

THE CHILDREN OF CRECHE

by James Alan Gardner

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"And so it's good-bye to New Earth and <BINK> hello to Creche."

Inter-World Vac/Lines is such a mind-slogging Mom-And-Pop outfit that they think their good-bye/hello trick is cute. Halfway through the welcoming spiel from the bursting mammalian Coffee-Tea-or-Kama-Sutra Flight Hostess...and speaking of sexual pandering, Inter-World, must we be so heavy-handed with the airborne pheromones in the cabin? I for one am more comfortable buckling up the seat belt when I don't have a pointlessly throbbing erection...halfway through the opening monologue with all its openly oozing female fecundity, they hit the cabin stasis field, and <BINK> it's six weeks later, we're dirtside on some colony where every particle of air has been through one lung too many, and Miss Wouldn't-You-Like-To-Know-If-I've-Been-Surgically-Enhanced is finishing off a sentence that started a couple of dozen light years ago. I mean, really, Inter-World, can't you see how smarmy the whole thing is?

No, you probably can't, you pitiful geckos.

It was with this lapse of taste in my mouth that your intrepid Art-Critic-cum-Role-Model-cum-Provider-of-Vicarious-Savoir-Faire donned the traditional leather jacket of his profession and sallied forth into the Vac/Port for a first recce of the fabled planet of Creche. I was not entirely surprised to find that a Vac/Port is a Vac/Port is a Vac/Port, all of modern semiotics notwithstanding. You have your usual gaggle of tourists from the colony one star system over, the ones with no particular idea why they're here, except that they just *had* to get off-planet or go mad, and this place was cheaper than Morganna's Semen-Sea Whack-Me World; and you have your traditional traders from your favorite alien culture that doesn't see in the visible spectrum, blundering around with incomprehensible accents, asking humans to read the signs to them; and alas, you have your mass of parochial flibberties who shouldn't be allowed to read our dear old *Mind Spurs Weekly* but do anyway, who have pilgrimaged to the V/P to maketh the Big Embarrassing Frenzy of Gratitude that J*O*N*N*Y! T*H*E! S*C*A*L*P*E*L!, Knower of Taste and Taster of Knowing, has deigned to descend upon their terraformed little Nowhere to partake of their pathetic drippy lives and report same to the Cosmos at Large (i.e. You, Devoted Reader, currently feeling superior to such hicks, for reasons that are more obvious to you than to Yrs Trly).

Still and all, the Creche mob of droolies were a touch outside the normal run: old as dry beavers, the lot of them. Of course This Reporter was aware of Creche's famed shortfall in the production of mewlies and pukies; but you don't snugly plug into the *reality* of a child-poor world until you wander into a Vac/Port expecting the usual horde of training bras, only to find that their ecological niche has been filled by the

