

Final destinations in space

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- *From:* "Jim McCauley" <jematfriidotnet>
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I just finished Robert Sawyer's *_Mindscan_*: cool book, which reinforces my notions about uploaded humans as the most logical interstellar explorers. But another feature of the book is a very upscale lunar colony for the mortal husks that the uploaded copies leave behind. Interesting, and creepy too.

Which occasioned me to think again: For all the back&forth about manned exploration, I'm not hearing much (here or anywhere else) about permanent human habitation off this planet. That is to say, you leave the earth, and you don't come back, ever. Hopefully, you live for a while in space before you qualify as recyclable organic material.

The key, I suppose, is the linkage between motivation and finance. There was a gap of more than seventy years between the European discovery of the New World and the first permanent Settlement on the North American continent proper. Greed and religion featured prominently in future developments.

Is any such motivation in sight for off-world habitation by humans and other species? We've burned up nearly four decades since Apollo 11, and still there is no St. Augustine or Massachusetts Bay Colony anywhere off-planet. Granted, it costs a bundle to reach escape velocity by whatever means you choose, and destination development is a long way from cheap. What sort of motivation is finally going to make the capital start to flow?

I'll say this, and you can take it as gospel: If someone had offered me, when I was a single man in my twenties or thirties, a chance to be on a team that settled the moon or an asteroid, I would have signed on immediately. Even now, as I stand between retirement and dotage, if I had a shot at talking my wife into settling permanently on the moon, I'd make every persuasive argument possible. Eventually 1/6th gee would be a blessing to our aging bones --- but I don't have tens of millions of dollars lying about to pay our one-way fare.

Jim McCauley

- *Follow-Ups:*
 - ◆ **Re: Final destinations in space**
 - ◇ *From:* Eric Chomko
 - ◆ **Re: Final destinations in space**
 - ◇ *From:* Brad Guth
 - ◆ **Re: Final destinations in space**
 - ◇ *From:* royls

- Prev by Date: **Re: One Small Step**
- Next by Date: **Re: One Small Step**
- Previous by thread: **Re: Brad Guth's Credentials**
- Next by thread: **Re: Final destinations in space**
- Index(es):
 - ◆ **Date**
 - ◆ **Thread**