

I dream of Mars

written by Nathan Forstved on December 31, 2006

Ever since I was a young child I have dreamt about what it would be like to leave the confines of this planet and head out into the Universe. When I was in Grade 6 I created a club with a few of my friends. At first we would just hang out with each other after school and do things that any kid would find entertaining. We would go have a few matches of laser tag and hit the gaming machines. It went on like that for a while, until one day I wanted to try something a little different. I cannot remember exactly what triggered this event in my mind... I mean, it was so long ago. But what I do remember is what we did with it. We began talking; dreaming of what it would be like if we were all aboard a starship, bound for some extraterrestrial location. I came up with the fantastic idea of designing a starship. No, I am not talking about those kinds of ships that you see on a show like, let's say, Star Trek or other Science Fiction media classics. No. I am talking about a realistic attempt (from a child's mind) to actually visualize, set out, and plan a ship. We drew out blueprints and discussed the plan in between classes and after school. The ship was multi-decked, had individual crew compartments, escape pods, airlocks, even gravity produced by a massive centrifuge. We had low powered laser defense systems, not to attack or defend from any intelligent threat, but to prevent asteroidal impact and damage. Somewhere in the midst of our design I came up with our destination. It would be a black hole. I remember reading books and snippets of information about black holes. They marveled me. How could such extreme, raw power exist? I think, also, I was amazed at the mystery of it all. Little was known about what black holes were... or if they really existed at all. Much of what was being discussed is what most of you already know, that a black hole is created when a star collapses in upon itself, creating a mass gravitational disturbance, centralizing around a singularity. However, I remember thinking that if a black hole existed, why not a white hole. If a black hole consumed all matter, even light, then logically speaking all of that material would be proverbially "dumped" somewhere, right? Wrong. But that is beside the point. My mind was thinking outside of the box, where nothing could touch me. I lived beyond this world and was so engrossed in the awe and beauty of the Universe that reality just didn't seep in. I didn't know that our ship would never exist. None of us did. We somehow thought it would be. So, our destination was set for a black hole, supposedly at the center of this galaxy. (I don't actually remember where the black hole was located, or if it was discovered that possible super massive black holes could exist in the center of galaxies yet. But for story sake, let's wave the destination of where it was... it just was.) Our ship would head for a black hole and then perform different experiments from a safe distance. We would test if our communications would become too distorted with the probes that we sent towards it, the durability of our materials, testing our propulsion drives, and all the while sending all of this useful information back to Earth for study. We would scan and store data of the black hole in our computer system for later analysis. Our eventual goal was to perfect a working vehicle and see if one could cross the event horizon and live to tell the tale. We wanted to cross between realities and peak into the answers that we all ask. Who are we? Why are we here? What is and how is life. What is reality and how can it be changed? Of course any such mission would have been doomed to an utterly excruciating end. There wouldn't have been enough of us to place on the head of a pin. You know that old adage, the one that asks how many angels can dance upon the head of a pin. Well, if the angels were foolish enough to hurl themselves at a black hole, the answer would be none. There was no reasoning with us, though. We were so sure of our selves, with that kind of innocent gullibility only childhood can bring. We never believed in Santa Clause, you see (well, there was one guy... but that is a much different story), we believed in the absolute truth of our devotions. We thought that just because we willed something to be, it would become fulfilled. I wish that our reality worked that way. I really do. But I am getting away from myself here. We finished our planning stages and the design of our ship and continued contemplating our upcoming mission. One of us decided to stay behind and wave his seat on board, in case we came across a friendly intelligent species. What an excuse, eh? If you had the choice of being part of such an event, would you have stayed behind? I think he was just a pansy... and if you are reading this, my friend, you know who you are. The rest of us would, of course, go and meet our destiny in the stars. Of course it never got that far. We had no clue as to how such a feat could be accomplished. After our development stage I think it all fell apart. The only other thing I did with one of them was a science fair project on black holes. She and I didn't get a very good mark.

We didn't get a horrible mark, mind you, but there just wasn't enough information at our fingertips to do an entire presentation on. At the end of the year I left to go to another school, so did one other. The group was split up and we would never again dream the same together. So, you are probably asking me what the heck is the point of all this? Why did I make you read this particular chapter of my childhood story? The answer is quite simple: it is one of my most special memories. The bible speaks of having faith like a child. Now, I am not a religious person by any means, but perhaps it wasn't far off with that. Children don't understand barriers and the confines that we adults restrain ourselves with. Children dream and, if nurtured correctly, those dreams can grow into mankind's most beautiful achievements.

Mars is the start of that beautiful future for humanity. It is our conduit to the Universe and must be pursued and protected. Eventually we will have colonies on the Martian surface, or perhaps, the subsurface. Our goal as a species should be to lift our eyes to the stars once more and to be the explorers our ancestors were. Like the child who dreams of a time and place beyond our own, we too, must imagine a world without limits. The passion of our youth will pave the way for the future. Once upon a time in history the western world was devoid of European colonists. Our world would be much different today if Columbus never embarked on his voyage to find the new world. And like Columbus, we too, have a place in history. Where will humanity be if we do not take preemptive steps to send our children into space? The colonization of Mars and beyond rests on our backs. To educate and give guidance to our children and the general public is the most important step any of us could take. Ultimately it will be as important as the scientist who solves the technical obstacles on our path. For when the day comes when humanity yearns for space and Mars, it won't matter what obstacles lay in our way. We will be like the rushing river sweeping down towards the valley. And once that day comes, when we've done our jobs, there will be no stopping it. Humanity will reach out its hand into the cosmos and, once and for all, truly belong. There is a verse of the Bible that, I think, needs revision:

When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child,

I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

- Bible - 1 Corinthians 13:11

As adults, yes we have matured, but we have also grown jaded and cynical. Let's take our undeniable curiosity and passion into the New Year and reawaken a part of ourselves that once looked to the stars and dreamt of its mystery and awe. Let us reawaken our fellow human beings and, as a collective consciousness, give motion and power to those dreams. We are done sitting on the sidelines. During this New Year, be bold, imagine... dream. You have yours. I have mine. I dream of Mars.