

Lost in Space

The radio is playing in the background, but I am not really listening, until the roar of the engine of a space ship taking off grabs my attention. It is a fictional docudrama about space exploration and the development of the space programme in the latter part of the twentieth century and into the future. It catches my imagination with its realistic style. I listen for a while, then my mind carries me off on its own journey through space and I imagine myself being strapped into a spaceship for takeoff.

Would it have that distinctive plastic smell of a new car or the benzene-laden stench found under the deck of a small motor boat? Would there be that sharp tang that you sometimes get from electric wiring, with its tinge of acid and solder? Would your ears be filled with the un-muffled creak of metal upon metal? There would be little in the way of decorative cladding or unnecessary padding to hide the mechanics of technology as weight would be at a premium. Perhaps you would feel as if you were inside a giant machine.

Think about how it would feel to be propelled outwards from the earth, against the pull of gravity. The weight of it dragging at your cheeks, the relief when you finally escaped its grasp. Imagine the moment when gravity loses its grip. Would it be like the feeling you get on a roller coaster as you go over the top of the highest point and plunge downwards? Would it be more like the feeling you had as a child when you leapt from a swing as it reached the apex of its highest curve, where you had to psyche yourself up and time it perfectly to avoid a painful landing?

How would you feel as you looked back at the earth shrinking behind you? Awe, wonder, panic? What if you were a weightless particle floating among the stars. Drifting along in the unimaginable immensity of space, pulled this way and that by unseen forces. Finally, caught in an irresistible hold and dragged towards the earth before burning up in the atmosphere in a shower of sparks winking suddenly out of existence.

I can only imagine what it would feel like. I don't suppose I'll ever know!

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