

All Power to the Forevertron!

Don LaCoss

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“We have been fooled, conned into letting governments and armies get into space on our behalf. Occasionally they will dangle little tidbits in front of us like “life on Mars” or “ice on the Moon,” but nothing really changes. It must be apparent that their interests are not ours. Now is the time for everyone, for all of us here to do it for ourselves—and for each other.”

– from a 1995 manifesto by the Association of Autonomous Astronauts

At some time in the 1950s and some where in Brooklyn (Brooklyn, Wisconsin, that is), a young man’s revulsion for the contemporary trajectory of technology spurred him to begin hoarding discarded, obsolete, and forgotten materials scrounged from junkyards. A descendant of wild English pirates and stern Presbyterian ministers, he was nostalgic for the tech of an imaginary industrialized mass society of the nineteenth century where the madness of mad scientists was celebrated rather than demonized, a world where Tesla had vanquished Edison, where Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein and Jules Verne’s Master of the World were taught in engineering schools.

During the day, this young man (who now calls himself “Dr. Evermor”) worked as part of an industrial wrecking crew that travelled the US, demolishing and dismantling beer breweries, Mississippi River barges, power plants, railroad coal hoppers, candy factories, roadside burger restaurants, paper mills, and the like; at night, he dreamed of building steampunk monuments to the half-forgotten alternative futures of science-fiction technology: “We destroyed a lot of things. During that time I took it upon myself to pull out interesting shapes and forms that I thought were interesting to me if nobody else. I realized that a lot of these shapes and forms are going to disappear from our landscape entirely,” Dr. Evermor said in a 1999 interview. In the 1960s, the destroyer began to create. “Rather than imposing one’s will on something that’s already been created you leave it alone and you just add or move another piece in as a blender that’ll tie it from one [form] to another.” His motivation for creating, he says, was strictly for pleasure and creative expression. “I try to make magic out of nothing.”

In the early 1980s, Dr. Evermor’s fantastic salvage sculptures were gathered together from all across southwestern Wisconsin and erected on an old schoolyard playground in Sauk City (about 20 miles north of Madison) that had been used by families employed by a sprawling munitions factory compound during the Second World War. The property’s historical significance—a place of play for children whose families were enslaved to global war machines—inspired the good Doctor to turn his ramshackle sculpture park into an experimental appliance for peace and exploration. This three-story device, assembled from tens of thousands of individual components and estimated to be at least 100 feet high and weighing about 300 tons, is now the “center cell” of the Forevertron.

When assembly is finally complete, Dr. Evermor plans to climb the metal spiral staircase and secure himself inside the glass ball nested inside an insulated copper egg perched atop the Forevertron. As a ground-crew scurries to keep the mysterious machine on-line, cranks will be turned, switches will be thrown, smokestacks will belch, connections made, and buttons pushed. The specially-designed lightning Grabber will then focus the crackling sheets of “invisible magnetic lightning-force and electrical energy” that are needed to highball Dr. Evermor to the heavens.

Carbon-arc spotlights will illuminate this historic event for the benefit of the press. There's a glass battery-powered telescope at the north end of the machine that's been crafted from welded box tubing and seven sets of copper-covered agricultural equipment wheels designed for "astronomy scholars" to witness the Doctor's flight for themselves; a Celestial listening Ear was also built that can be used to monitor the Doctor's traffic reports from outer space. "Doubting Thomases," he says, can gather on the nearby observation platform or on the transparent "Perch for the High Priest of Non-Believers" to learn firsthand the error of their ways. Well-wishers and dignitaries will be welcome and accommodated comfortably in adjoining gazebos and on metal-cocoon furniture protected by four hundred wooden beer tanks and a dizzying array of Faraday stray-voltage cages. For safety's sake, Dr. Evermor has also installed a 16-ton autoclave from a used decontamination chamber that he had swiped some years ago from a post-moon shot Apollo spacecraft scrapheap. (It is the only component on the Forevertron less than fifty years old.)

But Dr. Evermor concedes that there is still much work to be done, and the going is painstakingly slow—his fifty-foot Overlord Master Control tower, for instance, has taken fifteen years to complete. Evermor's Gravitron, a crucial component needed to help his terrestrial body mass transmogrify into a form more suitable for electromagnetic space travel, needs a little more fine tuning, and his longtime partner Lady Eleanor says that the wind speed gauges require far more precise calibration. More daunting, Dr. Evermor and Lady Eleanor's failed attempts to secure more land from the Badger Ordinance compound for the Forevertron proving grounds have forced them back to the drawing board. But spirits remain high, and curious visitors and well-wishers can be found regularly prowling around the spaceport. Some stay for a few days, volunteering their folk-science energies and skills to help ready the craft for intercosmic travel.

Every day, the colonization of outer space by nation-states and their military-industrial overlords expands at a depressing pace. But just an hour spent discovering the wonders of the Forevertron's launching pad inspires new looks skyward, and it arouses a righteous fury to reclaim the multiverse from bureaucrats, generals, entrepreneurs, and soulless technicians. The Forevertron is just one of the countless outlaw airships needed to escape the manacles of gravi-capital that traps us all to the Earth. Let us break the monopoly over the skies held by NASA and all the other national-corporate space agencies. Squat the satellites! Seize the void!

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