

Thrillin' at the MacMillan #1: SPACE TOURISM

LET'S START WASTING MONEY IN SPACE

[by]

Spider Robinson

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I've spent several decades rebutting silly complaints about "money wasted in space." Dollars have been spent getting there—but every single buck stopped *here*, on the ground, in the pocket of some smart person. Furthermore, every dollar NASA spent earned thirteen dollars back. Look what it got them: a manned space program that barely exists and has little future.

Time to change that. Today we need to *start* wasting money in orbit, big money. That means tourism.

Nobody spills money like rich tourists. This province has bet its future they'll spill enough during a few weeks in 2010 to replace the millions of dollars it's given the Pied Whistler to lure them here.

Space will offer a *much* better show than any Olympics, any cruise ship, any resort.

For one thing, it'll have sports you've never *imagined*. Nobody's invented them yet—but trust me, zero-G sports will make anything you've seen boring. Six-wall squash, 3-D curling, free-fall gymnastics, spherical skating, airjet lacrosse—all that's needed is people ready to pay to see them, and astonishing new sports will arise.

So will new kinds of entertainment. Some based on ones you know—zero gravity dance, juggling with four limbs—and some new, like liquid sculpture. In zero-G, water or paint can be coaxed into bubbles, ropes, loops or lenses, then manipulated with airstreams or music. Music itself will change as space forces redesign of instruments and performance needs. So will *cooking*. So will *sex*...

Even today, without *any* such exotic features, Low Orbit is so attractive a destination. people are paying Virgin Galactic US\$20,000 for four minutes there. The new Neiman-Marcus Christmas Catalog offers a \$1.7 million deal for a family of six that includes a private party with Richard Branson, afterwards. Four folks who've paid Russia twenty *million* for a week aboard the Space Station say they got their money's worth, and two more are signed up. My wife's trying to scrape up US\$3,750 for a total of fifteen minutes of zero-G in an airplane, *pretending* to be in space. An industry is a-borning that conservatively expects to make twenty billion a year putting capitalists in orbit. Good.

Space is a meditative, contemplative place. The body finally stops complaining and lets you get some thinking done—maybe even some not-thinking. Hierarchy has no meaning in zero G; nobody's short, weak or crippled. Sherpas on Everest can't begin to imagine the view.

Everyone who goes up gets their nose rubbed in the truth: that there really is Only One Earth, its atmosphere no thicker than the skin on an apple; that we truly are all one; that everything anyone does matters to everybody; that we must all share or all die, and that it is crucially important to get at least a few of our race's eggs into some other basket soon.

I say we need that done to our richest citizens, as many as possible, fast. I don't care if we lure them up there with zero-gee brothels. The more people who've been to space, the better off the poorest nomad in Tuva will be.

Today we're saddled with some of the dumbest aristocrats in history, stupid enough to starve their own serfs. Fortunately, the inexhaustible riches of Croesus lie only a few hundred miles above our heads. Now if we can just get them to look up...

BC writer Spider Robinson's 33rd book VARIABLE STAR, a collaboration with Robert A. Heinlein, is available from Tor Books; for further information visit <http://www.spiderrobinson.com> or <http://www.variablestarbook.com> .

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Some relevant links:

<http://www.spacefuture.com/tourism/gettingthere.shtml>

http://www.space.com/php/video/player.php?video_id=Virgin_galactic01

<http://www.livescience.com/blogs/author/tariqmalik>

<http://www.space.com/spacetourism/>

<http://www.spacetourismsociety.org/>

http://www.gozerog.com/home_full1.aspx

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Space_tourism

<http://www.spaceadventures.com/>

<http://www.prnewswire.com/mnr/neimanmarcus/24765/>

Spider Robinson is the H.R. MacMillan Space Centre's first 'Writer in Residence', generously sponsored by the Canada Council.