

# 101 Planets to See Before You're Recycled

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## One Hundred and One Planets to See Before You're Recycled

By Lee Hazelle

“Abandon disbelief all ye who enter here”

Over the course of my 240 years employed by the New York Tempo in the capacity of their chief travel writer, I've been required to visit innumerable planets to report on them as tourist destinations for my readers. I owe my career to the explosion of space travel technology starting in the late 21st century with warp, or above-light speed velocities, then alternate universe worm-hole journeying, teleportation, and, in our time, near the end of the 25th century, time travel. These four technologies have opened up not just this universe to the curious and adventurous (not to mention extremely rich) traveler, but other universes and times as well. With nearly an infinite venue to choose from, which are the best places to go? The most exotic? The tastiest cuisines to sample? The most amazing and interesting life forms to observe? The exciting thrill rides to experience? Picking the top 101 out of infinity is much like choosing your favorite 101 grains of sand off the seashore.

But, as there has been much call for a collection of this sort, I hereby put forth my 101 favorites. Well, not all are favorites; in dealing with the tourist industry, one has to inform his readers of scams and over-hyped destinations as well, and there will be some of that in this book, too. I've always prided myself on steering my readers away from trips that would disappoint. After all, for many, a visit to one of these places is a once in a lifetime event that costs a good portion of their retirement income.

Those who know me know I enjoy a good meal and a good thrill ride. (Unfortunately, the two usually don't go together; if the thrill ride is good enough, I usually wind up throwing up the good meal, which is one way I have of judging the thrill of the thrill ride.) Even so, there are quite a few selections in this book that fit those two categories. I've always loved natural wonders and scenery, but, truthfully, there are few planets that offer much more than we could see right here on earth, but I have included those exceptions I've found so far.

Readers know that, of major interest to me has always been the greatly varied flora and fauna of other worlds. There is just no end to the amazing paths life and evolution can take, and, though some of it is dangerous to us, most is just so remarkably different as to provide endless entertainment and enlightenment. As to the dangerous evolutions; well, I put them in the same category as a thrill ride.

This book will follow a chronological order, of sorts, since that's the way I wrote this material, and found myself, as recycling neared, too distracted to sort them by any other category. I started in the year C.E. 2190, and we're coming up on 2450, my mandatory recycling year. It's been a good long run, full of adventure, learning, friends and enemies made. I hope you've enjoyed my column as much as I've enjoyed researching and putting it together. And, now, I hope you'll enjoy this collection; my legacy to those whose hearts look to the stars and wonder what it's like up there.

Let the journey begin.

Destination #1: How Sentient is Too Sentient for Supper?

In the good old simple days, say, 1,000 years ago around 1200 A.D., it was assumed that mankind was the only sentient creature; that only we were self-aware, had consciousness. All other life both vegetable and animal didn't know they existed. This among other reasons put us, we felt, at the top of the food chain, giving us the right to eat whatever came our way. OK. That's nice and simple, and it makes for quite a varied menu.

Turns out we were wrong, of course, as we were about so many things back then. Sentience comes in varying degrees, but even plants are basically aware they're alive and fear and grieve when we pull them out of the ground and eat them. A carrot, for example, has been shown to lament that it will never bear seed and have offspring, though waiting solicitously then eating a carrot that has gone to seed is an excruciating experience; it tastes horrible and you like to never get the tough fibers picked out from between your teeth. That's why synthetic foods made from the re-arranged molecules of recyclable trash are becoming popular. Few people anymore have the desire to eat something that they know is upset about being eaten.

Unfortunately, solipsists that we are, we didn't carry this dawning awareness to the new planets and life forms we were discovering throughout the galaxy, and now we're beginning to have second thoughts instead of helpings, especially since we've gotten back biological surveys of the life form known as Camagons on the planet of the same name.

And I've eaten Camagon. I wouldn't go all the way to that planet just to sample one, and they're way too expensive to appear in all but the most exclusive of gourmet food stores, but travelers there to see the other sights have had them served as a standard menu course. The meat is rich, nutty, a combination of prime rib and lobster, and a wonderful sauce can be made from it to accompany the native root vegetables of Camagon, which are something like beets, only a checked blue and brown.

But now the biological surveys, which always lag behind the commercial development, show the Camagon to be an intelligent, family-oriented species with the beginnings of culture. Art for example, in the forms of ritualistic carvings and paintings has been discovered in their dwellings. And their dwellings are a couple steps above the crude, overnight nests apes on earth build; they shed water and have a place for the smoke of their fires to exit. Fire usage itself should have tipped us off.

They also make weapons, crude spears and throwing devices that enable them to nail their prey at distances up to 100 meters. And now, they're starting to use those devices against us. It appears, however, not in stalking us for prey, for they haven't eaten the few tourists they've caught out in the open, but rather in self-defense. All this had biologists re-thinking their evaluations of Camagon intelligence.

Let's put it this way: if you were to take a time travel vacation on earth back 100,000 years and the menu feature was Neanderthal man, would you eat him? Well, yes, he's been shaved and cleaned up, but would you eat him? Of course, you'd have to be assured by computer genealogy programming and DNA matching that this particular person wasn't an ancestor, but even with a nice gravy and potatoes, would you eat him? Most people say "no". This applies to the Camagon. They're at the same level of sentience on their planet now that Neanderthal was on our planet 100,000 years ago.

Of course, they're not humanoid: that's a big part of the problem. They don't look anything like us. They're quite insect-like, though with an ability to be either warm or cold-blooded depending on the environment, which means that with warm weather you can serve them very fresh and chilled in a chef's salad. Their six appendages used alternately as legs or arms also give them that insect appearance that we earth people associate with life of lower sentience. Plus, since the breeding of the giant Washington D.C. cockroach as a form of cattle and its acceptance as a major food source, our former squeamishness about eating multi-legged creatures has all but vanished.

The Camagon neither know nor appreciate this angst of ours as to whether we should take them off the menu and invite them to dinner as a fellow sentient creature. We haven't found any in the galaxy yet that come up to our level, except for the jellyfish types of the gas giants, and we can't eat them anyway as they just quantum tunnel out from between our teeth, but the Camagon could easily wind up in that category. If they do, how do we explain to them over, say, cockroach cocktail, that we're sorry we ate so many of them and exported so many more to be frozen and sold in food stores, but that's all over now, and are they interested in a trade agreement?

And do they really need all six appendages? Though the rest of their body is mediocre fare at best, their third and fourth legs / arms are quite meaty and tender, and without them, they'd have four appendages just like us, and would be a bit more acceptable in our society. Plus, even though they'd be double amputees, they could continue living. Maybe that's a compromise that can be worked out diplomatically. We'll have to see.

Destination #2: The Twin Cuisines of Touishy: No, They Don't Taste Like Chicken.

I don't usually do gourmet food reports, preferring to leave that to our news service's food expert, but, since food is a major part of travel, and since the newly discovered and colonized planet of Touishy is coming on line as a major travel destination, I felt I'd clue you in on the food there, it being touted as one of the major reasons to go. It is, after all, among the first non-earth foods we've been exposed to. Of all the other destinations I've covered so far in this column, all the food was trans-planted earth, and as the saying goes, something is always lost in the transplantation.

Touishy, an earth-like planet, and there are so few of those in our galaxy, with an atmosphere you can breathe without a backpack, and a climate you can enjoy without an enviro suit, is one of the first planets to offer food that didn't evolve on earth, and has never been a part of our food chain. The only thing it has in common with earth food is the same molecules, but that can also be said of the sodium hydroxide lichens of Gilguma which, as everyone knows, are deadly poisonous, but, if placed in an oven with burned-on food do a marvelous job cleaning out the scorch.

Novel as this new cuisine is, it is disappointing. It simply doesn't taste good, and leaves you with strange after effects. Let me explain. Earth life evolved into carbon based forms. On Touishy, there are two chemical bases for life, and they evolved simultaneously. Some eat the other; the others return the compliment and eat the former. Elsewhere they live together either in a dependent symbiosis or mutual ignorance. Our biologists are having a field day re-writing the books on evolution.

But, the food. As to the two chemical bases for evolution on Touishy: one is ammonia, the other is nitrous oxide, or as we know it, laughing gas. The former life forms, as they are prepared for the table, require numerous rinses and chemical bleachings to get rid of the ammonia flavor, and, since ammonia combined with bleach is explosive, preparation is a dangerous proposition, and

shouldn't be done unless the chef has a license to handle explosives, and his kitchen is equipped with fire extinguishers and smoke evacuating fans.

Even after rigorous preparation, what I tasted, the equivalent of a sea slug on earth was like licking my grandmother's floor on cleaning day. I couldn't get the ammonia taste out of my mouth for a week. But it didn't matter; with the next course, a salad is as close as I can describe it, though it was an actual native creature and wriggled off my plate a couple times before I could authoritatively fix it with a fork, soon had me laughing and giggling uncontrollably as the nitrous oxides took effect.

At least, post-meal flossing and brushing aren't necessary. If it's not chewed thoroughly, it will reassemble itself, pry open your mouth, and crawl, mournfully and wounded, out of your mouth, off your plate and off the table. God knows what the rest of the creature is doing in your G.I. Tract. But you're pretty well stoned at that point, and you don't think about such things until later. It's the equivalent of Chinese food, being hungry shortly after eating is the usual experience with this animal.

Touishy foods don't have names, yet. They need a marketing expert for that. A good bit of hype will get most non-discriminating palates past the ammonia flavor of the first category, and if it's followed by a good helping of the second, even Craig Claibourne the Vth, our food editor won't give it a bad writeup.

Maybe you saw a recent edition of the "Food Network" program, "Iron Chef Galactic" where these two foods were featured. It doesn't do much for the appetite when the first food, the ammonia thing, was squeezed on the counter and its bodily fluids used as an anti-septic to clean the food prep surfaces before actually trying to make a main course out of the beast. The old saying about making laws and making sausage comes to mind; it's better if the consumer doesn't witness the preparation.

As it is somewhat like an earth sea slug, much had to be done to alter its appearance. With its overpowering ammonia smell, the sea slug aspect didn't add much in the way of plate appeal. The Iron Chef skinned it, then plopped it into an aluminum pan for sauteeing. Big mistake; ammonia and aluminum don't mix, and there was an instant chemical reaction which produced noxious fumes, flames, and small explosions. He tried to pass it off as part of the preparation process, but when haz-mat crews wearing gas masks had to come in and fumigate the kitchen, the judges on the panel took an unexpected commercial break, and when they returned, a new chef had taken his place. I hear the first Iron Chef recently got a job at a burger joint.

The replacement chef struggled gamely with the nitrous oxide salad creature. He was wearing a gas mask left behind by the haz-mat crew, so he wasn't overcome by the fumes of the beast and was able to proceed with his food preparations without undue giggling. He tried chopping it with

his knife, but as soon as he did, the creature re-assembled itself and tried to escape. He pounded on it with his meat tenderizing mallet. No effect; it was like pounding jello. There are, apparently, no major organs to this thing that can be damaged to the point where it will lie still for being turned into a meal.

Finally, he just gave up and tossed the thing whole and wriggling into the deep fat fryer. It came out looking something like a "Blooming Onion", and apparently stunned for it held still for a few minutes, and the judges were able to eat portions of it before it came to and leaped off the table. It missed the floor, however, and landed on the head of one of the female judges, and she went off shrieking, wearing what looked like a new hat.

Yes, visit Touishy. The exotic new flora and fauna will keep you entertained for your whole visit, and so far, we haven't found anything there that wants to eat us. I guess our carbon atoms aren't to their liking, so you won't even need an insect repellent. Also, bring sandwiches. There isn't anything there we want to eat, either.

### Destination #3: A Public Health Warning for Travelers

At the current rate at which we are discovering and visiting life sustaining planets in our galaxy, about one a week, it is inevitable that the tourist industry is pushing to open these for visitation before they have been thoroughly examined for organisms that may be harmful to us. Such is the case with Ryskellia and the newly discovered danger of Ryskellian Leprositic Departure Syndrome, which I will refer to by its initials, R.L.D.S.

The problem is this: on Ryskellia, evolution proceeds at an alarming rate such as was not seen on earth. Apparently a gene or perhaps a symbiotic micro-organism infests every living thing, takes over its biological systems much like a flu virus takes over the cells in the lining of our nasal passages, and mutates it to its own liking, creating an independent, sentient organism out of what was once a part of the body of the host. Because of this, on Ryskellia, the top of the food chain changes weekly; evolution is one big free-for-all.

How does this affect us earthly tourists? It was thought it would be fun to see the constantly new mutations duking it out. Casinos opened to take bets and fleece tourists. Then, the virus or mutating organism discovered us, and that we could be hosts to it just as readily as anything on the planet. Thus, human travelers to Ryskellia began coming down with R.L.D.S. So far, the disease has been quarantined and contained, but our hearts must go out to those who are current victims of it; though not fatal, it is a nuisance in the extreme.

Here's what happens with R.L.D.S.: without warning, a limb of your body suddenly grows its own

digestive system, cardio-pulmonary system, brain and nervous setup, everything it needs to become an independent entity. When consciousness and sentience arrive, it detaches itself from you to live life on its own. Your arm, for example, departs, and, humping away like an inchworm, signing with what was formerly your hand in sign language for the deaf as to what a bore and ogre you are, for this disease seems to make our body parts ill-tempered and hostile to their previous host, it jerks around a corner with a final flipoff to you with your former middle finger. Most people find this irksome.

Of course, prosthetic devices can replace the departed limbs, but most people prefer to have their original parts back. Re-attachment surgery is no problem, for even if the limb has been gone several months, it has been kept alive by its own systems, so there is little tissue damage. The evolved organs just have to be cut out and the limb re-attached. But, can you ever trust it again, especially after it's been so insulting to you, and has fought tooth and nail to not be re-attached?

To complicate things, this is now becoming a legal issue. The Galactic Civil Liberties Union is suing to have the individuality and rights of these former limbs recognized, and to prohibit their reunion with their original owners. It's bad enough one has to track his former body parts wherever they may have migrated to around our galaxy in their search for a livelihood, but now one also has to fight the Union's lawyers and the various extradition procedures of the different worlds. The legal nightmare is sometimes worse than the problem of being left limbless on a strange planet. One luckless tourist to Ryskellia who lost all four limbs simultaneously, had to hunt down his arm in a neighboring galaxy. How it got that far so quickly is still a mystery.

We'll keep having problems like this until the legislature cracks down on hasty tourist promotions. This won't happen any time soon; the Earth Tourist board has just been noticed contributing hundreds of millions of dollars to campaigning politicians of all three parties, so, no matter who is elected, the needed reforms will be side-tracked for further study.

Therefore, since this is titled as a public health warning, all I can do is warn you to stay away from Ryskellia until they find an antidote for this syndrome. Besides, it's expensive, it's a tourist trap. The gambling there on the weekly evolutionary winners will cost you an arm and a leg.

#### Destination #4: Parking Lot Planet

When it got to the point that a place to park your flying car went for the same price as a 120 square foot condo in downtown New York, entrepreneurs decided it was time to do something about the parking situation. Good thing they did; all the former parking spaces that cost as much as a condo are now converted into condos, and the housing crisis in our major city has been solved, if one doesn't mind bedding down on the grease and coolant spots left there by the flying cars formerly parked in them.

The solution for parking space was ingenious but not simple: find a planet with a lot of room, and turn it into a parking lot. Parking your flying car on a world that is at least 138 light years away might seem inconvenient, but this was shortly after the invention of warp-transporting, which technology enabled one to be zapped to virtually any corner of our galaxy at post-light speed, as long as that world was in a relatively straight line with earth. (Which is why, in our solar system, Mercury was ruled out because it's on the opposite side of the sun often, and it's going to be used as Venus's moon when the terra-forming of that world gets underway.) In this case, it involves a wormhole transfer and two transporters, but, the driver and his vehicle can be projected to the Parking Lot Planet in under three seconds.

The planet itself offered nothing else to be desired. It was an iron world, moon-like and devoid of atmosphere, water, or any form of life. All it had was a straight-line shot for earth warp-transportation, and space; dozens and dozens of square miles of it where cars could be parked without any worries on the part of the driver as to whether they'd be parked in and unable to fly out, whether their paint jobs would be dinged by careless drivers, or whether they'd even be able to find a spot before a business appointment expired, or, indeed, before their retirement / recycling came up.

Car owners bought a spot for a month at a time, or longer term if desired, and were given a small remote control rather like a garage door opener. Press the button, and the orbiting Parking Planet Satellite picks you up, and projects you to the wormhole. You exit the other side of the wormhole, another transporter picks you up, and you're on Parking Planet where a ready attendant takes your car from you and parks it. You're transported back to earth by the same means, ready for your business day without worrying about putting gold bars in the parking meter every five minutes, or catching the meter maid in a good mood and signing over to her the title to your 36,000 square foot summer vacation cabin on Long Island to keep her from writing you a ticket, that if paid, would settle the national debt for the next decade.

When your day is done, another click on the transporter remote device reverses the process, and you're back on earth in your flying car, ready to go out on the town for the night. Lord knows being out on the town is preferable to going home; that 120 foot condo you now live in which used to be a parking spot is, truly, 120 square feet, but, it's more likely 3 feet by 40 feet rather than the more usable 10 X 12 square feet, which go for a premium price and have home owner's association fees more than triple those of the more creatively measured condos.

For all its convenience, Parking Lot Planet is more than a parking lot. Because of the recent recession, a lot of people just left their cars there. When the rental fees expired, Parking Lot Planet took possession of the vehicles, and they're now on sale. You can get a pretty good deal on a repossessed 2255 Flying Ring Batmobile for example. I got my 2282 Freelark convertible for under \$20,000 plus paying all the back parking fees. The only better place on earth to buy an antique or collector's item car is Havana, Cuba, which recently sold a 1954 Desoto for several billion dollars, balancing that island's budget for the next 10 years. The Desoto needs gasoline and doesn't fly, of course, but it was said to have been driven by the island's original founding father, Fidel Castro,

still in power after all these centuries, due to early 21st century life enhancement techniques. (To deal with Cuba, you'll have to go through Mexico. An embargo is still in force.)

There are a couple options offered by Parking Lot Planet that the driver / flyer should consider: since they'll more than likely be transporting you back into rush hour traffic, you can find yourself stuck on a side road waiting for an opening in the flow of vehicles that might not come along; you'll sit there all night, and just transport yourself back to Parking Lot Planet the next day. It's hard to merge into traffic from a standstill to mach 4 unless you're driving a car with twin supercharged neutron drive, and if you can afford that, you can probably afford a parking space in the city.

Parking Lot Planet will, for a small fee, transport you back to earth with a head start on traffic; instead of exiting the transporter and being stationary, you'll exit at mach 4 to match traffic speeds. One hopes the computer inserts you into an open space in the traffic flow. If not, you might be combined with a truck load of toilet paper as one luckless commuter was, and it took two surgeons and three emergency crews with a fusion-powered "Jaws of Life" to pry him loose from it, and sort out his body tissue from the tissue.

The best option of all, though, is the time-saver. With this, they'll bring you back through a black hole instead of a wormhole, and you'll be back in the city at about 8:30 AM of that same day. Your work will have been done, you'll be back in time to that morning, and you'll have your whole day ahead of you. You can go out for breakfast, fly by the windows of your 188th story office cubicle and see the other workers slaving away at stuff you completed earlier in that parallel morning work time, see a couple museums, maybe a matinee performance of a popular Broadway show, and do some shopping. Assuming you can find a place to park.

## Destination #5: TV World

For a true aficionado no extreme, no length is too far to go for obtaining the pure, original experience. We have recordings of nearly every TV and movie made since the early 20th century when these forms of entertainment came into vogue, but that's not good enough for an increasing group of early TV purists: they want to see the original signals of the original shows which have been sailing through space at light speed for 300 years or more.

The only way to do that, of course, is to warp-travel into space 300 light years plus to get ahead of the signals, find a planet that doesn't have much solar or cosmic ray interference, get a comfortable seat, an original TV with the big hump on the back for the old vacuum picture tube, (usually salvaged from a museum), a tiny 12 inch screen, then watch the signals as they wash over the planet; the original ones that our great ancestors saw in the 1950's. (If you want a real treat, pick a planet about 10 light years nearer, and watch a series called "Star Trek". Though they got much right in the way of warp speed travel and sub-space communication, today's Military Space

Command would never have put up with a ship's captain as presumptuous as James Tiberius Kirk, and everyone knows Vulcans don't have pointy ears; in fact, they haven't evolved much past slime molds.)

Many buffs are doing this, and the tourist industry, never one to turn down an opportunity to make an Amer/Euro/Asia dollar, organized charters to the distant solar system of Bocuse #2, and its planet, named just for this promotion, TV World. Warp travel makes this 300+ light year journey just a long weekend. The travelers got a TV program which was a replica of a 20th century TV magazine called "TV Guide" that apparently went out of publication in the early 21st century when the 800+ cable channels and the 56 networks got to be just too much to cover. What would they do now with our 3,887 channels and 414 networks? (And yet, with all that, there still isn't anything on TV worth a damn, except my travel show, but I digress.)

The TV World people did a great job researching the experience and providing a setting. Each of the viewers was given a lounging type of chair, that, if you pulled a lever, the footrest shot out, the chair reclined, and you could watch from a nearly prone position.

We also had flimsy metal trays with pictures of Florida flamingos on them upon which dinner was served. I was informed these were TV trays and the dinners, in compartmentalized aluminum trays, were TV dinners.

I had no idea the TV culture was so big back then; I guess for them it was all new and exciting. It had to be; the meal was anything but; watery gravy, a thin, white glop that was supposed to be potatoes, and a cut of meat that came from some portion of a chicken's anatomy that has since been eliminated by evolution. The aficionados in the group seemed pleased, though, and settled in for the original 300 year old experience as their ancestors had it, with the original signals their ancestors saw. In color.

And that's when the riot broke out. It was supposed to be in black and white, but the tour group, Turner TV Tours inc., based out of Atlanta, Georgia, felt 24th century travelers just wouldn't keep interest in black and white, so they intercepted the signals, ran them through a computer and sent them out in color. Never mess with a purist. TV dinners were thrown at the screen, the TV trays were upset and bent into flimsy metal weapons, lounge chairs were overturned. These people were outraged! Turner had grossly miscalculated on the intensity and rabidity the tourists held for the original, pure experience.

Turner apologized, but refused to refund any money until the mess made in the riot was cleaned up, the damage compensated for and labor deducted. The tour group left TV World in a dour mood. The next planet in line for prime original signal viewing is 312 light years the other way, and though most people will live to see that time come around, it's in the quadrant of our galaxy owned by the Trump Corporation, and hotel accommodations might put the price of this trip beyond that of the average ancient TV buff.

## Destination #6: "The Saddest Are These; It Might Have Been . . ."

The title for this article comes from the tail end of a poem that I know neither the title of nor the author. The full quote is, "Of all sad words of tongue or pen, the saddest are these; it might have been." It's a poem about missed opportunities and so is the latest vacation adventure; the alternate universe experience. You wouldn't think there'd be much of a market for missed opportunities and regrets, but it is a growth industry.

One of the most significant technological breakthroughs of our century was the discovery of parallel universes, and the means to access them. It gave new meaning to the extent of infinity when we found, in accord with theoretical physics speculation, that there are an infinite number of universes in this universe; that each time we make a major decision, a universe spins off from us in the opposite direction of the decision we make.

You decided not to marry that redhead? Fine. The universe you're in now is the one that resulted from that choice, but in a parallel universe you and the redhead are married and have four kids. Most galling; her rich uncle died and left her \$2 billion Amer/Euro/Asia dollars, which she lavishes freely on your alternate self.

Now, through a combination of inter-dimensional and time travel, we can visit our past decisions and see if we screwed up or not. I don't recommend it; it's too scary, too discouraging. These are truths best left alone and unknown. Besides, to avoid messing up anyone else's life, each traveler is accompanied by two security robots. You aren't allowed within 30 meters of your alternate.

Try to contact your alternate self and fit into what you perceive as a better life, and the robots zap you back to this reality without a refund of either time or money. That is a fun basis for a trip; find out what a loser you are, and if you try to do anything about it, your vacation is cut short and you forfeit your money. Still, they sell a lot of alternate universe journeys. I guess the desire to know is strong.

But, let's face it: that really would be scary having a duplicate you come out of nowhere, admit that he was wrong in not marrying that redhead, but he's going to take over your life now, thank you, so flake off. So far, no one has done that to us that we know of. Does this mean that we're the sole possessors of this technology in an infinity of universes, or are we a choice universe where no one chooses to contact us? Or, most likely, the other universes are ahead of us and have better sense than to fool with this technology. And just think: less than 200 years ago, the tourism and travel bureau closed down because there was no possibility of new places to visit. The mind boggles.

Yes, I took the trip. Twice. Ever wonder what I would be doing if I wasn't writing this travel column? So did I. Ever wonder what my life would be like if I hadn't said "no" to that redhead? No, of course you haven't: you didn't know about her, but now you will.

I figured she'd put on weight as she got older. She did, but discovered a miracle fat-burning substance, patented it, and is now selling it for billions. She's slim, she's rich, and she's married to the guy who talked me out of going out with her. What a downer. I'd rather go to the all-tropical planet Boorishine and come back with a case of Boorishine's Revenge from drinking the tropical drinks with those little force field rain shields in them.

As to what I'd be doing if not writing this column: I already knew, but I had to punish myself and check it out anyway. When I went looking for this job, my cousin was drunk and had a bunch of lottery numbers for me he'd come up with in a dream. Right. Practical me; I'll let you keep the tickets, and I'll look for honest work, thank you. He's retired on his winnings, and, if that isn't enough, he's married to a redhead multi-billionaire who markets a miracle fat burning . . . but you've probably guessed that.

I'm going to make one more alternate trip: somewhere there has to be a universe where I kill my cousin and get away with it. Now that's a paradise I could fantasize about. Who knows? Maybe I could ditch those pesky monitoring robots, pull a quick switcheroo . . . well, I can dream.

#### Destination #7: You Will Have It's Baby, Buddy

We're always amazed at the wonderful twists and turns evolution takes. Whatever works to get a species up and running, finding a niche, surviving and reproducing is, as the Australians used to say before the Tsunami of 2209 wiped out their sunny land, "fair dinkum." ("The Handbook of Archaic Languages and Extinct Peoples", page 449.) For those wanting to see new things and have new experiences, the infinite variety of life and evolution is a major tourist attraction.

But, having a baby? Even if you're male? That's the major reason to visit the newly discovered and tourist-franchised planet Tiuron in the Brahe system. A nearly earth-like planet, evolution has once again worked its wonders in stocking this world with the slightly similar to and grossly different from what we know on earth. But, with all the new species to observe and holograph, there is one that will seek you out and ask a personal favor. An extremely personal favor.

It's called a lemune. It could easily be mistaken for an earth mammal of some sort; raccoon? Fox? Common house cat? Re-cloned mini-wooly mammoth? It doesn't have fur as we know it, but it does have an extremely soft bodily covering that's a sort of furry feather. Start petting it and you can't stop. These things are totally tame and have no fear of extra-Tiuronial or Tiuronial beast.

Indeed, and scientists speculate this is a major part of their evolutionary reproductive strategy, everything and everyone seems to like them. They have no known natural enemies. How effective is this strategy? They're the only extra-terrestrial animal we've discovered yet that the food franchises haven't wanted to exploit for new cuisine. In fact, several of the franchise scouts wound up pregnant with this animal's offspring; both men and women.

Here's what happens. This animal is so incredibly appealing. Biologists think it exudes some kind of pheromone that initiates sympathy, helpfulness, and nurturing in the subject being approached. When I saw my first lemune, I was immediately drawn to it. Now usually, animals don't like me. Cats hiss and sink their claws into me, dogs put their tails between their legs and snarl, and even parrots say snarky things about me, so when this wonderfully cute and cuddly animal came up to me and looked up into my eyes, and put out its claspers to be picked up and cuddled, I couldn't resist.

I wanted to pet it. I wanted to cuddle it. I wanted to feed it. I wanted to take it home and nurture it. (Immigration and alien species laws won't permit this.) And then . . . I wanted to have its baby. And I'm a male. The desire to actually conceive, carry and bear a child of my own has never come over me before. I felt for a moment how a woman must feel as she, with the man she loves, realizes that the time of her life for reproduction has arrived. This thing has some powerful pheromones, alright.

The lemune has no reproductive capacity other than the implantation of an embryo into a host body. When its embryo is implanted, you feel a sharp sting, but then several moments of ecstasy; I imagine it's equivalent to what a virgin feels when her hymen is penetrated for the first time she has intercourse. To accomplish this without being eaten, scratched or otherwise brutalized, it has evolved a complex pheromone system that first gets the selected host to fall in love with it, then to strongly desire to be a host for its embryo. Yes, I got pregnant, and four days later, I gave birth to a baby lemune which almost immediately crawled off to find its original parent, which had been shadowing me ever since the embryo was implanted. The pheromones apparently don't cover bonding with the infant. Once it crawled off, I quickly forgot about it. No post-partum.

The gestation period goes by quickly; that's why you can make a vacation week out of it, and still have a couple days to see the rest of the life on Tiuron. When the lemune implants the embryo into you, it connects to your blood system and a womb and all the supporting organs are rapidly built. I carried my baby lemune right near my navel; carried it high, like my mother did with me. Mom would have been proud of me. I was the second of her four boys; now I'm the daughter she never had.

We could have talked; I would have told her that I'd only be pregnant for four days, and she would have said she was in labor longer than that with me. We could have gone shopping for baby clothes together; all the bonding things a guy never gets to do with his mom.

I had all the thrills, all the pains; within minutes of implantation, I was throwing up and eating soda crackers. Shortly, my clothes didn't fit and my hands and ankles were retaining water. I was hot; just couldn't get cool even with the air conditioning on full. And this was just the first hour. By the second day, I was beginning to feel flutterings from the swelling pouch on my abdomen. Then: rhythmic, jerky motions. This thing had hiccups.

On the third day, my back hurt from trying to stand up straight with all that extra bulk on my belly. I craved strange foods; foods I'd never had before. That's the drawback; it evolved to search out Tiuron foods for the nutrition the embryo needs, and I hadn't the faintest idea what was edible and not. I never could satisfy these cravings, but I guess I gave birth to a healthy infant.

By the fourth day, nearing birth, I was snarly and irritable. I growled at the lovable lemune, "You did this to me!" When you get ill-tempered with one of those cute, cuddly things, you really are in a bad mood. I went into a fit of hyper-activity; I cleaned out and re-packed my suitcase four times. I emptied all the ashtrays in the hotel lobby.

Birth was easy; the growth just falls off, and the new baby pops out like a bird out of an egg. It left no scars, but I do have stretch marks that will be hell to explain to the guys in the gym.

#### Destination #8: Newlook #3: The Plastic Surgery Planet

At the rate the planet Newlook #3 is going, they'll have most of their topsoil shipped off to earth and other worlds harboring humanoid females by the end of the 24th century. Their topsoil is rich in silicon, the main ingredient in computer chips and the breasts and lips of Bollywood movie stars. It's the latter we're concerned with here; it's a wonderful world to see the screen stars of the galaxy as they come here to have "work done". If you're the type that enjoys a "see and be seen" type of vacation, hob-nobbing with the stars from the stars, Newlook #3 is your choice for a vacation journey.

Even more so, if you need a bit of "work done" yourself, then you can kill several birds with one stone; see the movie stars before and after, have your own work done, and maybe even pick up a few autographs if you can catch a star in a good mood. A lot of paparazzi vacation here, and the photos they take and send back to the tabloids pay for their trip, and if they can't sell the pics to the tabs, they can always find a few with which to blackmail a starlet who doesn't want her more ugly moments put on display.

One of the more popular treatments is a technicolor skin transplant. It's not uncommon that a blue-tinged female humanoid of Ringlek will be popular with her own people and race, but when it comes to making it big in the galaxy, not too many males are attracted to a blue-skinned girl. The procedure involves taking the skin of a chameleonoid and grafting it on to the person desiring an ability to change skin colors at will. It's not a matter of skinning one of the chameleon girls when

she isn't looking; they shed their skins as lizard types are wont to do, and they've found a ready market for their old skins on Newlook, assuming you can keep them from eating the old, shed skin, which is a natural instinct for a lizard-type.

If you're going in for this kind of skin surgery, be sure to check the skin for teeth marks; sometimes unethical castoff skin hunters rip the skin out of the mouths of the chameleonoids as they're trying to eat them, and there can be scars and tears. The old skin natural to the female patient is peeled off, warts, zits, poison sacs, scales and all, which is an added plus, the new-old skin from the chameleon grafted in, nerve endings hooked up to the brain so she can control her coloring, and voila! Which color do you want to be today, madame?

It's costly; not so much that the procedure is expensive, but getting new cosmetics and wardrobes to match all the color possibilities have been known to bankrupt even the richest of starlets. Most usually move to larger homes so they can have bigger closets to accommodate the increased wardrobe. Needless to say, it's usually at this point that their careers take a nosedive and they can't get work. All the bills for new homes, cosmetics and clothing come due, and they have to get work as a "living palette" modeling different colors and looks for the cosmetics companies. (What a comedown for a once famous and gorgeous movie star: "OK, honey, now turn green . . . not that green . . . can you throw in a bit of mauve to that color scheme? No, no, not blue. You're not listening. Oh, plaid. Right. Now you're just being bitchy.")

Breast augmentation is one of the most popular treatments. Females from the planet Lactosia are the biggest customers. It seems on that world, success and fame equates with not only the size but the number of breasts a woman has. Their current leading film star, Korsima Kosecki has, at last count, 16 breasts, none of them smaller than a "G" cup in earth bra sizes. Rumor has it she started with only four, none larger than "C", but now she can charge \$10 million per film, and they've signed her to a 20 year contract.

Her problems have only begun; as she ages, the breasts begin to sag, and at last report, she had to have little motorized toy cars under each one to help her carry them all, and keep them from dragging on the ground. Undaunted, she's going back to have four more added to her back.

A nose job can be tricky. Noses are one of the most varied features the galaxy over, and if you get the wrong specialist, one who doesn't know earth noses very well, but is an expert in, say, the many nostriled slit noses of the Gapasians, you could wind up with a nose that looks more like a flute has been attached to your face lengthwise, like a long, permanent black moustache only with holes in it. In fact, these Gapsian noses do have musical properties and can be played somewhat like flutes, if you can figure out which holes to plug up and which ones to blow through. Coming down with sinus congestion will limit you to just the bass notes.

I know one luckless fellow who went in for nose reduction surgery and got one of the

less-reputable doctors who gave him a Gapasian nose. He came back to earth at the beginning of pollen / allergy season . . . need I say he was allergic? . . . and he began sneezing in the key of "C". For two days he uncontrollably made music until he finally got a handle on it, and is now the head flute player for the Chicago symphony, and he doesn't even have to worry about carrying his instrument in a case; it's a permanent part of his face. He can do flute duets by himself; blowing a regular flute with his mouth, and accompanying it with the flute that is now his nose.

I also know of at least two trumpet players who went there to have split lips taken care of, got interested in a Gapasian-type nose, and wound up coming back to earth being able to play not only trumpets, but their own nose flutes as well. Had they had a tuba stuck up their butts, they could have been one-man bands. OK, sorry, they don't really do tubas on Newlook. You'd have to go to Bavaria on earth during Oktoberfest for that.

I had a bit of work done on Newlook myself. I won't say what, it's personal, but if I can train it right, I'll be able to tie my shoes without bending over and using my hands.

#### Destination #9: The Fat Farm of Frazkoosha

Not every vacation is taken for pure enjoyment. Excluding business trips, of course, some go away to, hopefully, come back a better person. Such a place is the Fat Farm of Frazkoosha. Most diet and weight management schemes promise weight loss; few deliver. Frazkoosha does. In spades. When I needed to lose 50 pounds, I nearly didn't qualify; I had to bulk up at least 10 pounds more so the experience wouldn't leave me underweight, or even . . . dead. Yes, 60 pounds in 3 days is their promise, and they deliver, 100%. Guaranteed.

Of course, the wildlife on Frazkoosha which is almost all parasitical is the major factor in helping them keep their promises. The plan is simplicity in itself; when you arrive, they turn you loose in the jungle and let you fend for yourself. It seems there is no known life form on this planet that doesn't happily, quickly, enthusiastically attach itself to us and begin sucking out our innards. The great majority of them dine happily on fat, hence the ease at which fat disappears there. Others suck up the excess skin and blood vessels that nourish the fat cells, so all is done with an amazing balance. We don't come out of Frazkoosha all baggy and deflated; we come out fit and trim, if we can make it back to the guest house after our ordeal of being a buffet for everything that flies, crawls, leaps, ambushes and prowls.

Some parasites just destroy their host; others will eat the superfluous tissues but leave the important ones alone that keep the host alive. Most of Frazkoosha's wildlife follow this plan. This, of course, is what works to the fat-tourist's advantage, as well as to the profitability of the whole fat farm scheme. Many is the moment while, undergoing this ordeal, you have to remind yourself that they're just eating the stuff you don't need, at least for now; when it comes to the point they begin to dine on necessary tissues, that's the time you need to quickly make it back to the lodge for

the de-parasitizing treatments. They'll equip you with a body monitor which will inform you of that moment. Act quickly on its counsel.

In my case, as I fled into the jungle instinctively trying to avoid the flying cholestofs, about the size of your hand, that first notice you, I was shortly covered with them, and looked like an old fashioned quilt with puffy squares all over my body. It's been discovered that they send out a signal to the other parasites that says, in essence, "Dinner!" Kind of a symbiotic / altruistic relationship between parasites has evolved on this planet. It had to; with a world that is almost all parasites, it's hard to come by something that isn't, and is edible. Stopping in my headlong flight to catch my breath, I inhaled the small worm astatin, which multiplied inside my body and went to work on the excess blood vessels and support structure for the fat cells that the cholestofs were charging through like a hot knife through butter.

After my three days in the jungle, while staying within sight of the lodge, my body alarm went off, and I was able to struggle back to the base and be de-parasitized. Actually, not carrying an extra 60 pounds of bulk, it was an amazing thing to be able to run and not get out of breath, even though I was still carting around 60 pounds of wildlife. I hadn't lost so much so quick since the year I was audited by the I.R.S. and congress passed a law confiscating all our retirement accounts. The procedure is simple; they dose you internally with a universal parricide for which, strangely, the Frakooshian life forms haven't yet developed resistance.

The external life forms are blasted off with a quick shot of neutron radiation, supplied helpfully by Frakooshia's nearby star which is about to collapse in on itself and go supernova. With this in mind, if you need to lose a significant quantity of weight, you might want to make your reservations a.s.a.p. There's a waiting list of about six months. No telling how long the planet will continue to exist. You have to go there; the laws against the importation of alien wildlife prohibit bringing any of Frakooshia's animals to earth. Having no known predators here, they could greatly upset the balance of native species.

The only lingering ill effects from this trip were the parasite nightmares. I had them for weeks until I finally went in for bad dream removal therapy. The dreams consisted mainly of waking up screaming in the middle of the night and beating up on my pillow, accusing it of being a lawyer. But the up side was that I could fit into clothes I had worn during my college days which are coming into style again, and once again began to draw admiring glances from females. If only they knew.

Destination #10: "The Fly on the Wall"

The invention of time travel has opened whole new places and times for the adventurous soul. With this current wrinkle in time travel, the old problem of killing your grandfather and changing galactic, world, or your history has been eliminated, if you don't mind inhabiting the body of a fly

for awhile. Have you ever said to yourself, "I wish I could have been a fly on the wall" at a particular event? Now you can, and several problems are solved at once. In the first place, since it's been determined no fly has ever had much if any effect on history, then going back in time as a fly is a pretty sure guarantee you won't mess up anything.

With new miniaturization and soul-transference techniques, your intelligence, brains, soul, whatever you want to call it can be placed in the body of a fly, you can be transferred back to the time period of your choice, and, literally, be a fly on the wall to witness historical events. This is why history courses in colleges and universities are on hold while thousands of history books are being hastily re-written.

If you're a history buff, and the idea of seeing such events as Lee's surrender at Appomattox, Hitler's last hours in his bunker, Thieugalt's surrender to and beheading by the Muslims at Detroit in 2088, or any other famous event, "Fly Travel Inc." will book you to the time destination of your choice; all you have to do is let them put your body in suspended animation, transfer your soul to the body of a fly; it won't mind, they're barely conscious, stick you in their time travel machine and away you go.

One bit of study is recommended: did the person you're going to visit have a pet lizard? Several customers traveling back in time to visit the philosopher Baadenclark didn't know the man loved lizards and surrounded himself with at least a half dozen of the creatures. The time travelers were zapped out of the air by these animals as soon as they popped into the great mans presence. Lawsuits against "Fly Travel Inc." are still winding their way through the courts.

I took this trip myself. I've always been a history buff, and with the recent resurgence of Hitler studies from the 20th century, I've been dying to know what Hitler said to his mistress / wife Eva Braun seconds before he pulled the trigger and blew his brains all over the wall. Now I know, at least to a degree: I was the fly on that wall. I did have to take a crash course in German while I waited; it only occurred to me after I'd signed up that I'd need to know that language to get the full benefit of my trip. But, there's a long waiting line as thousands of historians and history writers are signing up for the experience, so sign up now, learn the language you'll be hearing, and when your time comes, you'll be ready to go. Best of all: no bags to pack!

Inhabiting the body of a fly is, admittedly, a loathsome experience. You have to keep strict control over it to keep it from wandering off to some pile of disgusting matter. If you don't exercise control, all that preparation and the rather healthy fee will be wasted, and all you'll have to show for your vacation will be an opportunity missed, and a desire that lasts for months to take long, cleansing showers.

So; what did Hitler say? What were his truly last and final words? His bodyguard testified that Hitler said, "I hope the room reserved for me in hell has a ceiling fan", but that was before he went

into the bedroom with Eva Braun. I arrived as they opened the door and went in; I barely made it in as the door shut behind me. I positioned myself on the wall and settled in to hear these famous last words. They were: "Dammit, there's a fly in here! I'm not going to die having a filthy Bolshevik fly gloating over my death." He picked up a copy of "Mein Kampf" and tried to smash me with it.

Eva managed to calm him down, they sat on the couch together and spoke these final words. Eva expressed a wish that Hitler would have taken the breath mint she had offered him earlier. Hitler snarled something I couldn't quite make out, and she sighed, and shot herself. There seemed to be no hand-holding, no tender kiss, no sweet goodbyes between them; a shot, and that was it for Eva. Then, Adolph Hitler, who had wrought so much death, destruction and misery in Europe for the last 5-1/2 years placed the gun in his mouth, muttered something, and pulled the trigger, splashing the wall right where I was with his blood and brains. And, what did he mutter? I don't know! My German wasn't excellent at that point, even though I'd studied it intensely for 6 months prior to the trip, but he had a gun in his mouth, and it muffled his words. I still don't know what his final words were.

The trip, therefore, was somewhat of a disappointment, though I did witness that dramatic bit of history as the proverbial fly on the wall. I put in for budget expenses to go a second time after polishing up on my German, but the publisher wouldn't go for it, so, at least from me, the world will never know Hitler's last words. Probably no one else will be able to, either; hundreds of historians have signed up for the experience, and it turns out flies can change history; a recent report of 36 historians having the trip at one time told of how Hitler and Eva both objected to the mass of flies in the room, not knowing of course that they were historians from the 23rd century, and had the place fumigated before they committed suicide. Only a few travelers returned from that debacle, and "Fly Travel Inc." was, once again, embroiled in lawsuits.

## Destination #11: The Planet of the Death Nut

Consider the cashew, a very popular nut of rich, buttery / meaty flavor, and the favorite of almost everyone. When I open a can of mixed nuts, the first thing I do is pick out the cashews, much to the chagrin of my wife who would prefer to beat me to the punch in such an endeavor. One of my favorite Chinese dishes: cashew chicken. The cashew is a member of the poison ivy family; the nut is encased in a shell containing a liquid so corrosive it is used in paint stripping. It's illegal to import unshelled cashews into the United States. If anyone comes into contact with the liquid in the shell, they'll wind up with a very painful rash, the same as if they'd rolled in a patch of poison ivy. Yet, the cashew, when properly handled is pretty much the world's favorite nut. One wonders, how, with all the obstacles, some brave soul first tried eating a cashew and found it palatable. \*

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A travel writer in the 24th century, who is facing mandatory recycling, puts together a list of the 101 best planets to visit in this and neighboring galaxies for the

adventuresome traveler. (There are also, in an epilogue, 10 planets to not visit.)

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