

# SCI-FI SLEEP



BY ROBERT ELLSWORTH

Sleeping in the sticky, smoggy summer heat is trouble enough for most, but, for the millions affected by insomnia, it's even harder. I was lying awake one listless night, after days without decent sleep, when I nudged my boyfriend in a discreet attempt to arouse him, but it was useless. He was blissfully snoring, probably dreaming of some Abercrombie model. I reluctantly reached for the prescription dolls my doctor gave me for nights like this. The herbal teas, amino acids and over-the-counter sleeping aids, just weren't working. I was desperate. Luckily, the Lunesta kicked in, but the next morning I woke up feeling as if I'd been hit in the head with a frying pan. Besides the grogginess, the hideous chemical taste in my mouth didn't help matters.

Dreading the next midnight hour, I decided to research alternative therapies in search of soporific bliss. That's when I found a neurological process known as brainwave entrainment. Using headphones, two audio streams are sent to a listener—one to the left ear the other to the right (binaural)—the effect of which is that you can actually manipulate and change your mental state.

In layman's terms, throughout the day we go through several states of consciousness. For example, to fall asleep, you go from the beta state, through alpha and theta, to delta, the sleep state. Brainwave entrainment lets you access any one of these states at will. Sounds very sci-fi, but I tested two technology-assisted sleep programs over the course of a month, using them to take naps and to fall asleep at night, and the results were astonishing!

## **Flying Chao's Headspace Explorer and Headspace Explorer PE**

After you've set the parameters to your liking, Headspace Explorer generates a set of audio files you can burn to a CD or download to your iPod. The personal edition is more geared toward presets, with a dizzying selection of sessions geared to help you relax, sleep, learn, focus, mediate and energize. The full edition also lets you completely customize sessions, with some trippy inner exploration programs that brought back memories of circuit party nights.

The Headspace Explorer sleep programs—there are over 15 preset ones!—knocked me out almost as fast as habit-forming sleeping pills, sans hangover (or bitter after-taste). I was also impressed with some of the Focus settings, which not only amped me up, but helped me concentrate on finishing this article. If only they'd had this when I was in college.

## **Pzizz**

Pzizz has "modules" designed for specific sleep goals, from an afternoon nap to deep nighttime slumber. According to the company, it combines Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) techniques along with "specially composed music, sound effects and binaural beat to induce states similar to that of the Rapid Eye Movement (REM) stage of sleep." The software creates audio files from a combination of ambient soundscapes, spoken instructions and sub-aural sound effects, which you can fine-tune to your own liking. I found the spoken voice meddling for my tastes, but the sleeping mode was perfect for a 30-minute catnap, especially since a loud voice awakes you with encouraging words like: "It's time to get going and rejoin the day!"

Both programs work on Mac and PC platforms. These amazing audio programs may not wean everyone off their Ambien, but for purposes of relaxation, stress relief, enhanced focus and creativity, and sleep assistance, you couldn't ask for a better, cost-efficient method.