

Satellite Zone

by Richard Elam

Although Ben seemed to be one of the busiest persons aboard the *Carefree*, he still took time out to chat with the boys early that afternoon.

“Have you been at the orphanage all your lives?” Ben asked Garry and Patch.

“Almost that long,” Garry replied.

“Our parents were good friends,” Patch added. “All four of them were killed at one time in a rocket-plane crash near Salt Lake City. We were only three then and were placed in the orphanage at the same time.”

“How long have you been in space, Ben?” Garry asked.

“Oh, about eight years now, off and on. I started when I was in my teens. I was a sort of cabin boy aboard the old Mars exploration ship, the *Jules Verne*. We spent a year there. Boy, what a life! It was like living in a deep freeze. Since then I’ve traveled to Venus, Luna—the moon, you know—and there’s no counting the trips I’ve made among the satellites.”

“How did you get in with Captain Eaton and the *Carefree*?” Patch wanted to know.

“A few years ago I took time to go to school and learn space-ship engineering and design,” Ben replied. “My teacher was Captain Eaton—or Professor Eaton, as he was called then. He was also a millionaire and president of Space Shipping Incorporated. He helped build the sturdiest ships ever to fly the solar system. I graduated stone broke and had to go back to flying the spaceways.

“I thought I’d never be an engineer or designer, but then Professor Eaton got in touch with me and said he was going to design a space ship for his own use. He said I was the best pupil he had ever taught and asked if I would work with him on the project. Of course I jumped at the idea. We assembled the ship out here in space, and I’ve been with him ever since.”

“Captain Eaton is a grand person, isn’t he?” Garry asked.

A fond look came into Ben’s dark eyes. “He’s the wisest, kindest, and most generous person I’ve ever known or heard about. You may think he selfishly spends all his money for his own enjoyment as he cruises the spaceways, but that isn’t the case. He gives far more than he spends out here to charities and churches back on earth. And he has built countless scientific libraries, but he’s too modest to let them be named after himself.”

“The *Carefree* is such a big ship, Ben,” Patch said, “that I don’t understand how it can be run by so few men.”

“It’s due to the captain’s genius,” Ben explained. “Practically everything you can think of is automatic, and our batteries are constantly recharged by sunlight. Of course, once in a while something goes wrong, and we have to dock at a repair satellite. And we also have to refuel about every six

months at a service station. But we don't use very much fuel ordinarily because we mostly just cruise about in the 'satellite zone,' as it's called."

Ben had to go back to work, and the boys joined Captain Eaton in the library, where he was waiting for a TV newscast to come on.

Garry and Patch got the shock of their lives at the first feature to come over the telecast. For the subjects were *themselves*.

They quickly discovered that they were the most celebrated missing persons on earth. The orphanage had first reported their absence, and then Mr. Mulroy had given his version of their disappearance. It seemed that Mr. Mulroy was in very hot water because he had not made sure that the boys had gotten off the *Orion* before the blast-off. In fact, he was in such hot water that he faced court-martial unless Garry and Patch were found.

"Well, I guess the vacation is over, Patch," Garry said sadly. "We can't let Mr. Mulroy be court-martialed for what we did."

"We've got to tell them where we are, haven't we?" Patch replied. "Although I'd give *anything* to stay aboard the *Carefree*—that is, if Captain Eaton would have us."

"I'd like nothing better than to have you two stay on," the captain said. "But you must consider Mr. Mulroy and all the police forces who are working to uncover the mystery of your disappearance. Right, fellows?"

"Yes, Sir," they both agreed reluctantly.

"We must make full use of the time left you to finish seeing the marvels of the *Carefree*. I said I'd show you the observatory today. What do you say we go there now? I've got some double-star photos I want to check on."

The boys liked the idea and went with their host along the zero-gravity tunnel toward the observatory.

The observatory was a "bubble" attached to the *Carefree*'s center tube or axle, just a short distance from the air lock through which Garry and Patch had first entered the ship. The observatory was such that it never rotated with the tube or the rest of the ship. In this way its telescopes could always keep focus on objects in space.

Three pairs of magnetic shoes clicked along the metal floor of the observatory as Captain Eaton led the boys to the reflector telescope, whose big six-inch eye was pointed out into space. Captain Eaton looked over a camera which was attached to the eyepiece of the telescope. Then he unfastened the camera and took it off.

"The picture has been exposed long enough," the skipper said. "It takes a pretty long time for a photograph to be made in the heavens, you know. But when you give it full exposure, it shows you much more than your naked eye can do."

Garry studied a satellite chart on the wall. "I didn't know there were so many satellites whirling

around the earth. So many different kinds and sizes too!” he said.

“Yes, there are many more than one would imagine,” the captain agreed. “Here, let me show you some of them on the chart. The pictures you see are exactly the way each satellite looks, and they are all drawn in proportion.”

Garry and Patch studied the chart with its multitude of different shapes and sizes. There were satellites that resembled drums and others like round balls. Some were torpedo shaped, and some were circular and flat like “flying saucers.” There were giant satellites, wherein people lived and worked, and many of them were in the shape of huge revolving wheels. Some of them had no regularity at all, appearing to Garry to resemble more than anything else huge space insects, bristling with antennas and sun mirrors.

“As you probably know, fellows,” Captain Eaton said, “the Von Braun Space Station is our largest satellite of all. But there are a few others that approach it in size. For example, here is Quartermaster 10, the biggest of the depot satellites that furnish supplies to men who live in the world of the artificial moons. Here is a big fueling satellite, and over here is another big one—Spaceharbor—which is really a network of smaller moons joined together. This is a shipyard satellite where space ships are built and repaired. The *Carefree* was built in Spaceharbor.”

“Gee, with so many of those things orbiting earth every minute of the day, it seems that space ships are always in danger of hitting one of them,” Patch remarked.

“That is a very real danger,” Captain Eaton said, “especially for us, since we usually cruise in that area above earth called the ‘satellite zone.’ For this reason, every person on pilot duty is responsible for knowing the position of every satellite within dangerous range of the *Carefree*. This requires constant study and figuring of orbit paths. It really is the biggest job the pilot has to do, because generally the *Carefree* is on automatic pilot and runs itself, you might say.”

“What are some of these smaller satellites?” Garry asked.

“Well, there, there, and there are some of the observation satellites called ‘Tiros.’ They are used to photograph part of the earth for different reasons. Some of the reasons are prediction of weather, mapping, and for military purposes to see that the countries of the world do not start arming themselves for aggression.”

“The Tiros moons were first put into orbit in the 1960’s, weren’t they?” Garry asked.

Captain Eaton nodded. “Also these, Garry—the Transit satellites, which are used for navigation, both in space and on earth. This odd-looking little moon over here is one I’m sure you’ve heard about. It is WAS, which means weather-alteration satellite. Know what it does?”

“Sure,” Garry replied. “It’s used to seed storm clouds with chemicals. If the seeding works, hurricanes and tornadoes can be broken up before they cause damage. I believe they were first put into orbit in the late 1960’s.”

“Very good,” the captain complimented. “Of course there are many other kinds of man-made moons, some too technical to explain. But, in spite of their great number and complexity, each has its use, and they are a tribute to man’s great achievements in the world of science. One of our big jobs

aboard the *Carefree* is to see that they remain in orbit, doing their duty for the people of earth. If we should ever change their orbit, for instance by colliding with one of them, we not only would destroy their usefulness but we would, in all likelihood, destroy the *Carefree* as well.”

Garry did not even want to think about the possibility of such a disaster.

After the visit to the observatory, the captain asked the boys if they would care to try out the swimming pool.

“Hey, would we!” Garry and Patch said together.

A few minutes later, as they were heading down the corridor toward the gym, they passed Mr. Klecker walking along stiffly—in full dress of course—and carrying a stack of books.

“Hello, gentlemen,” the tall man greeted them cordially, and the boys returned his greeting.

As he passed, Patch whispered to Garry, “Bet those books are about the circus.”

Garry smiled and nodded.

The boys had learned that Mr. Klecker had a hobby. He was very much interested in the circus of the old days. He had many books on the subject, and whenever he talked to anyone it was about the circus.

Garry and Patch had heard from the others that Mr. Klecker still looked after the captain as if he were serving him in his mansion. He would lay out his clothes for him and attend to other small details. Once in awhile Mr. Klecker would be called on to assist in things of a mechanical nature, but he hated to get out of his full dress and don greasy coveralls.

The boys proceeded to the gym. They were anticipating a good time. But something of a decisive nature was to happen which would have an important bearing on their future life aboard the *Carefree*.

Source:

Elam, Richard. “Satellite Zone.” *Young Stowaways in Space*. New York: Lantern Press, Inc., Publishers, 1960. 85 – 93. Electronic.