



photographs by
Misha Gravenor

The Zero-G Spot

Michael Behar

has a simple fantasy
to be the first man on the
planet to join the
100-mile-high club. But as
he discovers in his hot
pursuit of the big bang,
he's hardly alone.
In fact, cosmic copulation
has become the
hottest craze since
the Kama Sutra.

THIS IS ONLY
A TEST
SCENARIO
CREATED FOR
STAFF

A couple of months ago,

I was late-night channel-surfing and caught the tail end of *Moonraker*, the campy old James Bond flick in which Agent 007 both saves the world and enjoys zero-gravity sex with Dr. Holly Goodhead. (Nice day at the office.) As they embraced in a free-floating tumble, I realized something very important: *I wanna do that.*

You see, I have always been a space geek. So having sex above the stratosphere has long been on my list of adventure goals. But until recently, all I could do was dream. These days—thanks to the burgeoning space-tourism industry—the concept of the 100-mile-high club is starting to seem seriously feasible.

So I decided to become an “early adopter” and go for it. Step one was to ask my wife, Ashley, if she would consent to climbing aboard a souped-up jetliner so we could make out in a setting that was more likely to induce nausea than bliss.

“As long as we never tell my grandmother,” she said, “I’ll do anything.”

This is why I married her! Next small detail: I needed to find a way to get us into space. But I soon learned that this mode of adventure travel is hideously expensive—currently costing as much as \$40 million for a single orbital flight for two. Fortunately, I came across Zero Gravity Corporation, a more affordable option based in Dania Beach, Florida. The CEO there is Peter Diamandis, the same guy who runs the X Prize Foundation, which awards millions of dollars to private companies that achieve clever, cost-efficient milestones in spaceflight. Zero Gravity operates *G-Force One*, a modified Boeing 727 that uses radical maneuvers—pilots take the aircraft up and down in drastic 10,000-foot free falls—to give passengers 30-second periods of weightlessness, typically 15 to 20 times per flight. Zero Gravity won’t exactly put you in orbit, but for a mere \$3,750 per person, it’s the next best thing.

Even so, when I told Ashley about it, she sounded more fretful than thrilled. “Will there be other people onboard?” she asked.

“Yes,” I said, “but don’t worry: There will be plenty of private nooks and crannies.” Bond himself couldn’t have told a smoother lie.

ON A SULTRY AUGUST MORNING, we arrive at the Kennedy Space Center, in Cape Canaveral, Florida. When we meet for our preflight breakfast at the visitor complex, in addition to three Zero Gravity “coaches,” a flight director, a flight attendant, and a staff photographer, there are 24 members of Mensa waiting to board. The brains have come from all over for the club’s 60th anniversary, at Disney World.

Everyone is amped and jittery, making nervous small talk. (I divulge our mission to a Mensa lady wearing spectacles and a velour beret, who says, “Ewww.”) When we’re issued our one-piece flight suits, I start getting nervous myself. With all these eggheads getting in the way, coital calisthenics could be a challenge.

A shuttle bus delivers our group to the tarmac. We enter the plane, walking single file up clanky metal steps. Aside from five rows of seats in the rear, where we’re told to sit during takeoff and landing, the plane is empty. The interior doesn’t exactly ooze with romance: It’s cavernous and cold, a long, hollow tube bathed in fluorescent light and padded with thick gym mats. One of our coaches, Matt Reyes, the 29-year-old director of technical operations for Zero Gravity, hands each of us a barf bag.

“Keep this handy,” he commands.

Shortly after takeoff, our pilot slams the throttle and pulls the plane into a sharp 45-degree climb. In less than a minute, we zoom from 24,000 to 32,000 feet. He backs off the engines and we level out for a few seconds before teetering forward into a steep dive. For 30 seconds, at the apex of the parabola, everything inside the aircraft is weightless. It’s cool, it’s weird, it’s pandemonium. Hyperventilating über-geeks are ping-ponging everywhere. Someone shouts, “Spin me! Spin me!”

G-Force One is climbing again for round two when I find Ashley amid a

tangled heap of Mensa bodies. I grab her hand, ready to get down to business as the craft settles into its second apex. Unfortunately, our first kiss in zero gravity is a bust. It lasts only a split second—a grinding of noses, lips, and teeth—before I bounce off her like a slo-mo Super Ball thrown against a brick wall. During weightlessness, even a small amount of force triggers a ricochet effect: I somersault into the rear cabin while she cartwheels toward the cockpit.

IT SEEMS A LOT OF PEOPLE ARE TURNING to space to jump-start their sex lives. Look around and you’ll discover that mankind is on the cusp of a New World Sex Order. Though sex in space is still only theoretical—no one seems to know for sure if it’s ever happened—the marketplace is already in motion. Inventors are busy devising harnesses, cribs, and other contraptions—a matériel arsenal of so-called “NASA sutra”—to make celestial sex more feasible. Conferences are being held, and scientists are sciencing: They’re testing sperm virility in zero gravity, contemplating the optimal sexual orientation for crews on long-term missions, and investigating whether abstinence makes astronauts go postal.

For a sexonaut with cash, a growing collection of travel outfits—from Germany’s Space Travellers to Japan’s Spacetopia—are gearing up to provide the flights. In Kazakhstan, you and your playmate can, right now, blast into the cosmos on a Russian Soyuz rocket, where you’ll dock with the International Space Station for an eight-day stay in orbit. Cost: \$20 million each. So far, only four tourists have made the trip.

The more budget-minded might consider Virgin Galactic, Richard Branson’s latest endeavor. In 2009, from a spaceport in the Mojave Desert, Virgin spaceships will supposedly begin blasting passengers 350,000 feet up to a suborbital altitude. Here, at the edge of space, you’ll have at least five minutes of weightlessness to get funky. Airfare will be \$200,000 per person. Another company, called Rocketplane Kistler, will sell similar suborbital jaunts that will launch from a 3,000-acre spaceport an hour west of Oklahoma City beginning in 2009.

If you think blowing thousands of dollars for a few minutes of weightless ecstasy sounds stupid, don’t tell 32-year-old George Whitesides, the executive director of the National Space Society, a nonprofit dedicated to what he calls “the creation of a spacefaring civilization.” George and his wife, Loretta, who married on Labor Day weekend 2006, postponed their honeymoon until Virgin Galactic is ready for takeoff. They’ve ponied up \$400,000 to be the first honeymooners in space.

The Whitesides may be the first galactic newlyweds, but they won’t get a private room. That’s why others will want to make a reservation on the \$500 million orbiting-space-habitat project envisioned by Robert Bigelow, the entrepreneur who founded Budget Suites of America. Bigelow is courting large institutions to lease parts of his complex for general scientific research, but he’ll also rent to hotels that want to promote space vacations. (Added bonus: He’s even put the name of the complex up for sale, so guests could find themselves staying at the Trojan Brand Condoms Space Resort.)

I ask Bigelow by phone if space sex is part of the plan.

“We can accommodate a variety of activities onboard,” he tells me.

“Does that include space sex?” I ask.

“Nature will take its course,” he says.

Grand opening is slated for 2012. There’s no price yet, but filling rooms shouldn’t be too tough: At least two dozen private ventures are developing rockets and rocket technology that will slash the cost of putting humans in orbit.

These brave, sexy souls will need proper boudoir equipment, and a space architect from Los Angeles named John Spencer is determined to see that they have it. In advance of the day when weightless boinking becomes routine, he’s designing the necessary habitats and gizmos.



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"Space is a very dangerous place," says Spencer, adding that spacecraft are sterile and cold environments. "You have to make them feel sensual so people are comfortable—and, of course, there has to be booze."

Sam Coniglio, vice president of the Space Tourism Society, has resolved the cocktail conundrum by crafting a zero-gravity bar glass. "Right now, astronauts have to drink out of those ugly tubes that look like sippy cups," he says. His invention is a sleek, curvaceous vessel that's perfect for holding that cosmic cosmo.

After tossing back a few cold ones en route to Uranus, future sexonauts might be able to plunge into a zero-G Jacuzzi. Without gravity, water forms into perfect orbs, so a weightless Jacuzzi would hover like a giant soap bubble. "You could have an eight-foot sphere of colored water in the center of the room, warmed from the inside, and people could dive in and float around," says Spencer.

As for the sex act itself, it may require third-party tech support. "Sex in space is going to have to be choreographed," says Jim Logan, a physician and 17-year veteran of NASA, where he was chief of flight medicine for the shuttle program. "Otherwise it's just going to be a wild flailing."

The prevailing workaround is the Three Dolphin Technique, proposed by sci-fi author G. Harry Stine, who claimed that dolphins mate in threes: A male and female pair off while a third nudges the couple together to avert coitus interruptus.

Another possible alternative to ménage à trois is the Snuggle Tunnel. Created by Coniglio, the tunnel is a rigid plastic tube about four feet in diameter and eight feet long. One end will be affixed to a window

portal (for a starry view), and 360 degrees of quilted velvet cushions will pad the interior. Once inside, a couple can go at it without worrying about drifting apart.

If free-floating fornication is your style, Vanna Bonta, an actor, screenwriter, poet, and self-made space-sex guru, has fashioned the 2 Suit. "It's made of a very lightweight fabric that balloons out, and you're enclosed inside with your mate," she explains. "If you don't want to struggle to be together, the 2 Suit is for you." Unfortunately for Ashley and me, the suit is still a work in progress.

Of course, there's always the no-frills method: Get naked and hang on, preferably with help from belts and straps. "Bungee cords or Velcro will be the easiest way to go," says Bonta. "They'll be standard issue on your flight suit so you can attach yourself to your partner. As long as one of you is stationary, leverage and thrust is possible."

THAT'S GOOD TO KNOW, but I'm hoping we as a species can do better. In July, a few weeks before my Zero Gravity flight, I attended the annual meeting of the Space Frontier Foundation, an 18-year-old organization that promotes privately funded space colonies. The conference is a big draw for space junkies. This year's edition, at the Flamingo Las Vegas, attracted 130 scientists, space buffs, aerospace engineers, industrial designers, and entrepreneurs. Robert Bigelow was there. So was Buzz Aldrin, the *Apollo 11* astronaut who walked on the moon with Neil Armstrong.

What lured me to Sin City was the meeting's final session: a two-hour seminar

devoted to sex in space, marking the first time the subject has earned an exclusive time slot at a major industry gathering. On the way into this giant horny step for mankind, I was sidetracked by a colorful booth in the exhibition hall, which featured a big sign reading *SEX IN SPACE*. Science journalist Laura Woodmansee, a zaffig Bette Midler look-alike from Los Angeles, was there plugging her new book of the same name, which covers everything from zero-gravity sex toys to birthing in space.

"Sex is the killer app of space tourism," she said. "Almost everyone who goes up is going to want to try it."

The caterers rolled out a serving cart loaded with ice cream sundaes. "How appropriate," someone said. "There are even cherries."

We were all chowing down when Rick Tumlinson, cofounder of the Space Frontier Foundation, shooed the crowd into the auditorium. Jim Logan took the stage after Woodmansee.

"I've experienced a lot of zero gravity," said Logan, "and my observation is that sex in microgravity is going to be underwhelming. The fantasy is vastly superior to the reality." There were groans and boos from the audience, mostly from the private-sector crowd. I slumped in my chair, feeling despondent as I listened to Logan dash my dreams of becoming a space-sex ninja, only to realize that he wasn't really talking about recreational sex. His main concern was procreation—when a zero-G quickie results in a zero-G pregnancy.

As Logan explained, microgravity depresses the immune system, atrophies muscles, and strains other bodily functions (not enough, however, to prevent a hard-on). The effects of weightlessness on a human

fetus could be equally devastating. A successful nine-month space pregnancy could very well produce a child who misses developmental milestones. The poor tyke might never be able to return to Mother Earth for fear of literally being crushed to death by gravity.

Fortunately, Bonta took the stage and gave a cheerful, detailed how-to presentation on sex, complete with PowerPoint slides. One illustration showed a buxom naked woman floating in the arms of a burly man. She went on to explain that sex in space may be especially sweaty and messy. Liquids in zero gravity don't stay put, she said, so "couples will spew various fluids into the air, which will stick to walls, video ports, TV screens, telephones, and the participants themselves." The consequences could be blown fuses and gummed-up circuits.

I was grossed out until Bonta assured us that man's insatiable libido will spur ingenuity. "Love will find a way," she said, adding that, eventually, all spacecraft will be sex-proofed in a manner that prevents shagging couples from destroying their ship.

THOUGH ASHLEY AND I ARE pioneers in spirit, it's unlikely we'll be the first to go where no couple has gone before. Men and women have been traveling together into space for 25 years—and people who keep track of such things believe that somewhere, somehow, at least one couple has already had sex up there. Early rumors emerged in 1982, with the first mixed-gender crew: Soviet cosmonaut Svetlana Savitskaya spent a week cooped up with cosmonauts Leonid Popov and Alexander Serebrov on the space station *Salyut 7*. Similar gossip surfaced again a decade later when Mark Lee and Jan Davis, married astronauts who have since divorced, flew together on the space shuttle *Endeavour*. But to this day neither will talk about whether they did or didn't.

Author Pierre Kohler wrote in his 2000 book *The Final Mission* that NASA had experimented with a variety of belts and tubes to test sexual positions on a 1996 shuttle flight. Kohler's source turned out to be a faked NASA document circulated on the Internet, but that hasn't stopped others from speculating. Web gossip abounds, and sites like Space.com and BoingBoing.net mention the *Mir* space station as the likeliest love shack. Elsewhere, *Star Trek* creator Gene Roddenberry has been quoted as saying, "I guarantee you it happened, for no reasons other than common sense."

The Russian Space Agency and NASA categorically deny any incidents of sex. "I don't even address the issue," grumbles Rick Searfoss, a former astronaut who piloted two shuttle missions and commanded a third. "These shrinks and academic weenies need to get a life. We are professionals and have a billion things to do on a mission."

But "humans are humans," counters John Spencer. "We will do it anywhere and any way we possibly can."

By 2018, NASA intends to return humans to the moon, where they'll build a lunar habitat. Astronauts will be confined for months inside the vessel, and they're not likely to spend all that time taking cold showers. "They're going to have sexual intercourse," declares Harvey Wichman, former director of the Aerospace Psychology Laboratory at Claremont McKenna College, in California.

Although NASA won't talk about it, scientists unaffiliated with the agency are taking the matter seriously. Earlier this year, the National Academy Press released a 144-page white paper titled "A Risk Reduction Strategy for Human Exploration of Space: A Review of NASA's Bioastronautics Roadmap."

It covers the usual topics: radiation exposure, bone loss, nutritional deficiencies. But buried in the report, the authors make a surprising notation. NASA's "roadmap" to space, they write, "contains no references to human sexuality, and this oversight should be corrected. ... Areas of concern for the 30-month Mars mission include the potential psychological and physiological consequences of sexual activity, consequences that could endanger life, crew cohesion, performance, and mission success."

For now, daily detail on shuttle missions won't include romantic interludes—yes, the Martian probes will remain in the docking bay. "Privately, everyone I have talked to at NASA is in agreement that this is important," says Ray Noonan, a sexologist from New York City, who wrote his dissertation on sex in space. Don't I know it!

G-FORCE ONE COMPLETES 18 parabolas during our two-hour flight, which traces a 100-mile-long rectangle within a designated FAA-controlled airspace over the Atlantic Ocean. It takes four parabolas before I determine that the only way to get close to Ashley is to seize her hand during the ascent, then yank her toward me the moment we start to levitate.

By our 15th parabola, we're feeling increasingly queasy. Weightlessness induces a kind of seasickness. To shake off the nausea, I shut my eyes as the plane slides into another parabola, but with my eyes closed I can't tell which way is up. I might be pitching and rolling, or hovering motionless a few feet above the deck. My senses, on the other hand, are on overload. I'm hyperaware—touch, taste, sound, and smell are remarkably crisp and strangely amplified. My skin feels loose and relaxed.

G-FORCE ONE climbs again, and this time Ashley throws her legs around my waist, claspings them tightly behind my back. Firmly entwined, I grab her head and pull it toward me, ramming my lips into hers like an overeager teenager. Technically, we kiss. But it's not pretty.

I hear the dull thuds of bodies flinging into walls and the whine of the engines tearing through rarefied air.

In this condition, sex would probably be mind-blowing—that is, if I could get within groping distance of my wife. *G-Force One* rises into another parabola, but before I can get to Ashley, a chubby Mensa dude with a knotty beard rams into my knees and sends me barreling like a bowling ball into a cluster of other passengers. I score a strike. Globes of water and M&Ms are dancing through the cabin. *G-Force One* climbs again, and this time Ashley throws her legs around my waist, claspings them tightly behind my back. Firmly entwined, I pull her head toward me, ramming my lips into hers like an overeager teenager. Technically, we kiss. But it's not pretty.

Thirty seconds isn't enough to do much else, obviously, especially with a planetload of gawking onlookers. But our quest is not in vain. On the next parabola, we manage to hang on a bit longer, embracing face to face in an askew missionary position before spinning vertically and crashing feetfirst into the ceiling. We persist, lurching and slinging ourselves into various positions that fall somewhere between "clumsy tantric" and "drunken Twister." Sex in space, where a gentle hip thrust could launch Ashley into an uncontrolled death spiral, is going to require the aerial agility of a dragonfly.

That's OK. I'm willing to practice.

OUTSIDE ONLINE

Wondering what author Michael Behar's wife, Ashley, thought of fooling around in space? So did we. Read an uncensored chat with the sexonauts at outsideonline.com/zerog.

MICHAEL BEHAR, a former editor at *National Geographic*, wrote about kiteboarding in October.

OUTTAKES



NASA SUTRA
Behar and Kissinger in a weightless embrace

For "The Zero-G Spot" (page 140), a story about out-of-this-world sex, the next trend in space tourism, we sent Boulder, Colorado-based writer Michael Behar and his wife, Ashley Kissinger, up on a zero-gravity flight to do a little "research." Gordy Megroz recently caught up with the pioneering couple to get the dirt on the deed.

OUTSIDE: Was this story just a ploy to spice up your sex life?
[Laughter]

A.K.: Oh, it doesn't need any spicing up. So is orbital bliss a purely novel pursuit, or is there a nobler reason to get it on in space?

M.B.: Missions to space are just going to get longer and longer. And astronauts are going to have sex. So the space community has to face that fact, and if they're going to have sex up there, they need to know how to do it. It's not easy. Any subtle motion—even undressing in weightlessness, the act of flinging your shirt

off—will send you tumbling.

At this point, exactly how naughty does it get up there?

M.B.: I think NASA is prudish, but not the entire space community. I'll bet if you rented out a Virgin Galactic plane—the whole thing, every seat—they wouldn't have any problem with you having sex in it.

A.K.: We'd be happy to be their guinea pigs!

Read the rest of the interview at outsideonline.com/zerog.