

A vintage space helmet, likely from the Apollo era, is the central focus. It is a white, dome-shaped helmet with a clear visor. A circular label on the side of the helmet reads "VISOR" with a downward-pointing arrow. The helmet is mounted on a dark, metallic structure, possibly part of a spacecraft or a museum display. The background is dark and filled with various mechanical components, pipes, and panels, creating a sense of a complex, industrial environment.

A SPACEMAN WALKS INTO A BAR

by Ted Hogeman

The experiment was set for the 2nd of March.

Group Captain Lionel Berkeley, RAF, watched as the subject, a USAF serviceman, finished clasping the helmet to his yellow pressure suit.

Berkeley both admired and pitied the young American for participating in the experiment, and sincerely hoped that he had volunteered of his own accord, rather than being volunteered by his superior officers.

The other occupants of the chamber, one British and two American scientists, scurried about as they completed the final preparations.

"Airman Vance. The Project Zipgun test today involves a brief jaunt between the twins, Bentwaters to Woodbridge. Step over to the pad here, please."

Berkeley motioned the serviceman to a glowing white square in the bunker floor, with an identical glowing white square in the ceiling above.

Intricate, angular machinery surrounded three sides of the pad, bundles of thick cables running up into the concrete ceiling and down into the floor. Reel-to-reel computers churned and hummed along the walls of the test chamber as they diligently recorded data from sensors arrayed throughout the room.

"Sir, permission to ask a question?" Airman Vance inquired, a hint of southern twang to his accent.

"Permission granted." Berkeley replied, coolly.

"Am...am I the first...man...to go through, sir?"

"I'm afraid I'm not at liberty to say."

The young airman fidgeted, wiping his gloved palms against the yellow nylon of the pressure suit pants, looking increasingly nervous.

"What I can tell you is this," Berkeley continued.

"When you make the jump, you will travel over 22 kilometers in the blink of an eye, and be making a significant contribution to the technological prowess of the free world."

Airman Vance noticeably brightened at that, and stepped onto the testing pad.

Berkeley shared the subject's apprehension, though he was careful not to let those feelings bleed through to the surface.

The Joint Experimental Operation had jumped to human trials rather quickly, but then, the race was on, after all. Who knew if the Reds were already blipping soldiers from Moscow to Siberia and back in similar experiments behind the iron curtain.

"RAF Woodbridge, this is Bentwaters. Prepared for transmission, over." The British scientist reported into a radio handset.

"Copy RAF Bentwaters. This is Woodbridge, prepared for reception, over." The radio crackled back.

"Airman Vance, please close your visor before the jump," one of the American scientists called out, and moved a pair of thick, dark goggles over his own eyes.

Berkeley did the same, the polarized lenses dimming the brightness of the test chamber down to an eerie twilight.

Airman Vance pulled the black face-shield over the front of his helmet, looking like nothing so much as a spaceman about to set foot on another planet.

"Are you ready, Airman Vance?" Berkeley asked.

"Sir, yes sir!" The airman replied, muffled through the pressure suit's helmet.

"Activating now," the other American scientist declared, and hit the switch.

The room thrummed with power.

The white squares and the delicate arms of the machinery between them shined impossibly bright, and then somehow grew brighter still.

Airman Vance appeared as nothing more than a vaguely humanoid shadow in the glow. Despite himself, and the protective goggles, Berkeley raised a hand in front of his eyes to shield them from the light.

With a final electrical snap like an entire thunderstorm in a single moment, the lights dimmed, and the humming wound down. Berkeley lowered his hand from his eyes.

The airman was gone.

Music. Haunting, impossible music.

That was the first thing he noticed as the blinding light of the test chamber crushed down to a single point in the center of his vision, darkness surrounding him, only for it all to come rushing back, but different, in a tidal wave of unfamiliar sensation.

The second thing to go through his head, a bizarre, at first non-sensical, instinctual response, was: act natural.

Airman Taylor Vance, USAF, test subject for Project Zipgun, a project he knew dangerously little about, appeared to find himself in a crowded bar.

The establishment was dimly lit, with rough cement walls, and a high and wide countertop jutting into the middle of the space. A man stood behind a counter, a tangle of metal tubes, like beer taps, behind him.

So far, so good. This, Vance's brain could handle. A giant praying mantis stood next to the counter, on the opposite side from the man. This, not as much. Not good. Not good at all.

As Vance slowly turned his head, towards the music, more horrific sights filled his vision. A group of bulbous-eyed molluscoid demon children were playing the eldritch melody on pipelike instruments like it was Thursday night in a Nashville honky tonk halfway down Broadway.

A bestial wolfish figure with gleaming eyes and long fangs sat nearby in a corner booth. At the bar, a man with a face like a spider's pushed a cup to another man with a nose that folded upwards, like a vampire bat.

Vance wondered if he was in hell. He swore that he saw the Devil, red skin, horned head, black robes, the works. And yet, far from ruling this dark and strange underworld, the fiendish being simply sat there, smiling and sipping a drink. In this strange place, even the Devil himself was just another customer.

A man sat down next to Vance. He also wore a space suit, clear visor revealing an ordinary human face, and Vance wasn't sure if that was comforting or terrifying.

Now, he considered that he might be hallucinating.

Maybe the experiment had popped a blood vessel in his brain, and these were his dying moments. The man spoke a foreign language that Vance had never heard before, but the way the other spaceman slapped him on the chest and gestured to the bar was damn near universal. Okay. Act natural, he thought again, this time the instinct making more sense. And the good lord knew he could use a drink.

Vance stepped through the crowd of surreal bar patrons, dizzied, worried each step could be his last.

That either this hallucination would suddenly fade as the eternal darkness of death finally took over, or that one of the many monsters surrounding him would take notice of him, and the previously mundane activity of the hell-bar would cease as they all ripped him to shreds in a frenzy.

He carefully watched the bartender pass a drink to a shaggy bear-like creature with a bandolier, but didn't see any money being exchanged.

His sanity felt suspended by the thinnest of threads over the unfathomable abyss of this entire experience as he raised two fingers to the bartender.

A teenage boy, blond, and an older, bearded, white-haired man stepped down the stairs that Vance assumed was the entrance. He zeroed in on the two human figures. Felt his rapid panting for the first time, and began to take back control of his breath.

These two, he could handle. Just a father and son. Maybe grandfather and son. Out for a drink. That calmed him.

This was understandable. Just out for a drink.

The other spaceman shouted impatiently, incomprehensibly, from the table Vance had come from.

Looking down, the bartender had deposited two mugs of frothing, misting liquid in front of him.

Act natural.

Vance picked up the two cups, moseyed slowly back to the table. Two new patrons had joined the other spaceman, a woman with an enlarged head that Vance found distressing to comprehend, and an honest to God green martian with a suction cup for a mouth.

Both started chattering away in different languages, and Vance's new spaceman drinking buddy eagerly grabbed one of the cups.

Vance felt the thread in his head fray further, and he searched desperately for the old man and the teenager at the bar to try and hold on for just a little while longer.

He spotted the pair, though now the teenager was involved in a scuffle between the spider-faced being and the bat-nosed man. Vance began to shake his head violently.

No no no don't take away the only liferaft I've got right now, his mind babbled at him.

Then the grandfatherly figure that had been Vance's last grasp on his sanity pulled a sword made of light from his dusty brown cloak, and cut the other two men to bloodied ribbons.

The thread finally snapped.

Inside the pressure suit helmet, Vance screamed.

"RAF Woodbridge, did you receive?
Over."

The static hiss of the radio felt like it lasted a lifetime to Group Captain Berkeley. The British scientist tried the handset again, now a hint of desperation entering his voice, "This is Bentwaters. RAF Woodbridge, did you receive?"

A crackle. And then, with trepidation, "Negative, RAF Bentwaters. Woodbridge did not receive. I repeat, Woodbridge did not receive."

One of the American scientists pulled the protective goggles from his eyes,

"My God, what happened to him?"

Berkeley pursed his lips, staring at the now empty experiment pad. "It appears that you've... completely disintegrated the poor fellow."

The responding silence settled thickly over the room, broken only by the steady buzz of static from the radio receiver.

Already in his mind's eye, Berkeley could see some uncaring, aloof United States Air Force officer concocting an all too plausible tragic story to explain the young airman's disappearance to his next of kin, and the needless, bullheaded stupidity of it all twisted like a knot in his chest. He sighed.

"Shut it down, gentlemen. Shut it all down."

// **MOVIE SCENES REIMAGINED** //

**A
SPACEMAN
WALKS
INTO
A BAR**

by Ted Hogeman

**Enjoy this story?
Help us out!**

- Drop a like or comment
(all hail the algorithm)
- Join the e-mail list
(laughingwiththestorm.net/mail)
- Share it with others
who might enjoy it!
- Tell us what you think!
Send a DM or email us at:
laughing.with.the.storm@gmail.com

a laughing with the storm publication