

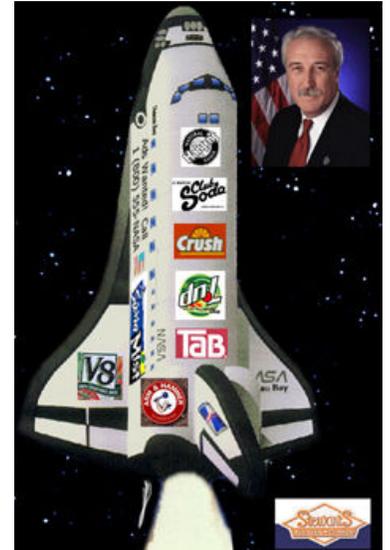
Space – No Place For the Unhip



By Chad Pretzels

Not long ago, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration was appointed a new head by the name of Sean O'Keefe. O'Keefe was not a scientist by trade; rather, he had the reputation of being a man skilled with affairs financial, someone who would be able to make NASA spend its money well, and get the money that it needed. This appointment caused a small bit of controversy, though I should point out that, my knowledge of current events being what it is, when I say that it caused a controversy, I basically mean that I overheard a couple of my friends debating the issue one day.

There were those who feared that the scientific credo of NASA would succumb to the worldly desires for profit. Would the Space Shuttle be festooned with logos for soft drinks? Would this interfere with the science of the missions? Would the alternative be shutting down the space program due to a lack of funding? While both finances and science are noble goals and worthy considerations for an endeavor as weighty as the United States space program, both camps on this issue are missing the real question. Whether the space program produces financial profit or scientific progress is unimportant compared with how cool it is while doing it. And I'm not talking about what was cool thirty years ago, when every kid dreamed of growing up to become an astronaut. I'm talking about twenty-first century cool. And I'm just the one to show them how it's done.



We can begin by sprucing up the Shuttle. It's not bad as it is, but it's really only one step up from a 1950s comic book rocket. I would add at least six, if not eight, more fins, located at various positions along the fuselage. And lights are a necessity—huge rows of flashing and pulsing lights will make even the most boring of Shuttle launches an experience to remember. Perhaps even different color lighting so the Shuttle can set the mood. Next, add some fireworks. While the Shuttle launch is one of the most amazing displays of raw power we have, a few more pyrotechnics are always a good idea. I don't know whether fireworks work in space, but if not, the firework designers had better get their act together and *make* them work. When this is all done, we need to hire a film crew to go up into space and take footage of the Shuttle doing various stunts—a shot of it doing a barrel roll as it flies past the camera would be priceless.



Before



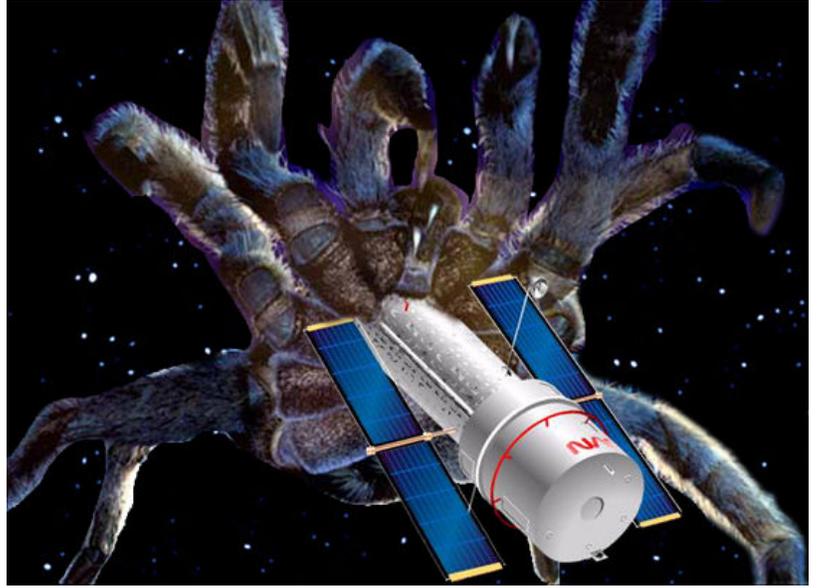
After



Even More After

But it's not just the Shuttle that needs work. Space telescopes like the Hubble, while a cool concept, are seriously lacking in the aesthetics department. Their basic design is a barrel which houses the telescope and two ungainly solar panels that stick out on either side. This may all be practical, but what if we redesigned it to look like some sort of bizarre space arachnid? Its horrid, fanged mouth could open to reveal the telescope, and its long, ugly, outstretched legs could collect solar energy. See, and that's just off the top of my head.

Also, let's consider what we're sending to other planets, moons, and asteroids in our solar system while we're at it. Currently such missions utilize craft covered over with scientific data collection devices, cameras and radio dishes and sensors and whatnot.



**The Next Generation Space Telescope (NGST)
Where's The Hubble At Now, Biatch!**



That doesn't mean there can't be room for the odd flamethrower here and there. Flamethrowers and iron spikes are what I see decorating the exploratory probes of the future. And maybe if there's room (and there had better be), a gargoyle or two.

After we've made all these changes to the spacecraft we're sending out, we might want to start thinking about their names. While names like Endeavor, Pathfinder, and Discovery may bring forth images of serene accomplishment and splendor, they are nowhere near as singularly awesome as something like The Annihilator. I have a hard time believing that the government is unable to employ people with the ability to concoct such names. Surely the people who used to design Decepticons need a job.

The space program today is no pathetic appendage of society—we would not have kept it around this long were it not at least reasonably cool—but there is still work to be done. When we finally make first contact with an alien race, how is it going to look if their ship can fly circles around ours? Our reputation in the interstellar community may be forever compromised. Our very survival as the species we are depends on being cool enough for space.