

# Life & Liberty

## Space for Freedom

By Poul Anderson

When our forebears came to the New World in the wake of Columbus, they flourished in the elbow room of a vast new continent. Free institutions took root and for several centuries thrived as never before. Today we again feel the walls closing in... on earth. As I concluded a toast at this year's annual convention of the L-5 Society, the largest and most effective of the activist organizations that promote space development, "Here's to elbow room!"

It is a magnificent dream, that beyond this sky humanity may win an endlessness of new worlds where not only is wealth abundant but the dead hand of the state does not reach. Those who stay behind will surely benefit, too, just as Europe did from its daughter countries—by an inflow of resources and advanced technologies; by the inspiration of discoveries, achievements, marvels, and, above all, societies where people are free. Indeed, my considered opinion is that without space colonization, high-energy civilization such as we enjoy does not have very much longer to live. We are using up this planet.

That the resources are out there, and that it is feasible to go get them, has been abundantly demonstrated. See, for openers, the writings of Arthur C. Clarke, Gerard K. O'Neill, Jerry Pournelle, G. Harry Stine, and J. Peter Vajk. Quite a few others agree, in places as diverse as Europe, the Soviet Union, China, and Japan.

Should government funds spent on pursuit of the dream have been spent instead on the poor at home? Apropos this fashionable worry—which is not at all addressed to whether adventurous souls might have plunged into space on their own—it must be noted that the first steps have not been an extravagance compared to other governmental programs. In the year before the first moon landing, when the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) was at its budgetary peak, it got about 7 cents of federal money for every dollar that went to serving social needs. It would be unkind to compare the results.

Thus far the real gains, as opposed to the "spinoff" hype, are often less than

obvious, because they are so pervasive. Possibly we *could* have created remarkable new materials, miniaturizations, computer systems, management techniques, and other industrially priceless goods, as well as life-saving biomonitors, here at home—but the fact is that we didn't. And there is no way we could have made the discoveries and achievements that depend on actually being in space.

Take communications satellites. Like Thoreau, I doubt whether Maine and Texas have much worth saying to each other, but they are bound to say it; and there are some phone calls and TV programs that *are* important (India, for example, has staked a good deal of its future on satellite-transmitted education of its villagers). Comsats are cheaper for meeting those needs than are long-distance cables and relays. Money is shorthand for labor and natural resources, of which we have hereby freed up a lot for other uses.

Meanwhile, weather satellites have brought about a revolution in meteorology. The savings to life, property, and agriculture have already exceeded the entire cost of the space program from its beginning. Navigational satellites are also amply earning their keep. New industrial and pharmaceutical processes, which can only be carried out in orbit, are now at the planning and experimental stages. A Golconda of biological knowledge is waiting, too, with all that that implies for human well-being.

None of this is to justify the way in which the dream has been pursued thus far. It is to hold on to the dream even as more and more enterprising space adventurers rise to the challenge.

True, a launch does still cost a pretty penny, but this need not remain the case. If energy could be applied with perfect efficiency, then giving one kilogram of mass the freedom of the solar system would cost about \$1.25 at the electrical rates that I presently pay. That's cheaper than operating existing aircraft. Granted, it's an ideal case, but laser or electromagnetic launch systems promise to approximate it eventually, and meanwhile rockets can be vastly improved.

I'm not alone in this opinion. The last time I counted, there were—besides NASA and foreign undertakings—seven American companies working to get into space. Clearly, they smell a profit. What is there?

Solar energy is merely the first treasure. Here on the ground, it can at best be a helpful but minor auxiliary energy source; more frequently, it's just another sell by the antinuclear crowd. The sun gives us about 1.4 kilowatts per square meter—at high noon on a clear day in the tropics, allowing for no inefficiencies, transmission losses, or ecology covered over.

In space, though, we are free of such terrestrial limitations. We can make our collectors as big as we like, requiring little maintenance and no fuel. While we should, of course, conduct preliminary tests to make sure, we have no reason to expect any harm from the microwaves that would beam the energy down. Humans wouldn't want to live in the

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by Joe David

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areas where receiver rectennas are arrayed, but they can safely pay routine visits, and livestock can graze on the land. Think of it!—not only no more energy shortages, but no more poisons spewed out of power plants.

Collectors in Earth orbit are of questionable utility, and they would in any event badly clutter up the night sky. But David Criswell has shown that we can put them on the moon, built mostly out of lunar materials. Three stations should suffice. This would mean a permanent human presence there, but that's desirable in its own right. The moon is a mine of resources that can easily be launched off of it.

The moon's one serious lack appears to be hydrogen, but ice may well lie under the poles. If not, comets have plenty of water, while asteroids have all the metals we'll ever need. These won't be hard to get at either, once we've actually established ourselves in space. As Robert A. Heinlein has put it, "Once you're in Earth orbit, you're halfway to anywhere."

In the more distant future is the realistic prospect of moving our necessary

but human-hostile industries into space. There, they could not harm a home planet that our descendants may, conceivably, turn into a residential Eden. Even before then, vigorous, self-supporting communities will exist throughout the solar system. While space does pose its hazards, on balance it turns out to be less unfriendly than the ocean bottom, the Sahara Desert, or the Antarctic interior.

In that longer range, and given that wealth, we may dare hope that a variety of new civilizations, many of unprecedented kinds, will thrive and that among them will be, somewhere, people who are truly free. The dream has obstacles to overcome that dwarf any technical problems.

Government obstruction may prove to be not the worst of these. After all, certain governments, notably the Soviet, are quite interested in space colonization. Still, liberty in space could be frustrated by the stridency of the Third World nations whose unsuccessful "moon treaty" would have banned private enterprise yonder; or by exigencies of defense and war; or simply by the appetite for regulation among our own politicians and bureaucrats. We cannot ignore politics.

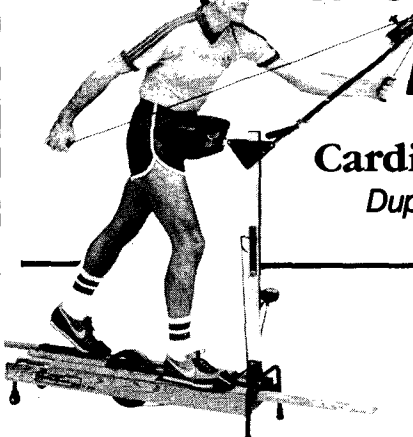
But those are right now only potential threats. At present, the unimaginativeness and outright timidity of our great corporations is what stands conspicuously in the way. They have the capital to do the job, but they aren't about to venture it. Apparently we must depend on the likes of small entrepreneurs like Gary Hudson and Phil Salin, most of whom are operating on a shoestring.

If people do get into space to stay, they will face a set of demanding environments. The instrumentalities required are going to be more than a sodbuster's plow or a prospector's mule—not just expensive but potent, involving energies on the order of the Hiroshima bomb. In the communities themselves, mutual survival will call for mutual discipline. Even so, considerations like these should be relatively minor.

On the positive side, a free folk in space should easily be able to defend itself. Maybe the next century or two will see declarations of independence popping forth all over the solar system. We can do it—we, you and I, can get this started—if we want it enough. In the end, as always, what happens to human beings will be the work of the human spirit.

*Poul Anderson is the author of numerous science-fiction works.*

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# LETTERS

(Continued from p. 10)

was \$5,000 or less during the whole year." This refers to all accounts of all persons reported on a Form 1040.

Under this provision, in order for each of five family members to have accounts of \$5,000, totaling \$25,000 for the family, as suggested by Mr. Skousen, it appears each would have to file a separate income tax return—which would probably cost more in income tax payments than if all five family members were reported on a single Form 1040.

John F. Barnard  
Washington, DC

**The editors reply:** According to the authoritative Commerce Clearing House Federal Tax Guide, an individual is subjected to the reporting requirement only for "title ownership of any foreign account, held individually or jointly with one or more persons, or the holding of a foreign account as representative of some other person." So if each member of a five-person family that is submitting a single tax return had, in *his or her own name*, up to \$5,000 in a foreign account, there would be no reporting requirement. (A complication could arise if a married couple each had foreign accounts that together totaled more than \$5,000; in that instance, an argument could be made that these funds must be reported, though not all tax specialists would agree with that argument.)

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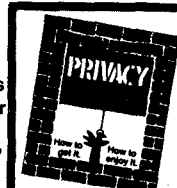
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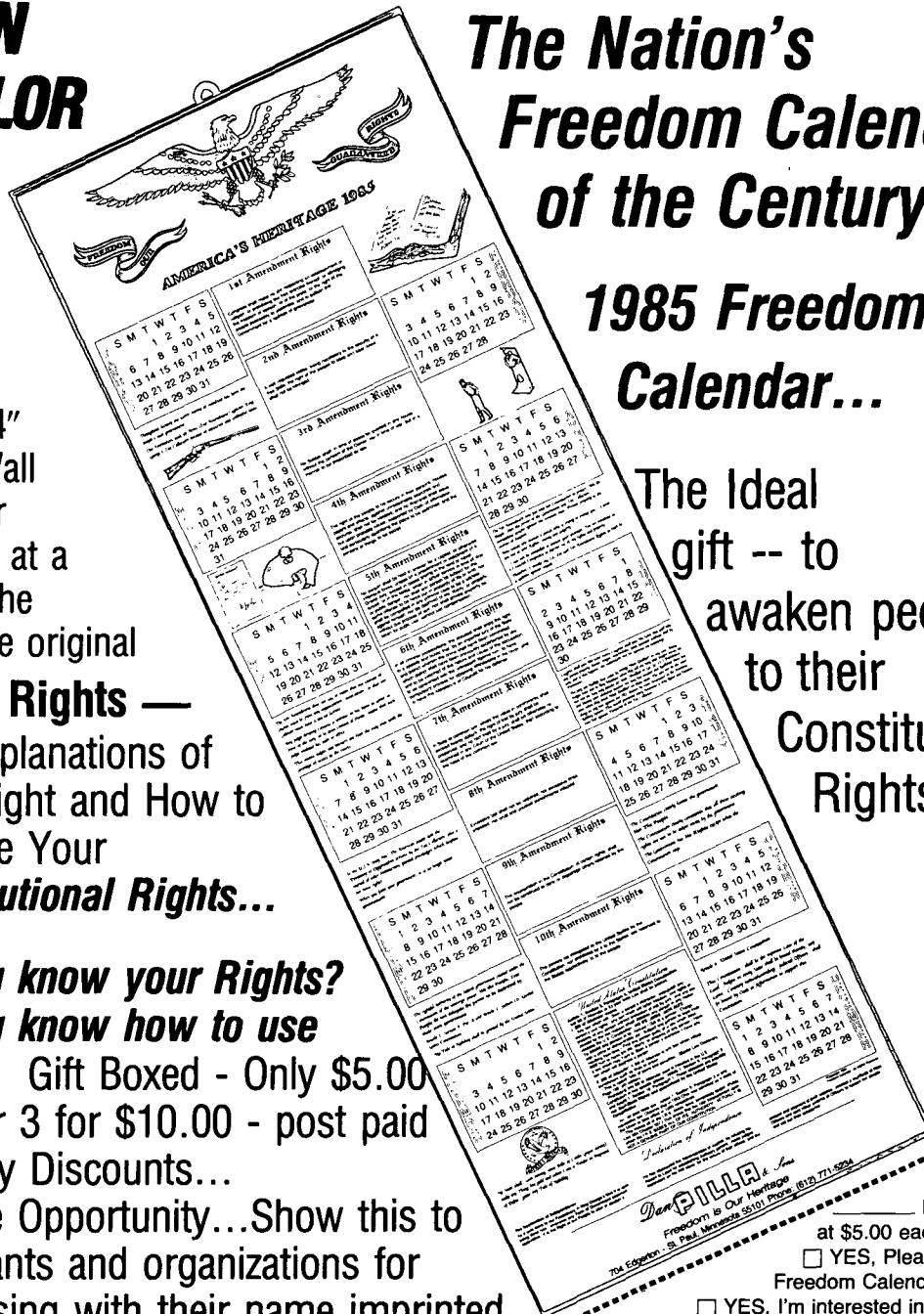
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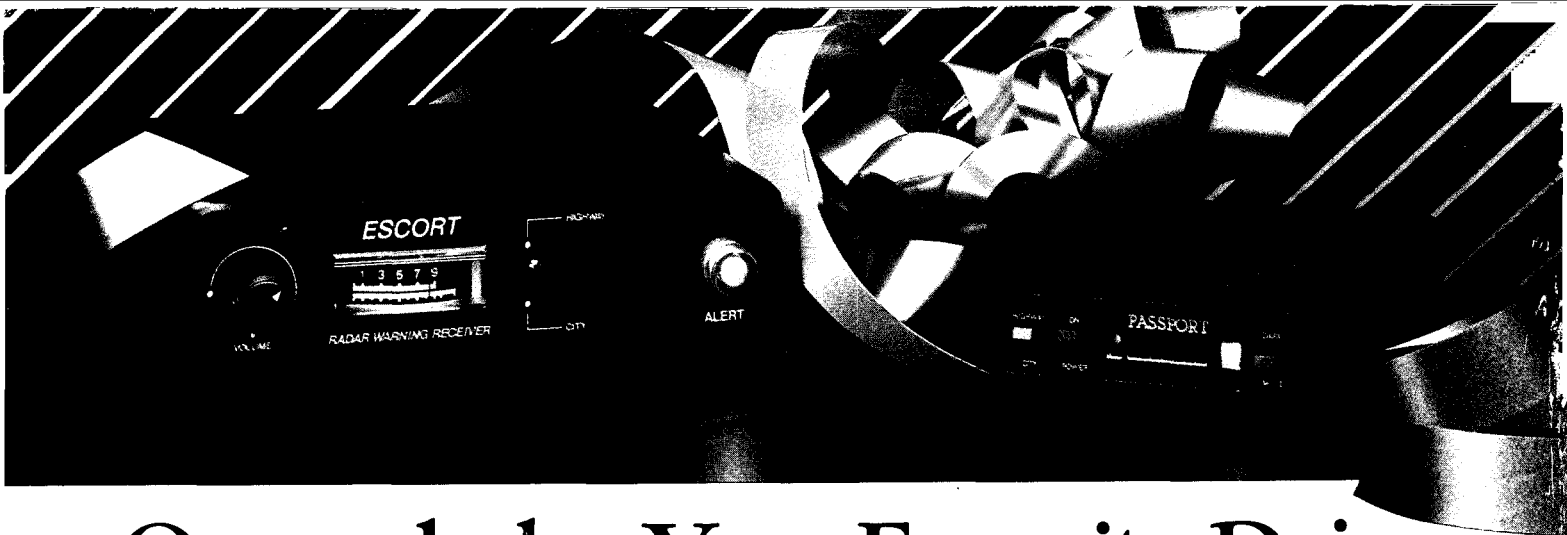


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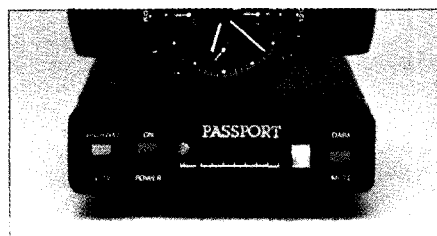
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## First Class Performance

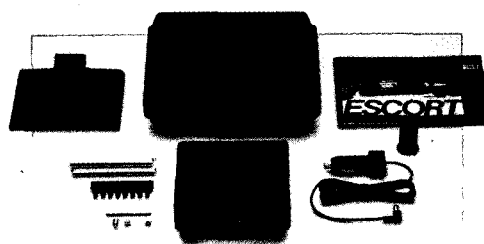
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