

# THE 'APHRODITE' PROJECT

A. Bertram Chandler

## THE 'APHRODITE' PROJECT CARL LAWRENCE

Gentlemen,

Herewith the final report of the Research Project 11FF. which, as you know, was started twelve years ago, shortly before the space stations were turned over to civilian operation.

Preliminary research, carried out under the title 'Techniques for the Investigation under Terrestrial Conditions of Social Problems in Free Fall', was devoted to the study of the situations to be expected in free fall and to the changes they would involve in the living habits of personnel. The problem giving the greatest concern was that of course in all the hundred odd positions recorded by students of the subject the force of gravity was a common factor. It was feared that in free fall the absence of this factor would cause the other two factors to drift apart at the least provocation, leading to a general state of dissatisfaction and frustration among the personnel and to a high rate of employee turnover. Indeed, two of these early investigators gave considerable time and effort to a device in which the force of gravity was replaced by a spring. This line of investigation had to be abandoned when the investigators were trapped in one of the devices which was under-damped and went into free oscillation. The investigators were rescued only in an advanced stage of debilitation.

However, subsequent experiments in field conditions showed that many of the fears expressed were groundless, and I am happy to report that the second phase of the project, Techniques In Free Fall, popularly known as TUFF, has been an unqualified success. In fact it may be noted with emphasis that under conditions of free fall a number of techniques are possible which cannot be duplicated under terrestrial conditions. In addition, any technique used in free fall requires a degree of co-operation that is greatly to be desired but which is seldom attained in practice under surface conditions.

In conclusion, this investigator wishes to take the opportunity of tendering his resignation. Because of the many close friendships he formed in the course of his work he prefers to remain on in the station.

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### *OBITUARY*

*by A. Bertram Chandler*

It is with deep regret that we announce the death of Dr. John Thomas Alcock, to whose pioneer work the Research Project TUFF owes so much. He was, in his passing, one of Science's most illustrious martyrs, a victim alike the inexorable workings of Newton's Third Law and of his own indefatigable zeal.

Throughout his period of service in the Research Project and, indeed, all his life, he was the enemy of mechanical appliances on every occasion that such devices tended to come between Man and his Mate - or, as in the Space Stations, when such appliances enforced an unnatural and, at times, undesirable propinquity. 'If that was what the Almighty had in mind,' he would say, 'our First Ancestor would have been a rubber tree!' He did not scorn, however, the boons, blessings and resources of modern chemistry.

Fortunately the WAAC Private who was his partner in his last experiment, a Miss Partz survived the disaster that carried the great scientist to that bourne from which no traveller returns - she having the presence of mind to snatch an article of bedroom furniture, ornamental rather than useful in the Space Station, and use it as a makeshift Space Helmet until the arrival of help.

Dr. Alcock, she tells us, had declared that his own strong right arm, aided and abetted by his strong left arm, was far superior to any contraptions of gutta percha and steel springs. From past experience she had no reason to doubt his assertion. On this occasion, however, he achieved a paradox of no mean order, this being no less than simultaneity in his coming and going. His line of flight was outwards with reference to the longitudinal axis of the Station and, avers Miss Partz he must have been accelerating at at least six gravities when he hit the outer wall. His last despairing words, carried back on the tenuous shreds of atmosphere that accompanied him through the ragged gap created by his egress into Infinity, were- 'Vaseline! I told them Seccotine...'

Lunar Radar reports that the corpse of Dr. Alcock, before it finally faded from the screens, was following a trajectory that must ultimately culminate, after a lapse of 93.65873432 years, in the Centaurian System.

Proud Terra could hope for no better ambassador.

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