

Gib Takes a Space Test

by Richard Elam

Gib Bromfield was nine, and the thing he wanted to do most was to make a flight into space. A colony on the Moon had already been started for scientific research, and a huge man-made space platform circled the Earth once every twenty-four hours.

“I want to go back to the Moon with you, Father,” Gib would plead every time Mr. Bromfield came home on a furlough.

“I’m afraid you’re still a little young, Gib,” his father would reply. “Some day you will be able to go out into space with me, but not yet.”

Mr. Bromfield was a construction engineer, and he was helping to build a big spaceport on the Moon. He came home to see his family every six months. Each time he returned, Gib couldn’t wait to meet him at the front door of their prefabricated home.

Gib would shake hands with him like a man and take his bags from him. Then he would step back and admire the tall, handsome man in the glossy black boots and gray uniform of the Space Service. By this time, Mother usually came running up, followed by Sandra, Gib’s little sister.

On Mr. Bromfield’s latest visit, Gib waited until the usual family talk had subsided before he started asking his father about his recent adventures. After Father had brought him up to date, Gib asked the same question he always asked:

“Father, may I go back with you this time for a short visit—just a short one?”

Mr. Bromfield smiled and ruffled Gib’s blond hair. “It’s not the time element, Gib,” he said patiently. “It’s the rigors of space itself, which are much rougher than Captain Rocket on TV would have us believe.”

Gib’s face fell. He had hoped that this time his father would give in and let him go back. Mr. Bromfield could see that his son was disappointed. He stared at Gib thoughtfully for a moment, then spoke again.

“All right, Gib, I’ll put you through S.Q.T. If you pass it and still want to go spaceward, I’ll take you.”

“Gee, do you mean that?” Gib burst out.

He was so excited he didn’t know what to do. Gib had never had any doubt that he would pass the S.Q.T.—the Space Qualification Test—that all those who go spaceward must take.

Mr. Bromfield went immediately to the video-phone and put through a call to S.Q.T., having them place Gib’s name on the space test list.

“Thanks, Father!” Gib said excitedly. “At last I’ll be going spaceward!”

“We’ll see,” Mr. Bromfield replied soberly.

Gib spent the next afternoon on the first part of the test, which was a complete physical examination.

“It didn’t hurt the tiniest bit,” Gib joked with his father that night. “If all the parts of the test are as easy as this first one, I won’t have any trouble.”

Mr. Bromfield did not say anything, but he smiled to himself as though he knew something that Gib did not know.

Gib and his father took the elevated expressway to the S.Q.T. center early the next morning in their atom-powered Johnson Superjet. The final portions of Gib’s test would be covered today.

The first part was familiarity with the space suit. In company with about fifty other candidates, Gib was given a supply of clothing. Then everyone was shown how to zip up their thickly insulated suits in front. Next, an attendant snapped metal cylinders to their shoulders and screwed the flexible tubing into valves on their suits. Last to be put on were helmets of light metal that had a darkened glass in front so that the wearer could look out.

“Now, all of you turn the little black knob on your chests,” the tester said. His voice sounded muffled to Gib because of the helmet he wore.

Gib turned his knob and felt his suit blowing up like a balloon as air flowed in from the oxygen tanks.

“This is how you would be dressed for a walk on the Moon,” the tester told them. “Now I want all of you to walk into the next room.”

As Gib went into the room with the others, he was thinking how easy the test had been up until now. And what fun it was taking the very tests that Captain Rocket himself must have taken at one time! He thought his father was surely mistaken for having doubted his ability to pass the S.Q.T.

The tester left the room and shut the door. In a few moments Gib began to have a strange sensation. He was feeling lighter and lighter, and the others with him were beginning to float right off the floor!

Gib struggled frantically as he felt himself go off balance. Each movement he made, however, shot him off at swift, crazy angles. He felt himself sweating with fear, and for the first time he was believing that maybe the S.Q.T. wasn’t going to be so easy after all.

It seemed as if he had the strength of a Samson, but it was a strength he could not control. A simple kick sent him hurtling across the room toward the wall! He tried to brake himself, but nothing he did would stop him. He crashed headlong into the wall. It shook him up a little, but he was not hurt. He saw that the wall was thickly padded.

After about fifteen minutes of helplessness, Gib felt himself getting heavier again and saw his companions drop to the floor in normal position. The tester came in with some doctors. The doctors

looked over each candidate and asked many questions. Gib was still dazed and wasn't sure of the answers he gave.

When the doctors were through, the tester explained what had happened: "This room was de-gravitized, which means the Earth's gravity in here was cut off by mechanical means. It's the same condition you will find in a space ship when the gravity plates are turned off. From the looks of some of you, this experience was something of a shock. But the final test will be even rougher. Anybody who wants to drop out now may do so."

Gib saw that about a third of the candidates had had enough. Gib was still giddy himself and started to join them. He was disappointed in the harshness of "zero-gravity." It had always looked so simple to him the way that Captain Rocket "swam" about in his rocket flyer.

Gib did not want his father to think him a quitter, though, and decided to stick out the test to the end. When his turn came, he was led into a huge room by himself and up to a queer-looking machine. It resembled one of the thrill rides at a carnival, the one that whirls you round and round like a ball on the end of a string. Gib entered a tiny cabin at the end of the large swinging arm and sat down in a thick foam-rubber reclining chair.

As he was strapped down, the tester said to him, "This is called the 'Centrifuge,' son, and it simulates the blast-off from Earth in a rocket ship. You appear to be a little young to be taking it, so if you've had enough just yank that lever in front of you and we'll stop the machine."

"I—I will," Gib replied, getting scared already.

He got more scared as all sorts of instruments were strapped to him. The tester explained that these were to record his reactions. As the door was closed on him. Gib had a trapped feeling. Then he composed himself and waited for the worst, telling himself that a spaceman must be brave.

Presently he felt the cabin begin to move, slowly at first. This much was fun, Gib thought, just like the carnival ride. As the cabin picked up speed, it was even more thrilling. But then as the speed increased still more, Gib began to lose his enjoyment.

Faster and faster he went, and Gib was crushed deeply into the chair cushion. He felt his cheeks draw back from his teeth, the corners of his eyes making him squint. There was heavy pressure on his chest, as if an elephant were standing on him. His breath hung in his throat and he saw strange colors and darting forms before his eyes.

He stood the agonizing effect as long as he could, and then his frightfully heavy hand crept unsteadily toward the lever in front of him and jerked it.

The cabin began losing speed and finally stopped. Gib saw a blurred image open the door and offer his hand. As he stumbled out, his head feeling big as a watermelon, Gib vaguely remembered hearing the tester say:

"You needn't feel badly about this, son. You almost lasted it out. Come back in another year or two and then I think you'll be able to pass."

Gib still wasn't quite himself as he met his father in the waiting room. He was quivering all

over, and his dad wouldn't quite come into focus.

"I flunked the test, Father," Gib told him.

"It sounds to me as if you're glad you did," Mr. Bromfield replied, with a chuckle. "I was afraid it might be too rough for you, son, but I knew there was no other way to show you that space travel isn't as easy as the comic books make out."

"I'll try again next year," Gib said, "or the year after that, anyway. That's what the tester told me."

"I'm sure you'll be ready then," Mr. Bromfield replied. "Now, what do you say we go home? Captain Rocket is almost due on TV."

Source:

Elam, Richard. "Gib Takes a Space Test." *Young Readers Super Science Fiction Stories*. New York: Grosset & Dunlap Inc., 1957. 28 – 38. Electronic.