

Space...the Final Frontier
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By FuMaku!

It's 2010: Compact Discs and the Exploration of Space is Dead. Record Stores are closing at an increasingly rapid pace, big-box stores that sell CDs are fazing them out, the last Space Shuttle Flight – EVER – is scheduled for this year and Obama has defunded the projected 2020 return flight to the Moon. The year 2010 is not what I expected. 2010 feels like defeat. (Insert Soundtrack now: **Black Sabbath's *Electric Funeral***) On the one hand I am a witness to the massive and turbulent change of the music industry: More than a mere format change, the business of music is changing as it begins to grudgingly embrace the digital era. On the other hand I am seeing the end of man's quest to explore space, a journey that only began 50 years ago.

Small MP3 players, capable of holding hundreds – if not thousands – of songs have made obsolete the notion of collecting bulky, stand alone packaging of individual albums, which usually contain a mere dozen or so songs. Whole record collections can be held in the palm of your hand and stuck in your pocket. Moreover, the fact that music is now rendered as a digital file, songs can easily be traded over the internet. This has virtually destroyed the notion that music should be paid for and that once a song is placed on the internet, you might as well consider it free to the world. I'm not saying that's fair, it's just the reality. Musicians, business men and consumer, alike, have been clumsily adapting to this inevitable change for the last decade, seemingly with no end in sight. Until now, that is. Now, we are closer to the end of the old ways than the beginning and within a year or two, at best, only a few boutique style record stores will exist. They will cater to a small but cultish group of people who will only let go of the past when they die. And when that happens, the stores will go with them forever. It's not all bad, though. The internet offers collector, fan and the novice veritable treasures, heretofore unfound on any format, due in large part to the less than commercially viable prospect of producing a product that only a small niche audience craves (and pays for). Now many of those long out of print songs are readily available and can be purchased at a very reasonable price (around a dollar) and listened to mere minutes after paying for the song. Of course, whole discographies are available free on the internet which cheats the owners of said songs their rightful compensation. Nowadays, musicians have to tour in order to make money if they are to survive. Successful musicians will have to build the cost of making music into their projected touring revenue. Unfortunately, monopolistic ticket vending companies have been, yearly, inflating ticket prices for the last 20 years. This steadily increasing balloon has yet to pop which makes it difficult for a band to want to add any additional cost, as it will drive more frugal minded people away from seeing a band live. Seeing a band live is fast becoming an elitist sport, enjoyed only by those who can afford several hundred dollars per ticket. Even thousands per ticket.

MP3s, the internet and computers, as we know computers now, didn't exist 50 odd years ago when man was beginning its journey into space. Within a dozen years of setting this goal, man was driving around on the Moon in what was the world's most sophisticated *Dune Buggy*. Mind you, this was still *decades* before MP3s, the internet and GUI based computers became household items. I was born a month before Apollo 11 set down on the surface of a celestial body other than the Earth. I was born into a world where space flight and exploration was a reality. After five more successful moon landings, Congress, in their frugal wisdom, defunded the Apollo program, killing the last three scheduled Moon landings. Space flight was not done, though, as plans were already being drawn up for the next step in space travel: The Space Shuttle. The space shuttle would rocket out of the Earth's atmosphere with the aid of detachable rocket boosters into orbit and later fly back and land successfully beginning around a decade later. Still this was before MP3s, the internet and sophisticated personal computers. America's next big step was production on the International Space Station. Originally projected to take a decade to complete, 20 years later the space station is still being assembled. Though talk of missions to the Moon,

Mars and various asteroids has taken place, timelines are always extremely long and America, in general has simply lost its lust to explore space. The space station is only scheduled to last until 2015, the space shuttle program will die this year and hope of returning to the Moon has been squashed by Obama. So it's over? In only five and a half decades America is throwing in the towel on space exploration? Of course probes will continue to be sent out, but the idea of man travelling abroad, celestially speaking, has been conquered by the incredible amount of time it takes man to travel the vast distances of space. And, we don't want to spend the money. It's hard not to feel cheated. A life-long love of Science Fiction had prepared me for the inevitable awesomeness of the future and high-technology, especially by the year 2010. But this has not come to pass. Despite the fact that current cell phone technology is far superior to the communicators the crew of Star Trek employed, space travel seems to be stuck in the Bronze Age: Unable to make that next jump in technology that will make what has come before seem crude in comparison.

So, where am I going with this? On the one hand, technology has been increasing exponentially for the last five decades, so much so that we barely notice it (ex: cell phones and personal computers) and yet, the space program seems to have been frozen in time for the last twenty years. Why is this? Technology has evolved at a staggering rate in so many unseen ways since man landed on the Moon but the technology of space travel has not. So soon since first seeing man walk on the Moon, THE GREATEST FEAT OF ALL MANKIND, man can't be bothered to look away from their latest text messages. Instead of gazing longingly at the night sky and dreaming of being there, we seem to be more preoccupied with insulating ourselves from each other via digital interface. Browsing long hours in a record store and going to concerts offered a communal experience no digital interface could ever convey. The Apollo program offered humanity a collective goal to root for and it concerns me we don't have something like that now. No more record stores, concerts and Moon landings. Bummer.