

CENSORED

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10¢



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
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Fourth Dimensional Mixup

by Leslie Crouch

"Well, my boy, if you've finished playing the glutton, I'll tell you why I had you come here tonight."

I glared across the remains of an inch-thick steak at the hunched-up old man sitting across the table from me. Thin, stooped, shoulders topped by an enormous head, he resembled some vile bird of prey. And the way he looked at me: gloating, sneering, sarcastic! Tight fisted old money-bag squeezer that he was. Even if he was my uncle didn't change my opinion any, or my feelings either, as far as he was concerned.

He was deucedly clever, and rich as all get out, too. No, I wasn't jealous of his money, but when I thought how he had got his wealth, something would rise up in me, and I'd get sick to my stomach and my hands would itch to get hold of his srawny old neck and do a little gentle twisting. Oh no, I wouldn't murder the old buzzard - at least not quite, I'd just make him squeak a little, like the rat he was.

Perhaps after that tirade, I'd better tell you something about him, or you'll get the idea I'm a tough guy that should be cooling off under a warden's care.

Old Nat Judson - that's his name - was my father's only brother. Dad had worked like the very old devil all his younger days to make a little money while Uncle Nat had sponged on him and just monkeyed around with this and that. Always inventing things he was, and I'll have to admit that his inventions worked - sometimes. Well, he borrowed money off Dad for one of his nutty ideas. It was something to do with television, I've forgotten just what. But it was a howling success, and Uncle Nat made quite a wad out of

it. Then Dad had an accident, and was unable to work, and he asked if he could have his money back, but Nat said "Nuts!" and moved out. For lack of the proper medical attention, Dad died soon afterwards.

Besides that, Nat was always acting superior to the rest of us, as if we were dirt; wouldn't give us a helping hand when we needed it, and that after we'd played the Good Samaritan to him lots of times.

This night, though, old Uncle Nat had phoned me he'd like me to go over and see him. And just to be decent, I went. Just because he was an ornery old devil was no reason why I should act the same.

There being no love lost between us, and me being a man and under no obligation to him, I answered with a snappy retort

"Hold your horses. I haven't finished this steak yet!"

Uncle Nat glared. I guess no one had told him where to get off for a long time. But he didn't say anything.

When I had finished, and I sure took my time about it, he took me down the hall to a big room that must have been where he did his work. It had all kinds of motors, little electric lights that blinked on and off, and cables as big as pipes running everywhere. But the strangest thing in the whole place was a nice looking ar right in the middle of the floor.

Uncle Nat led me to it. With a funny little smile on his face, and waved his hand at it, saying nothing.

Gee, but it was a swell looking bus. One of the latest models. Must have cost him a

pile of money, and I bet it hurt him to have to fork over the necessary coin of the realm for it, too.

As I said before, it was a swell looking car, ordinary looking at first, but after a second look, I saw something no car ever had on it before. That was a layer of small brass tubes fastened on top, they were open at both ends, and from their middles a lot of wires ran down inside the body; where, I couldn't see just then.

"Well, what do you think of my time car?" Uncle Nat asked.

"Your what?" I asked back. A 'time car'? What in sam hill was that?

"My time car, idiot! I can travel back and forth in time with it," he explained.

I was still no further ahead. I guess my face had a stupid expression on it, for Uncle Nat launched into a more detailed explanation.

"By using the fourth dimension I can go into the past, or ahead into the future with this specially equiped automobile!"

I had read stories of such things, but that it was possible was a moot question as far as I was concerned. What the fourth dimension was I had a hazy idea. Seems like it's the other three dimensions, namely height, breadth, and thickness or width, extended into time, or something.

I didn't know much about it, so instead of disclosing my ignorance, I snorted:

"Nuts!"

Uncle Nat glared. Maybe he thought I was infering that he was nuts. At least he came back with:

"You're like the rest of your family. Ignorant, and making fun of anyone that you can't understand."

Well that got me. My family ignorant! Why, the old.....the old skinflint.

"Yeah, maybe we are a bit low in mental power. We must be, or

you'd never have got all Dad's money, you old theif!"

To my surprise, he didn't say anything to that, but he glared plenty. For a minute I thought he was going to throw a fit, he got that red in the face. But he finally cooled off.

"Now, now, my boy, there is no use in fighting", he said in an oily manner, rubbing his claws together, "I admit I owed your father money, but he died before I could pay him back. That is why I called for you to come over."

I was taken aback at this. Something was up, I realized, for old Uncle Nat had never gone soft hearted before. He had something up his sleeve, and I intended to be mighty careful.

"My heart is bad, my boy," he said. "My doctor has given me only a short time to live, perhaps a month at the very best. I may die any time."

Hurrah! I thought.

"And before I go," he went on, "I wish to give you this time car of mine. I have no money, and I wish to repay your father for all he had done for me in the past."

I grunted. No money, indeed! Where had all of it gone to? We all knew he was rich as Midas. And instead of paying us off as he should have done, he was giving me this time car. What use would I have for it, even if it worked?

"How's it work?" I asked, determined to see it through.

His eyes lit up with a fanatic-al light. Turning to his work bench he picked up a comical looking framework of heavy wire. At first I thought it was a cube then I saw it wasn't. It looked like a cube, but had an extra thingumabob on it that looked like something out of the D.T.s.

"What's that?" I asked, interested in spite of myself.

"This is what mathematicians call a tesseract," he answered.

"A- what?"

"A tesseract. A cube extended into the fourth dimension.

I squinted at it from every angle. A tesseract he called it but it looked like a crazy mess of wire to me.

"I still don't know what it is," I confessed.

"No? Well, I'll try to explain it to you in syllable words,

"Picking up a pencil he drew a straight line on a pad of paper that was handy.

"What's that?" he asked.

"That's a line. Now ask me something hard!"

"I know it's a line, but what dimension is it?"

That was easy. Any student of geometry knows what dimension a straight line is in.

"One dimension. The dimension of length," I answered.

"Good. Now if I draw a line at right angles to the first, what dimension do we have?"

"Two, length and breadth."

"And if I draw a third line at right angles to the other two?"

"Three; length, breadth, and height."

"Fine, fine. Now suppose I draw still another line that is at right angles to all the other three, what have we then?"

I thought for a moment, and decided it was impossible. I told him so.

He smiled and shook his head.

"No, my boy, it is not impossible to do. The fourth dimension thus formed would be that of time."

"Huh?"

"Time, time! The three dimensions extend into the fourth; time. There has to be a time extension for an object to exist, you know."

I grinned weakly. Plausible, the way he put it, but still I couldn't get it. But I said nothing. Turning to the car, Uncle Nat said:

"This is an ordinary car, equipped with a machine by which its extension into time may be speeded up or reversed!"



"Oh!" Inane? Well, at the time it was all I could say. But I was wondering whether Uncle Nat was as crazy as they made believe he was. Or perhaps he was even crazier than everyone thought.

"You see, if the car's extension into time is speeded up, or made greater, it will travel thru time faster than its surroundings. Thus it will go into the future. If its extension is reversed, it travels back along the time stream into the past. Do you understand?"

"Uh huh!" Was all I could say. I was flabbergasted at the possibilities suggested by the thing.

"Just think of the possibilities of this machine, my boy. You could go into the past and see your childhood days again. In the future you could see what was to happen to you. You could tell the trend of the stock markets, and on your knowledge reap millions!"

I had thought of all that, and why Uncle Nat, an old money grabber who would practically murder his own grandmother for two cents would let such a powerful thing out of his hands, was beyond me. Yes sir, the more I looked at it, the less I liked it.

"But first, there is a little job I wish you to do for me," he said, with a sly grimace.

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Ah hah, so there was a string to the whole offer after all? I had suspected it.

"Yeah? And what's that?" I asked cautiously.

He stepped a little closer and looked up into my face with a smirk on his own. He chuckled as he answered:

"A little trip, my boy. Ah yes a little trip!"

I didn't like the way he said that. It sounded to me like: 'will you step into my parlour, said the spider to the fly'!

"Well?"

Again he chuckled, and rubbed his hands together with a rasping sound, like old dry leather being rubbed with sandpaper.

"A trip into the future, my boy, a nice little trip into the future!"

It sounded too easy to me; there was something mighty fishy about the whole thing, and I didn't like it. But I might as well see it through, it wouldn't hurt to do that. Nothing ventured, nothing gained, you know.

"What's the job?"

He took out his watch and looked at it.

"IN one hour, or a little less now, at exactly nine o'clock, you will arrive in the future. There you will go to the hall, on the little table there, you will find a black satchel. This you will bring back to me."

"Is that all?"

"That is all!"

Something not on the level here, I thought to myself. But what the heck, what could I lose?

"Okay, I'll do it," I assented

"Fine!" he said in a triumphant voice, as if he had won a momentous move.

"Will I start now?" I asked.

"Certainly!"

And now starts the craziest adventure any human has ever experienced. Don't accuse me of being drunk and seeing all that followed. I was as sober as I am now, and I'm absolutely sane.

"How do I operate this buggy

of yours?" I asked him.

He opened the door and pointed to the dashboard. On it were a pair of dials, like old time speedometers, a switch, and a couple of knobs.

"This dial", he pointed to the one on the right, "tells the operator how far into the future he is travelling. This little knob, it is the time controller, that you use when you are travelling into the future. The farther to the right you turn it, the faster you go. This other knob and dial is for control when going into the past. This switch, when turned, returns you to the present instantly. As you can see, the dials are marked in minutes, hours, and years.

I could see that, as I wasn't blind, but I didn't tell him so. With the feeling of the man who sticks his head in the lions mouth in the circus, I climbed in and closed the door.

I turned the knob that sent me into the future. Contrary to the efforts of the science-fiction writers in describing a trip through time, I didn't see any hazy scenes of the passage of time; instead, all went black, dead black.

But as I went, I carried one picture with me; that was of Uncle Nat, and he was laughing.

The dial said nine o'clock. Uncle Nat had told me how to start this darned contraption of his, but had said nothing about stopping it. However, common sense told me to turn the future knob back. This I did, and I was in the future one whole hour.

I sat in the car and stared out the window at the workshop. The clock on the wall read nine.

Slowly I opened the door and stepped out. This being in the future made me a little nervous; and the same sensation one has when living in a dream. But this was too darned realistic to be just a dream.

I left the room and entered the hall. Sure enough, on the

hall table was a black satchel. How did Uncle Nat know it would be there? Had he seen it when he travelled into the future some time? If so, why hadn't he taken it back with him then? Why send me for it? Why not come himself?

I could hear voices in the parlour. Deciding to make the most of this little excursion in Time, I peeked in. Uncle Nat was talking to a big stout man, with a huge black mustache. The town banker, Mr. Wells. What was he doing here?

Ah hah, I thought, now I can wait until nine, and see about Mr. Wells. If he comes, I'll know this machine is no fake; if he doesn't, then Uncle's a fraud, and I've been taken in by a hoax.

Thinking which, I picked up the bag, and went back to the work shop and the time car.

Entering the door, I almost dropped in surprise. What the devil! It couldn't be! Yes, it was!

Instead of only one time car, there were now two in the room! And getting out of the second, wasme, or my twin brother! As I haven't a twin, and as I know myself from acquaintance in the mirror, I knew that across the room was a second ME!

I came across the floor and looked at him, or should it be "me"? He looked decidedly anxious and seemed very glad to see me. As for myself, I was very surprised, and didn't know quite what to say. He, I, whoever it was, opened the exchange of words.

"Thank God, I got here in time!" he said.

"Who the devil are you anyway? I demanded.

He looked surprised.

"Why, I'm you, Garth Brooks Judson!" he answered.

I started at that, how the devil could he be me when I was myself and not him, when I was here and not there.

"I don't believe it," I said.

"It's the truth," he assured me. "I'm from nine-thirty, while you're from nine o'clock."

"That's plausible," I thought.

"What d'you want?" I asked him aloud. Or was it myself I asked?

"That bag!"

"But, I have to take this to Uncle Nat," I refused.

"DO you know what's in it?"

I shook my head.

"Then open it and look," he commanded.

I did so, It was literally overflowing with what I took to be bonds!

"Do you know who it belongs to?" he asked me.

"To my uncle I suppose."

He shook his head. "It's really Wells', the banker."

"Huh! What?" I couldn't understand this at all.

"Uncle Nat phoned Wells to come here with all these bonds. Uncle was going to buy them, and the deal was to take place here in this house. Wells agreed. Uncle Nat sent me, or you, into the future to steal them. Then he would have the bonds without having to pay for them."

That almost floored me.

"But why send me? Why not do the dirty work himself?" I wanted to know.

"He had to have an alibi," my double across the floor told me.

"If he is with Wells all the time he's here, then he will have an air-tight alibi. He has it all fixed for us to be the guilty one not him."

"How?"

"He had, or has, a camera rigged up in the hall. He took my picture when I took the satchel. That makes me the thief, then."

I saw it alright. I'd be railroaded to prison, maybe for life, while the real criminal would sit back in safety and laugh up his sleeve at the smart trick he'd pulled.

My double, I have to call him that, broke in: "So, if you give me the stuff, perhaps I can fix it so I'll get clear."

I handed him the bag.

"Now you'd better return."

I returned, with my blood fair-

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ly boiling at the mangy trick played on me.

How could I turn the tables on Uncle Nat? Suddenly an idea struck me, and I chuckled. Yes, that is just what I'll do, I decided.

I found my uncle waiting for me. His welcoming smile turned to a look of rage when he saw I was empty-handed.

"The bag!" he cried, "The bag! Where's the bag?"

"I couldn't find it," I snapped back.

"Couldn't find it? Why it was right there on the table in the hall!"

"I don't give a damn where it was supposed to be; it's not there now," I snapped back.

"You found that bag," he accused. "And you hid it somewhere. You've stolen it from me! I'll get even with you for that!"

At that moment the front door bell rang. Still muttering threats, Uncle Nat left to answer it I followed.

Sure enough, it was Mr. Wells, the town's one and only banker, and he carried in his left hand the now familiar black satchel.

I was wondering how my uncle would manage to have Wells leave such a valuable bag in the hall unattended for even the few moments necessary for the theft. But he had, that I knew.

Wells was hanging up his coat and hat, when Uncle Nat spoke:

"Before we-ahem- attend to the business you're here for, Mr. Wells, how would you like a glass of my best wine? Pre-war, it is." And he motioned to the parlor.

Wells' eyes lit up. It was common knowledge that he was an enthusiastic imbiber, and never passed up the chance of a drink free or otherwise. I knew he wouldn't let this offer slip through his fingers. In fact, the first glass might well merge into several before the "business" was attended to. Forgetting all about the bag, he followed my uncle. How easily it was all carried out. So simple, there was little chance that it would go wrong.

I entered the library, which was across the hall, and stationed myself just inside the door, where I could watch the hall and bag where it sat on the table.

I glanced at my wrist-watch, and saw it read just ten to nine.

Sure enough, at nine, or a little later, I saw myself come from the workshop, walk down the hall, pick up the bag, peep into the parlor and then return.

Suddenly a thought struck me, and for a few moments my head swam with the immensity of it.

Here I was, in the hall, and there were two of me in the workshop talking to each other! Phew-wwwie! Three of me in existence.

Stepping across the hall, I entered the parlor. Uncle Nat and Wells were wiping their lips and, grinning quite self-satisfyingly. Wells was preparing to leave the room. Now the fireworks would begin with a bang!

The three of us stepped out into the hallway. At once Wells missed his bag. He made a quick search, easy for there was only the table in the hall. Uncle Nat smiled wily. Wells let out a bellow that would have done credit to a bull who had been stuck in the back of his belly with a none too dull pitch-fork.

"The satchel- the bonds! THEY-REGONE!" Wells shouted.

"Ah- so I- er- see." My uncle eyed me with a none too friendly air.

I coughed.

The next ten minutes were filled with pandemonium. Wells yelled for the police. Uncle Nat managed to pacify him with assurance that the thief would be caught. I hung around with an indescribable feeling in me.

Finally Wells left. Uncle Nat turned on me furiously.

"Well, smart aleck, where's the bag?"

I didn't say anything, just grinned.

"You won't get away with it, you know," he snapped.

Walking to a light fixture above the little hall table, he

took down one of those little can-did cameras.

"I've got a photograph of you taking that bag, you know," he told me.

"Yeah?" I snapped right back, "Maybe so, but you can't do anything at all about it."

He was taken back at that, and before he could say anything, I was striding down the hall to the workshop. Entering it, I walked to the time car. I got in and closed the door.

Uncle Nat came running in, his face red and wild. He was yelling something, but I couldn't hear what it was. Raising my hand, I placed it thumb to my nose and wiggled my fingers at him in a none too complimentary salute. Then he faded into balckness as I turned the knob.

Where was I going? Back to get the bonds of course. Uncle Nat had tried, was trying in fact, to make me the guilty one. Now I was going to fix it so that his little trick would boomerang on him. How was I going to do that? By getting the bonds from myself and taking them to Wells' house, then when he returned he would find them there. As he had them, he couldn't very well accuse anyone of stealing them. Of course, he would remember taking them over to my uncle's house where they had disappeared; but he would likely think that the thief had suffered a bad case of cold feet, and returned them, or he might think he was a little unbalanced.

So back to nine o'clock I went. There I met myself, as you already know, and whom I persuaded to hand over the bonds to me.

Now I had the task of returning the bonds to Wells' home. I couldn't very well walk, as it would take me a good fifteen minutes to make the round trip. I could go far enough back in the past in order to have the necessary time, but I disliked the risk of running into myself or my uncle.

Suddenly the solution came to me. I could go into the future

to the time when the house was no more. Then I could use the car to drive to the road, where I could return to nine o'clock, and then go to Wells' residence, return the money, and reverse the whole procedure.

This I did, and it passed without a hitch.

Now there were four of me in existence at nine! One stealing, the money; the other meeting the first; the third watching the first two meet; and the fourth, returning the bonds to Wells' home! Also, there were now two bags of bonds instead of one. One bag was in the workshop with two of me, and the other was with me being taken to Wells' place.

Fourth dimensional multiplication, if you ask me!

But Uncle Nat had that photograph of me taking the bag. That had to be discredited some way or other. How? Ah ha, by creating an alibi for myself. And how would I do that? Easy, by appearing some place with someone whose word was reliable, at nine o'clock of course.

Now, who would I go to see, in order to establish this alibi, which had to be hole-proof? It had to be somebody whose word would clear me without any doubt.

Who would fit this purpose better than the local chief of police? Fortunately, I knew his son Harry very well. It was at his place that I read all the science fiction that I do.

Good. To Harry's, then, I would go!

I chuckled at the thought as I drove from Wells' to the house of my friend, Harry Thorntunn. Wouldn't Uncle Nat be in a heck of a stew when he found I had fixed myself in an air-tight alibi!

Back in time I went to eight-thirty. Parking my car down the street a bit, I walked to his home, and rapped on the door.

It was opened by Mrs. Thorntunn. "Oh, it's you, Garth," she greeted me. "Harry will be so glad to see you. He sprained his ankle this afternoon, and hasn't been

able to go out."

"Oh, that's too bad", I sympathized.

She took me upstairs to Harry's room where I found my friend lying in bed. His father was there also. They had been playing checkers.

When Harry saw me he let out a whoop of delight.

"Boy, but I'm glad to see you Garth," he said. "Pull up a chair and park yourself. Dad's been beating me again at checkers. I can't play 'em worth a darn, but euchre- I- we'll knock the stuff-in" outta him!"

Boy, but how fate was playing into my hands. What an alibi! Playing cards with the chief of police's family. Uncle Nat couldn't do anything now.

We played, and true to Harry's boast, were winning consistently. But I spoiled one play, that was when I glanced at the clock and saw it was five minutes past nine I fumbled my cards, and dropped three when a thought flitted thru my mind. Five past nine.....and there were five Garth Brook Judsons now in existence!

There were three at Uncle Nat's place. Those you know about; there was a fourth at Wells'; and a fifth me here, playing cards! The thought of it was enough to make a horse laugh!

Just think- FIVE me's when there was only one brought into the world in the first place! Whatta laugh!

At a quarter to ten, Harry went to sleep, so I left. It took me very little time to return in the time car to the workshop. I timed my arrival-or should it be return?- to within a few minutes of my departure. I found my uncle, waiting for me.

"You impertinent young pup," he snapped at me, "where did you go just now?"

I grinned at him saucily. I felt fairly confident of the outcome of the whole affair, and was content to just sit back and let things run their course.

As was to be expected, Uncle

Nat felt I had stolen the bond for myself, and he notified the police that he had the man who had stolen Wells's bonds that night.

Wells hadn't reported the theft, so they picked him upon the way over. He was pretty mystified and bewildered, and had very little to say.

But he told his story and Uncle Nat produced me as the villain of this little comedy.

Chief Thorntunn looked at me questioningly, and then stared at Wells and Uncle Nat.

"Do you accuse this man of robbery?" he asked, emphasizing the "this"

Wells said nothing, only looked the more bewildered. I could see, that he didn't understand what this was all about. But the old money grabbing uncle of mine, had plenty to say and he said it too.

"Yes, I do accuse this man," he poison-tongued, "I have irrefutable evidence that he is the guilty person!"

Chief Thorntunn looked at me with a puzzled look on his face.

"Er- let me see this er- evidence you claim to have Mr. Judson he demanded.

Uncle Nat's face wore a triumphant look as he handed a small photograph over. It was the one taken by the candid camera.

Chief Thorntunn looked, and his puzzlement grew.

"I- I don't understand this" he told my uncle.

"Isn't that a picture of him taking the bag?" Uncle Nat snapped

"Y- yes, it looks like it!" Thorntunn admitted slowly, then hastily added; "At least it looks like him!"

"Looks like him?" Uncle Nat fairly exploded. Things weren't going as he had expected, and he didn't like it.

"Yes, I said it looked like him. You see, Mr. Judson, Garth here was playing euchre with my family and me at the time he is supposed to have committed this crime!"

That literally floored Uncle Nat. He looked sutterly flabbergasted, that I felt a tinge of pity

for him. He looked so let down, so bewildered, so disappointed.

Here Mr. Wells took a hand, as I had been expecting him to do;

"I don't see why there is such a mystery being made of all this" he said.

"But-it was your satchel," how weakly Uncle Nat said that.

"Well- er- I'm not at all sure there was any er- robbery committed, Mr. Judson. You see, I er- that is- when I arrived back home I found the er- supposedly stolen bonds in my hallway!"

The chief of police turned on Wells.

"You say you have your property back?"

"I didn't say that. I said I'm not sure there was any robbery committed!"

Chief Thorntunn braced himself

solidly on his legs and glared belligerently.

"Say, what's going on here anyway? Are you trying to make a monkey outta me? I'm called here on a robbery that doesn't exist. I'm showna criminal that was at my home at the time this non-existent crime was perpetrated.. I think you're screwy" - this to my uncle - "and I got a good notion to run you in."

"Aren't you going to arrest me?" I asked, with a sly grin I'm afraid.

"What for? Something you didn't do? Don't be silly!"

We left Uncle Nat standing there, a slightly stupefied look on his face, which was slowly turning to one of dawning understanding

-the end-

-ROCKET SHIPS-

"Take a look at the cover of this magazine. Amusing rocket, isn't it?" asked the Sceptic.

"Well, I admit those rakish fins are a bit ridiculous, but they're only for show. The lines of the ship are all right." answered the Scientifictionist.

"You missed the point. The amusing part about it is that it and the majority of scientifiction rockets wouldn't work. Ignoring the freakish fins and gadgets that clutter up the average stf. ship, the design is all wrong. The ships consist of a long slim cylinder, with rocket jets at one end..."

"Well, what's wrong with that?" interrupted the Scientifictionist

"Have you ever considered what would happen as one of those stf. ships attempted to take off? - No I suppose not. On such a ship, the center of gravity would be above the point of thrust. It would be very top heavy, something like a cane balanced on the end of a finger. In all probability it would topple over and crash!"

"That's a bit hard to believe!"

"Why do you think that they put those sticks on ordinary sky rockets? Not just to make them easy to launch, but to get the center of gravity below the point of thrust. Try launching one some time with the stick removed. I did, with several, thinking that they would go farther without the weight of the stick. Some managed to rise all of eight feet before toppling over into the ground. No about the only stf. author who was aware of this, was Weinbaum, with his flying triangles, very sound and stable ships."

"But what about the experimental models made by the various rocket societies?" They're long, with jets at one end."

"Yes, but you should note that they have very long heavy fins, that bring the center of gravity below the point of thrust. What's more, many of them depend on their speed thru the air to steady them, and are launched from elaborate guides. Once out of the atmosphere, this steadying influence would be gone. No; rockets, of the stf. variety, won't work."