah, and then you lost major respect for the whole field of astronomy. Who were these people assigning colors? Did they have, like staff colorists at the labs? Did they know about Delacroix, about Cezanne, Redon, or Albers...?

No doubt it was amateur hour over there. You felt betrayed.



Nowadays when your computer goes to sleep, the default screensavers are swirly colorful universe panoramas, or rave-like lightshows on black backgrounds akin to psychedelic takes on star scenes. There used to be a simpler one on Windows systems called Starfield; it debuted in the early nineties. Starfield depicted white pixels accelerating toward you, like you were entering hyperspace on *Star Trek*. It merged the fantasy of a perspective from a spaceship's cockpit with the still-novel futurity of the computer screen as a portal to other experiences. To artist Olia Lialina, the popularity of stars in computing, especially in the early days of the Web, was symptomatic of an idea that "the Internet was the future, it was bringing us into new dimensions, closer to other galaxies."⁴ Lialina's website artwork *Some Universe* (2002) collages elements taken from websites that use star fields as decorative features and backgrounds. These are mostly white dots on black grounds, though some involve slightly more sophisticated color animations of stars twinkling and the silhouettes

of undefined planetary bodies. Most of these wallpapers were from websites whose content bore little relevance to space or astronomy. According to Lialina, "Space wallpapers made the Internet look special. This was obviously a space with a mission that other media could never accomplish. A great feature of the outer space background was that it could be just two colors, maybe half a ki-

THE EARLY INTERNET VISION OF SOME UNIVERSE AS A DREAM OF ANYONE LEAVING EARTH TO OCCUPY THE CELESTIAL HEAVENS MAY SEEM MORIBUND IN THE CURRENT ERA OF DIMINISHED INTEREST IN SPACE EXPLORATION.

lobyte in file size, but it would instantly give a futuristic feel to your page."⁵

In Lialina's piece, you can scroll up and down the site, encountering stylized figures whose placement eventually begin to coalesce into a narrative of sorts. Beginning at the bottom of the page is a terrestrial cityscape, next rockets launched into space, then satellites and the moon, and eventually ending at the top in a field of figures bearing a close

⁴ Olia Lialina, interview by Thomas Petersen, "Stars Fading on the Web: An Interview with Olia Lialina," *www.artificial.dk*, July 13, 2005, <http://www.artificial.dk/articles/olia.htm> (accessed November 17, 2010).

⁵ *Ibid.*

resemblance to the indelible stylized Galaga game shooter crafts that look like mini skyscrapers.

To Lialina, *Some Universe* functions as an archive of a now-receding moment of vernacular self-representation on the Internet. Part of users' fantasies involved a sense that individuals could project themselves into space, as though they had a part and stake in the future. But like Stewart Brand's *Space Colonies* book, the early internet vision of *Some Universe* as a dream of anyone leaving Earth to occupy the celestial heavens may seem moribund in the current era of diminished interest in space exploration—in 2008 NASA's budget is a mere six-tenths of a percent of U.S. federal spending and continues to shrink; it was once as high as 4.4 percent in 1966.



You gave your life for organic, low-gravity farming on Mars. That was something to cause modest pride to those back home when they heard the news. It was an air purity problem; those in biopod sector 8, like you, didn't make it. Thirty-seven casualties. Second worst accident on Mars. You had a bad

feeling that day in the gardens, a bad headache that night.

They managed to save most of the plants. Only the raspberries couldn't take the higher carbon dioxide levels—that crop was a total loss. The sugarcane did great. Your granddad used to suck on raw sugarcane, and his granddad worked the cane fields back when plantations still processed their own molasses. When you were young your granddad grew beautiful orchids and blooming air plants, and once, when you were still alive on Mars, you wondered why there were no flowers on the compound.

Only food, no flowers. No nonsense.



Gossip columnist Perez Hilton writes, "Dutch supermodel Doutzen Kroes will be out of this world in 2014—literally. The new mom has secured herself a seat on board one of the first Dutch commercial flights to space, courtesy of Space Expedition Curaçao. Doutzen said of her upcoming trip: "My work has literally brought me to the most beautiful places on earth. But apparently nothing is as beautiful as the view of the earth

from space. Astronauts who have been lucky enough to have had that experience, say it is life changing. I cannot wait to go."⁶

The newest trend in tourism is space.

Will space tourism reproduce existing class divisions, will only the privileged see that beautiful view of the earth from space? Who will serve the rich on these flights? Who will feed the models their fruit salads?

As many of the works in *Wild Sky* demonstrate, we are in a threshold moment. Can we imagine and use the "free space" Brand wrote about differently than an elite experience? Or will we allow it to be the privatized space many feared? In representing our experience of the phenomenon of the sky, *Wild Sky* attempts to understand the brief moments of study, never of obsolescence, that motivate our imagination of experiences beyond the surface of Earth. The sky has always been the preeminent projective space, the place where fantasies of rebirth, of reinvention, and of escape exist. In that ether, were so few have actually been, so much of our cultural imagination resides.

⁶ Perez Hilton, "Doutzen's Going to Space in 2014," *CocoPerez.com* (blog), April 14, 2011, <http://cocoperez.com/2011-04-14-doutzen-kroes-flying-to-outer-space-in-2014> (accessed November 17, 2010).

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