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THE WORLD was remarkably normal when the thing began. For some days past Soames had reminded himself frequently that things in general were unchanged. He'd met Gail Haynes. He liked her. Too much. But nothing could come of it. He had a small bank account in a New York bank. He had a small income from his profession. He had never even been rich enough to own an automobile. Back in the United States he'd had to content himself with a motorcycle, and he had practically no prospect of ever getting richer.

There have always been people in this condition. It is not news. There was really practically nothing novel about anything anywhere on Earth, just then, and of all commonplace situations, that of Soames was most natural. Other people in his fix and looking for a way out of the financial doldrums worked at things they didn't care about and made more money. Some of them took extra jobs at night, and some of them let their wives work, and most people had moments of intense satisfaction and other moments in which they bitterly regretted that they'd persuaded girls into such hopelessly unglamorous marriages. Soames was resolved not to do Gail so great an injustice. He remembered the world as, up to now, filled with bright sunshine and many colors and inhabited by people he didn't envy because he liked the work he was doing. How quickly a girl had changed his comfortable smugness. Now he envied every man who had a job he could expect to lead ~o something better, so he could buy a house and scrimp to pay for it and meanwhile come home in the evening to a wife he cared about and children who thought him remarkable.

He still liked his own work, but he wished he'd wanted to be a salesman or a truck-driver or a corporation employee instead of a research specialist in- a non-spectacular branch of science. He could imagine Gail and himself living in a not-too-expensive suburb, with a small lawn to cut and movies to go to and with each other to be glad about. It was not an extravagant dream, but he couldn't believe in it. It was too late. So he grimly tried to thrust Gail out of his mind. It wasn't easy. And when the normal state of affairs for all the world began to bend and crack, with the shattering of all usual happenings just ahead, Gail was within feet of him. She looked at him with interest. She was absorbed in listening to him. It was difficult to act as he felt he must. But he did behave with detachment, as a man acts toward a girl he thinks he'd better not get to know too well, for her sake. The place and background and the look of things, and the subject of his conversation too, combined to make a romantic rapport between them unthinkable. They were • not even alone.

They were in a circular room some twenty feet across, with a plastic domed roof overhead. A complicated machine occupied the middle of the floor. There was a square, silver-plated tube which wavered and spun and turned and flickered. Gail watched it.

Outside the sky was black with a myriad of stars. The ground was white. But it was not really ground at all. It was ice that covered everything. It extended twenty miles north to the Barrier, with icy blue sea beyond that, and southward to the Pole itself, past towering mountains and howling emptiness and cold beyond imagining.

This was the Gissel Bay base of U.S.-in-Antarctica. The main building was almost buried in snow. One

light bulb burned outside it, to guide back those who had business out-of-doors. Other signs of brightness showed in almost-snowed-up windows. Off to one side stood the plastic-domed meteorwatch structure in which Soames displayed the special complicated wave-guide radar with which he did his work here. He showed it to Gail because, as a girl reporter flown down to do human-interest aiticles on Antarctic research, she might get a story out of it.

No motion showed anywhere. The only sound was wind. A faint shooting star streaked across the sky and downward to extinction. Nothing else happened. This seemed the most unlikely of all possible

places for the future of the world to begin to change.

Inside the base's main building one man stayed awake on stand-by watch. A short-wave radio transmitter-receiver was at his elbow, tuned to the frequency of all the bases of all the nations now on Antarctica- English, French, Belgian, Danish, Russian. The stand-by man yawned. There was nothing to do. Nights were five hours long at this season of the year, and it was still worth while to keep to a regular sleep-and-work schedule.

In the radar dome, under the plastic hemisphere, Soames and Gail watched a clock ticking sepulchrally. From time to time a tinny voice came out of a repeater-speaker hooked in to the short-wave receiver in the main building. It was designed to make all inter-base communications available here. The voices were sometimes English, but more often French or Danish or Russian. Now and again somebody spoke at length, and nobody answered. The effect was of disconnected mumbling. ~There's not much of a story in my work," said Soames politely. "I work with this wave-guide radar. It's set to explore the sky instead of the horizon. It spots meteors coming in from space, records their height and course and speed, and follows them down until they burn up in the air. From its record we can figure out the orbits they followed before Earth's gravity pulled them down."

Gail nodded, looking at Soames instead of the complex instrument. She wore the multi-layer coldweather gar

ments issued for Antarctica, but somehow she did not look grotesque in them. Now her expression was faintly vexed.

The third person in the dome was Captain Estelle Moggs, W. A. C., in charge of Gail's journey and the general public relations angle.

"I just chart the courses of meteors," repeated Soames. "That's all."

Captain Moggs spoke authoritatively, "Met~ws, of course, are shooting stars."

"You saw the wave-guide tube stand still jug now," observed Soames. "It pointed steadily in one direction. it had picked up a speck of rock some seventy miles high. It followed that rock down until it burned out thirty-five miles up and forty miles to the west of us. You saw the record on the two screens. This machine made a graph of the height, angle and speed on this tape, rolling through under the pens. And that's all there is to it."

Gail shook her head, watching him.

"Can't you give me a human angler' she asked. 'Tm a woman. I'd like to be interested."

He shrugged, and she said somehow disconsolately, "What will knowing the orbits of meteors lead to?"

He shrugged again. Having Gail around him so frequently was becoming rather uncomfortable, feeling as he did about her. And he'd been thrown together with her more than average.

Everybody at the base had to carry at least two jobs. He'd piloted Gail in a helicopter ride along the edge of the Barrier two days before. The Barrier was the line of monstrous three-to-six-hundred-foot-high ice cliffs which formed most of the shoreline of this part of the Antarctic continent. They'd flown low and close to the cliffs' base, with angry seas ffinging themselves against the ice. It was a frightening experience, but Gail hadn't flinched.

"Finding out some special meteor-orbits," he said drily, "might lead to finding out when the Fifth Planet blew itself up. According to Bode's Law there ought to be a planet like ours between Mars and Jupiter. If there

was, it blew itself to pieces, or maybe the people on it had an atomic war." Gail cocked her head to one side.

"Now that promises!" she said. "Keep on!"

"There ought to be a planet between Mars and Jupiter, in a certain orbit," he told her. "There isn't. Instead, there's a lot of debris floating around. Some is as far out as Jupiter. Some is as far in as Earth. It's mostly between Mars and Jupiter, though, and it's made up of hunks of rock and metal of all shapes and sizes. We Call the big ones asteroids. There's no proof so far, but it's respectable to believe that there used to be a Fifth Planet, and that it blew itself up or was blown up by its inhabitants. I'm checking meteor-orbits to see if some meteors are really tiny asteroids."

"Hmrninm," said Gail. Then. she asked about one of those surprising, unconnected bits of information a person in the newspaper business picks up. "Don't they say that the mountains on the moon were made by asteroids falling on it?" -

Soames nodded and glanced at her quickly. She'd surprised him before. Not every attractive girl knows about the moon-mountains, craters, ring-mountains. They are the impact-splashes of monstrous missiles which, a long time ago, hurtled out of space to blast the surface of Earth's small companion.

Some of the craters could have been made by nothing more than giant meteorites, but there is a

valley in the Lunar Alps which is seventy-five miles long and five miles wide. It was literally gouged out of the moon's curved surface. It must have been made by something too big to be anything but an asteroid, plunging wildly through emptiness and just barely touching the edge of the moon in a grazing miss before it went on to nobody knows where. Then there are the nwres-the so-called seas-which are certainly plains of lava formed when even larger masses plunged deep and let the inner fires of the moon flow out.

- "It's at least possible that the moon was smashed up by fragments of the Fifth Planet," agreed Soames. "In fact, that's a more or less accepted explanation."
- She looked at him expectantly. The inter-base radio speaker muttered. Somebody in the Danish base read off readings of cosmic-particle frequency. In theory the in-formation would be avidly noted down by the French, English, American, Belgian, and Russian bases. It wasn't.
- "I have to think of my readers," insisted Gail. "It's interesting enough, but how can I make it something they'll be concerned about? When the moon was smashed, why wasn't Earth?"
- "It's assumed that Earth was," Soames told her. It, was odd to talk to Gail about abstract things, for her never to mention anything but impersonal matters when he felt so much more than an abstract intere~t in her and when her manner was distinctly personal.
- Soarnes took a deep breath and went on about subjects which didn't seem to matter any more. "But on Earth we have weather, and it happened a long, long time ago, maybe back in the days of three-toed horses and ganoid fish. Undoubtedly at one time the Earth was devastated like the moon. But our ring-mountains were worn away by rain and snow. New mountain ranges rose up. Continents changed. Now there's no way to find even the traces of a disaster so long past. But the moon has no weather. Nothing ever changes on it. Its wounds have never healed."

  Gail frowned in concentration.
- "A bombardment like that would be something to live through," she said vexedly. "An atomic war would be trivial by comparison. But if it happened millions and millions of years ago. . . . We women want to know about things that are happening now!"
- Soames opened his mouth to speak. But he didn't utter a sound.
- The flickering, wavering, silver-plated wave-guide tube of the radar suddenly steadied. It ceased to hunt restlessly among all places overhead for a tiny object headed for Earth. It stopped dead. It pointed, trembling a little as if with eagerness. It pointed somewhere east of due south, and above the horizon.
- "Here's a meteor. It's falling now," said Soames.
- Then he looked again. The radar's twin screens should
- have shown two dots of light, one to register the detected object's height and another its angle and distance. But both screens were empty. They showed nothing at all. There was nothing where the radar had stopped itself and where it a~thed. Instead, all of the two screens glowed faintly. The graph-pens wrote wholly meaningless indications on their tape. A radar, and especially a meteor-tracking radar, is an instrument of high precision. It either detects something and pin-points its place, or it doesn't, because an object may or may not be reflecting radar-pulses.
- The radar here was giving an impossible reading. It was as if it did not receive the reflections of the pulses it sent out, but only parts of them. It was as if something were intermittently in existence, or was partly real and partly not. Or as if the radar had encountered an almost-something which was on the verge of becoming real, and didn't quite make it.
- "What the-"
- The inter-base radio screamed. There was no other word for it. It emitted a blast of pure, horrible noise. It was deafening. At the same instant the twin radar-screens flashed bright all over. The two pens of the tape-writing machine scrambled crazy lines on the paper. The noise became monstrous. It was certainly not static. It was a raging, shrieking uproar such as no radio ever gave out. It had a quality of anguish, of blind and agonized protest. There was pure horror in it.
- The most remarkable thing, though, was that at this same instant the same sound came out of every radio and television set in use in all the world. Soames could not know the fact now, but the same noise-the same hideous signal without significance-disturbed electrical instruments as far north as Labrador, upset the operations of digital computers, loran devices, electron-microscope images, and amounted to an extra time-signal in clock circuits everywhere, throwing them all out of time. The noise stopped. Now a bright spot showed on each of the meteor-watch radar's twin screens. The screen indicating height said that the source of the dot was four miles high. The screen indicating line and distance said
- that it bore 167° true, and was eighty miles distant. The radar showed that something previously struggling to become more than partly real-a something which didn't quite exist, but was trying to come into existence

-now reported success.

Some object had come into being from nothingness, out of nowhere. It had definitely not arrived. It had become. It was twenty thousand feet high, eighty miles 167° from the base, and its appearance had been accompanied by such a burst of radio noise as neither storm nor atomic explosion had ever made before.

And the thing which came from nowhere and therefore was quite impossible, now moved toward the east at roughly three times the speed of sound.

Voices came abruptly out of the inter-base radio speaker. The French and Danish and English asked each other if they'd heard that hellish racket, and what could it be? A Russian voice snapped suspiciously that the Americans should be queried.

And the wave-guide radar simply followed a large object which had not come from outer space like a meteor, nor over the horizon like a plane or a guided missile, but which quite clearly, if theatrically, had come out of no place at all.

The sheer impossibility of the thing was only part of the problem it presented. The radar stayed with it. Moving eastward, far away in the frigid night, it seemed suddenly to put on brakes. According to the radar, its original speed was close to Mach 3-thirty-nine miles a minute. Then it checked swiftly. It came to a complete stop. Suddenly it hurtled backward along the line it had followed. It wobbled momentarily as if it had done a flip-flop four miles above the ground. It dove. It stopped dead in mid-air for a full second and abruptly began to rise in an insane, corkscrew course which ended in a fantastic plunge headlong toward the ground.

It dropped like a stone. It fell for long, long seconds. Once it wavered, as if making a final effort to continue its frenzy in the air. But again it fell downward. It reached the horizon. It dropped behind it.

Seconds later the ground trembled very, slightly. Soames hit the graph-machine case. The pens jiggled. He'd made a time-recording of an earth-shock somewhere.

Now he read off ~he interval between the burst of screaming static and the jog he'd made by striking the instrument. Earth-shock surface waves travel at four miles per second. The radar had said the thing which appeared in mid-air did so eighty miles away. The static-burst was simultaneous. There was a twenty-second interval between the static and the arrival of the earth-tremor waves. The static and the appearance of something from nowhere and the point of origin of the earth-shock matched up. They, were one event. The event was timed with the outburst of radio noise, not the impact of the falling object, which was a minute later.

Soames struggled to imagine what that event could be. The inter-base radio babbled. Somebody discovered that the static had been on all wave-lengths at the same time. It had been enormously powerful No lightning-bolt could have filled all frequency-bands with static of such volume and duration. There would be many hundreds of thousands of kilowatts needed merely to cover the Antarctic on all broadcast bands. Voices argued about it.

Gail munnured to Captain Moggs. They heard the man on stand-by watch say tiredly that the Americans had heard the static but didn't know what it was. The Russian voice announced that Americans tested secret weapons in the ice-wastes of the interior. This was another test. Of what? In the radar-dome Captain Moggs said indignantly, "This is monstrous! I shall report this to Washington! They accuse us of testing secret weapons when we've assured them we aren't! Mr. Soames, what, was actually the object the radar picked up, and what caused that static they talk about? I shall need to explain it when I report."

Soames looked away from Gail.

"The static," he said, "if you call it that, was caused

by the appearance ,of the thing the radar picked up and followed."

"And what was that thing?" demanded Captain Moggs.

Soames paused.

"There isn't anything it could be," he said slowly. "It was impossible. There couldn't be anything like that."

Gail cocked her head on one side.

"D'you mean it's something new to science?"

Soames was still aware of his own attraction to Gail, so he spoke with great formality. The radar had tried to detect and range on an object that wasn't there, which was out of all reason. Yet it was not a defect in the radar, because a thing did appear an instant later. The nearest accurate statement would be that the radar had detected something just before it became something the radar could detect, which did not begin 'to make sense. But there were only certain kinds of things in the air above Antarctica, and the radar-target hadn't been any of them!

There could be planes, but planes didn't appear in mid-sky without previously having been somewhere else. No, it wasn't a plane. There could be meteors, but it wasn't a meteor because it

went too slowly and changed course and stood still in the air and went upward. Nor was it a missile. A ballistic missile couldn't change course, a rocket-missile would have lert a trail of heat-ionized gases that would show in the radar, and it would have had to come from somewhere. So there wasn't anything for the object to be, even if it were possible for it really to be something.

He looked at his watch.

"Six minutes and a half from the static," he said grimly. "Eighty miles. Sound travels a mile every five seconds. Let's listen. Ten seconds . . . eight . . . six. . four..."

He stopped. Wind outside the dome blew snow crystals over each other. They made a brittle, crystalline, tinkling sound. Now the wave-guide radar had gone back to normal operation. Its silver-plated square tube ffickered and quivered and spun quickly in this direction and that, searching all the sky.

There was a booming sound. It was infinitely low-pitched. It was a long, far-away, deep bass growl, so low in frequency that it seemed more a vibration of the air than an actual sound. It died away.

"Concussion-wave," said Soames soberly. "It arrived four-hundred-odd seconds after the static. Eighty miles.

A noise has to be pretty loud to travel so far! A ground-shock has to be rather sharp to be felt as an earth-tremor at eighty miles. Even a spark has to be very, very fierce to mess up radio and radar reception at eighty miles. Something very remarkable happened down there tonight."

Gail said quickly, "You mean it may have come? A bomb? Could it be an atom bomb explosion?"

"There'd be a fireball and the radar would still be going crazy," said Soames. "We'd probably have seen the flash through the dome, too. And nothing solid would have appeared because of an atomic explosion. Quite the contrary! But something did turn up where the noise and static and earth-shock started. It flew. It braked. It accellerated. It rose upward. It's something that somebody ought to look into."

- "How about a spaceship from another world?" asked Gail hopefully.
- "It would have come in from outer space," said Soames. "It didn't."
- "A secret weapon," said Captain Moggs firmly. "I shall report to Washington and ask orders to investigate."
- "I wouldn't," said Soames. "If you ask orders you promise to wait for them. And there's wind and snow and God knows what to cover up whatever the radar said fell down to the ground. If you wait for orders, whatever fell will be covered past discovery by the time your orders come." Gail looked at him with interest, with confidence.
- "What will you do, then?"
- "I think," said Soames, "we'll find it and then report."
- "But..."
- "You," said Soames, "have a penguin story blocked
- out. I'm to pilot you in a helicopter, tomorrow, to a penguin rookery fifty miles down the coast where the Barrier breaks up. You were planning a cozy little article on Housewives of the Antarctic: The Care and Feeding of one's Penguin Husband. Right?"
- Gail grinned suddenly. "I see. Yes. That's a good title."
- "We take off in the 'copter," said Soames. "We start out ostensibly to gather material for an article on Can This Penguin Marriage be Saved. But we'll be blown off course. We'll find ourselves quite accidentally where the radar said there was the great-grandfather of static bursts, with a ground-shock and a concussion-wave to boot. We may even be blown farther, to where something dived downward for four or five miles and vanished below the horizon."
- Captain Moggs said uneasily, "Most irregular. But it might be wise."
- "Of course," said Soames. "It's always safer to report something you've found than not find something you've reported. Besides, the thing we'd report-there can't be any such thing."
  "But you've some idea what it is!" protested Gail.
- "My mind is full," admitted Soames, "of things that can't be. I don't know of anything it could be."
- "No spaceship?" she asked.
- "I'm not that much of a pessimist," he told her, grinning. "But we'd better look and see."
- "We start at sunrise," said Captain Moggs authoritatively.
- "Make it after breakfast," suggested Soames mildly. "One should never challenge destiny on an empty stomach."
- Gail smiled warmly at him as he showed them out of the radar-dome. He saw them greeted at the exit by Rex, the large and untidy dog who was the base's official mascot. Rex considered himself as much a person as anybody else; and hence entitled to choose his company. He'd been waiting for

Gail. He'd adored her from the hour of her arrival. He frisked about her as she started back toward the base's main building. Soames went back to the radar.

As he looked at it, it picked out something a little smaller than a marble at a height of seventynine miles and followed that incredibly ancient, small wanderer of space down to its spectacular suicide by fire at a height of thirty-four miles.

He turned up the inter-base short-wave speaker. An almost hysterical voice snapped bitterly that the burst of impossible static proved that the Americans were trying out dreadful devices in the frozen wilderness of the Antarctic. There were references to Wall Street, and to warmongering, and other familiar ideas. It was not remarkable. Since progress in science had come to mean progress in the ability to blow people up, there was a tendency to emotional reaction even among alleged scientists. Soames found himself thinking queasily that since it was pure chance that his radar had picked up the inexplicable side-effects of the static-burst,' it might truly be challenging destiny to carry on the investigation.

He painstakingly checked over the radar. It worked perfectly. The taped record of its observations carried the story of all that Gail and Captain Moggs and he had seen. Machinery may err, but it does not have delusions. It would have to be subject to systematic hallucinations to have reported and recorded what this radar insisted was the truth.

The inter-base radio suddenly announced that the French seismograph had recorded an earth-shock. Within minutes, the British and Belgians confirmed it. The Danes chimed in. The coincidence of a ground-shock with a static-burst-assuredly in time, and apparently in place-was proof that something dramatic had happened.

Soanies elaborately went over the whole business in his mind again. For the first time in several days he was able to keep his thoughts away from Gail. Any ideas about a relationship with her simply were out. The point was that he wasn't rich and never would be. He couldn't afford a wife and there was no use thinking about it. So he would think about whatever had happened down on the ice-cap tonight. In the present state of international

jitters, God only knew what anything like this might bring about. So far, studies for weather-control in bacteriology, physics, aerodynamics, cybernetics, even progress in miniaturization had been denounced fiercely in the U.N. as preparation for war. But it had appeared that a study of meteoric orbits ought to seem a harmless pastime even to the Russians.

When dawn came, he went out to the helicopter's hangar. There was a supply plane on the runway, but the helicopter belonged at the base. He checked it over. He was supposed to take Gail aloft in it today. He found himself excessively careful in his check-over. He tried to assure himself that he was over-conscientious merely because she was a girl, a visiting reporter, but he wasn't a good liar.

When he headed back toward the main building one of the geophysics gang beckoned to him. He ~followed to the small, distant hut, now snow-buried to its eaves, in which the seismograph ticked away. It was several hundred yards from anywhere that strong ground-vibrations could be expected. "I think I'm going crazy," said the geophysics man. "Did you ever hear of a ground-shock starting inside out?"

He pointed to the graph paper that fed very slowly past the seismograph's pens. The recording looked odd

"If you put your hand just under the surface of the water in a bathtub," said the puzzled geophysics man, "and jerk it downward, you get a hollow that spreads out with a wave behind it. It's the exact opposite of dropping a pebble into water, which makes a wave that spreads out with a hollow, a trough, behind it. Except for that one way of making a backward wave system, all waves-absolutely all wave-systems-start out with a crest and a trough behind it. Everywhere, all the time, unless you do what I said in a bathtub."

"I'm a shower man myself," observed Soames. "But go

"This," said the geophysics man bitterly, "is like a bathtub wave. See? The ground was jerked away and then pushed back. Normal shock-waves push away and

then spring back! An ice-crack, a rock-slide, an explosion of any sort, all of them make the same kind of waves! All have compression phases, then rarefaction phases, then compression phases, and so on. What"-his voice was plaintive-"what in hell is this?"

Soames nervously cleared his throat. He wondered if Gail could get a human-interest story out of a geophysicist who found earth-shock waves placed hind part before.

"Are you saying," he asked after a moment, "that ordinary earth-tremors record like explosion-waves, but that you'd have to have an implosion to make a record like this?"

"Sure!" said the geophysics man. "But how can you have an implosion that will make an earth-shock? I'm going to have to take this whole damned wabble-bucket apart to find out what's the matter with

- it! But nothing can be the matter because it registered what it got! But what did it get?"
  "An implosion," said Soames. "And if you have trouble imagining that, I'm right there with you."
  He went back to the main building and breakfast. He looked on sardonically as Gail sat at the table surrounded by eagerly admiring staff members who'd seen only each other and supply-plane crewmen for months past. Gail didn't look in the least like a staff member or a supply-plane pilot. In fact, fourteen beards had been shaved off since her arrival, without making any of the staff look very much like Gail. She was very good to look at.
- He ate morosely. When the meal was done the three of them, Soames and Gail and Captain Moggs, went out to the 'copter hangar together. The hangar originally had been a shed on top of the ice. Now its roof was scarcely two feet above the surface, and a snow-ramp led up to the bitterly cold, wind-swept take-off space. The supply plane would have blocked its use as a runway, but it wouldn't need to be moved out of the way for a 'copter launching.
- "I've talked to the radar and loran operator," said Soames. "I explained that you wanted to see some
- crevasses from the air, and that I'd be wandering~around looking for them on the way to the rookery. ~ will check on us every fifteen minutes, anyhow."
- Gail asked, "Have you thought of anything the-thing might be?"
- "I've less than no idea," admitted Soames. "All I could think of was more things it can't be. The geophysics boys have something to worry about too. It seems the ground-shock waves came in front part hindmost. And there aren't supposed to be any such waves. But the seismQgraph says there are. The thing made 'em."
- He helped her up into the 'copter's cabin. Their hands touched. He tried to ignore the fact, but Gail glanced at him quickly.
- The 'copter went up the long, sloping, bulldozed snow-ramp. Soames checked his radio contact. He nodded. The engines hummed and roared and bellowed, and the ship lifted deliberately and floated away over the icy waste.
- A 'copter ride does not feel like any other kind of airborne travel. One moves slowly by comparison with planes, and a side-wind makes a great difference between the heading of the ship and the way the ground moves beneath it. One seems to be traveling out of control, sliding around the sky with no particular direction. The feeling is only an illusion, but still disturbing. The motors droned and droned. The 'buildings of the base dwindled in size. Presently they were very small and very far behind. To the left the sea appeared. It looked even colder than the ice which covered everything solid.
- "This is a thrill," said Gail in Soames' ear over the motor-noise. "I like to think it could be a spaceship we're going to find!"
- "I'd prefer anything else," said Soames. "Anything!" The base seemed to drift away back to the very horizon. Soames swung the ship to the right, to the south. It went winging on over whiteness, a thousand feet high. Below was nothing but snow. No sign showed that any human being had ever trodden the surface beneath them. Nobody ever had. But no sign showed
- that any living thing at all had ever glimpsed the terrain beneath them.
- The tiny droning thiRg was infinitely lonely in the empty sky, above a bndscape that had never known a growing thing. There was only one spot in two thousand miles where human beings were to be found. That spot was the South Pole itself. Beyond it lay vast deserts of snow and the towering ramparts of icy mountains, colossal plateaus many thousands of feet high over which incredibly cold winds blew furiously. The little helicopter was, very much alone.
- Soames flew carefully, checking wind-drift by the shadows of ice-spires in the waste beneath. Twice he murmured briefly into his radio microphone. Each time his estimated position checked with the radar. The third time he was out of radar range for his altitude. He rose steeply until the radar picked him up again. His position checked.
- "I'm going down now," he told the base. "Hunting crevasses."
- He let the 'copter descend. The waste was featureless then and for a seemingly interminable time afterward. Then his estimated position matched the site of the static earth-shock-concussion-wave occurrence. There seemed nothing about this part of the snow-desert which was different from any other part. No. Over to the left.
- He went over to see. He hovered, a thousand feet up. A wind-pattern showed in the snow. But this was rather far from the probable thing. There were lines-hollows- where gusts had blown at the snow's surface. They were spiral lines, tending toward a center. They had not the faintest resemblance to the crater of an explosion which might have made an earth-shock.
- Soames stared down. Gail frowned thoughtfully. Captain Moggs announced firmly, "That is a very singular thing."
- Soames did not comment. He was getting a camera out of its place in the 'copter. Gail stared down.

- "I've seen something like that," she said, sounding puzzled. "Not a picture. Certainly not a snow-field. I think it looks like a diagram of some sort."
- "Try a storm-wind diagram," said Soames. "The way a cyclone ought to look from directly overhead. The meteorology boys will break down and cry when they see this picture!"
- He took a picture. He took others. The shadows of the wind-made indentations would come out clearly in the film.
- "Unless," said Soames, "unless somebody has a ~snap of a whirlwind touching a snow-field and, bouncing up again, this will be a photographic first. It's not an ex~ plosion pattern, you'll notice. Wind and snow weren't thrown away from the center. They were drawn toward it. Momentarily. It's an explosion inside out. An implosion pattern."
- He put away the camera and with some grimness headed for another place some twenty miles away, where a thing that had appeared from nowhere had dived four or five miles and vanished below the horizon, with only one sign in its falling-that it had struggled to avoid a crash.
- "I don't understand," said Gail a little sheepishly. She looked hopefully at Soames for an explanation.
- "An explosion," said Soames grimly, "is a bursting-out of a suddenly present mass of gas. An implosion is a bursting-in of a suddenly present vacuum. Set off a firecracker and you have an explosion. Break an electric bulb and you have an implosion. Th~t pattern behind us is an implosion pattern."
- "But how could such a thing be?"
- "If we knew," said Soames, "maybe we'd be running away. Maybe we should."
- He was acutely conscious of Gail sitting beside him. He was even impatient with himself for being so much aware of her when it couldn't amount to anything and he had a first-class scientific problem on hand.
- The 'copter fluttered on. The ice-sheet continued unbroken. Presently Soames said in a flat voice, "What we're looking for ought to be in sight. It isn't. There's quite a breeze down below. It's keeping snow stirred up in clouds. Anything solid on the ice-sheet is completely hidden by the equivalent of a dust-storm, only it's snow."
- The 'copter hovered. For a space fully two miles wide, cloudiness obscured the essentially featureless ice-sheet. It was practically a white-out-microscopic snow-crystals kept in turmoil like the densest of possible fogs.
- "From now on," said Soames, "I shall lie awake nights trying to figure this thing out. And I'll almost certainly never know."
- "There!" cried Gail.
- She pointed. Blowing snow hid everything. Then there was a hole in the whiteness, a shadow. The shadow stirred and an object too dark to be snow appeared. It vanished again.
- "There's a sheltered place," said Gail, "and there's something dark in it!"
- Soames pulled the microphone to his lips.
- "Calling base," he said briefly. "Calling base. Hello! I'm well beyond the last radar-fix. I think I'm bearing about one-severz-zero degrees from base. Get a loran fix on me. Make it quick. I may have to land."
- He listened, pressing a button to activate the loran-relay which would transmit a signal from the base, so the bearing and distance could be computed back there. It was wiser to have such computations done aground. He readied the camera again.
- Gail reached forward and took the 'copter's binoculars from their place. She gazed through them. The peculiar shadow, hole, opening in the blowing snow reappeared. Something in it looked a little like a missile, only it was bright metal and much too large. It lay askew on the ice. A part of itia large part-was smashed.
- "Spaceship?" asked Gail, "Do you think that's it?"
- "God forbid!" said Soames.
- There was movement. One-two-three figures stared up from beside the metal shape. A fourth appeared. Soames grimly took pictures. Gail gasped suddenly, "They're not men!" she said shakily. "Brad, they're children! Queerly dressed children, with bare arms and legs! They're out there on the snow! They'll freeze! We've got to help them!"
- "Calling base," said Soames into the microphone. "I'm landing. I have to. If I don't report in twenty minutes
- come with caution-repeat with caution-to see what's happened. I repeat. If I do not report in twenty minutes come with extreme caution, to see what is the matter."
- He sent the 'copter slanting downward. He reached forward and took the 'copter's standard-equipment automatic pistol and put it in his pocket.
- The 'copter made a loud noise as it went skittering down toward the object-and the children-on the

ice.

A LL ~VER mx wom.~o the lives of people and the ,tl.. march of events proceeded according to custom.

Commuters caught morning trains, and read their newspapers, which was not a cheerful way to begin the day. Farmers ploughed their fields, which was less dispiriting. Small boys vociferously played at games requiring much vocal gunfire, and small girls sedately played house. Over vast stretches of glittering sea, ships steamed valiantly, and on land super-markets offered special bargains, and in appropriate places dogs barked or scratched themselves or trotted impoltantly from here to there, or else slept in complete canine comfort.

As yet no sign had appeared of any new influence which might alter a firmly established trend of the times toward more and more complicated situations which could be more and more desperately stalled off but never solved. Nobody had noticed any cause for immediate desperation. No. Nobody realized that they'd noticed a cause for immediate desperation.

Already, a mere six or seven hours after its occurrence, there was discussion in scientific circles about the remarkable. burst of static Soames had heard. As it was discussed, its astonishing span attracted attention. It had blanketed the whole world. Then its violence began to be realized. Never before had there been an unconfined

discharge of electric energy of even a fraction of the power of the static burst. From an oddity to be discussed, it became a curiosity to be inquired into, and then it was a scientific problem of the first rank among researchers in pure science.

But, so far, it wasn't anything more. It had caused no conspicuous damage. At the beginning it attracted attention because it couldn't happen, and had. It was plainly impossible for any single source of radio interference to blanket the whole globe on all wave-ler~gths for three full seconds. But it had taken place. All communication was stopped, all .eledtrical apparatus in use was disturbed, all working meters and measuring devices thrown out of adjustment. It drew attention to itself because it was not conceivable, but was nevertheless real.

It did not cause alarm at first. That would come later, when the power released to make the senseless signal was computed. Right now, monitoring devices on the watch for unauthorized broadcasts said it came from Antarctica. There was an earth-shock in Antarctica at the same time, but there are always earth-shocks happening.

A really sensitive seismograph reports an incredible number every day. Nobody noticed the coincidence. Nobody was scared. Certain pure-science researchers who discovered that it wasn't a local phenomenon became more and more interested as they found it world-wide, on all wave-bands, and of maximum signal-intensity everywhere. But they were only interested, intensely so, to be sure, but stifi only interested.

So there was no recognition anywhere on Earth that any new thing had appeared to disturb the orderly development of crisis and compromise, in diplomacy; rises in prices to overtake rises in wages, in economics; and an increasing depreciation of human values in exchange for the increased convenience with which the world could 'be blown to bits when the time for that achievement arrived.

Nobody was really concerned except Soames-who guessed what was happening-and Gail because Soames was disturbed. The helicopter hovered over the ice-fog.

A ship lay plainly visible on the ice. Half its length was smashed, but Soames could see that it had never flown with wings. There weren't any.

- "It looks like a spaceship," said Gail breathlessly.
- '"'l"hat would finish things!" Soames said grimly.

It would. The arrival of a spaceship from another civilization on Earth was the worst catastrophe Soames could imagine. Earth was already squabbling and divided into power groups and embittered neutrals. It was a world armed with weapons so deadly that only the fear of retaliation kept the peace. And contact with a farther-advanced culture would not unite humanity. It would detonate hatred and suspicion into sheer madness.

Earth was an armed camp with all its nations more or less committed to one of two sides. A higher civilization could tip the scales between them, if it gave one side superior weapons. Any contact

with a superior race would result in competition for that race's favor. Yet if one part of Earth's population appeared to be favored by the newcomers, the other part must try to destroy it before the higher race could interfere to protect it. The world outside the Iron Curtain could not risk the Iron Curtain nations' becoming best friends of possible invaders. Communist leaders could not risk the free world's making alliance with a higher technology and a greater science. So actual contact wIth a more advanced race would be the' most deadly happening that could take place in the world as it was today.

Soames realized all this and began to perspire when the 'copter touched ground. He jumped out. He looked at the ship and felt weak. But he snapped a quick photograph. It was quite true that it had no wings, had never owned any. It had been probably a hundred feet long, all bright metal. Now nearly half of it was crushed or crumpled by its fall. It must have been brought partly under control before the impact, though, enough to keep it from total destruction. And Soames, regarding it, saw that there had been no propellers to support it or pull it through the air. There were no air-ducts for jet motors. It wasn't a jet. -

There were no rockets, either. Its drive was of a kind so far undreamed of by men of here and now. Gail stood beside Soames, her eyes bright. She looked at the children. Captain Moggs climbed laboriously down to the snow.

Gail said, "Brad! It isn't cold here!"

Soames noted but could not attend to the fact in his appalled realization that this ship, wherever it might have come from, was qualified to navigate space.

"Children," said Captain Moggs firmly, "we must speak to your parents at, once!"

The children looked at her interestedly. One of the girls spoke politely, in wholly unintelligible syllables. The girls might have been thirteen or thereabouts. The boys were possibly a year older-sturdier and perhaps more muscular than most boys of that age. All four were wholly composed. They looked curious but not in the least alarmed, not in the least upset, as they'd have been had older companions been injured or killed in the ship's landing.

They 'wore brief garments that would have been quite suitable for a children's beach party in midsummer, but did not belong on the Antarctic ice-cap at any time. Each 'wore a belt with moderately large metal insets placed on either side of its fastening.

"Brad!" repeated Gail. "It's warm here! Do you realize it? And there's no wind!"

Soames swallowed. The camera hung from his hand. It either was, or could be a spaceship that lay partly smashed upon the ice. He looked about him with a sort of total grimness. There was a metal girder, quite separate from the ship, which had apparently been set up slantingly in the ice since the landing. It had no apparent purpose.

Captain Moggs said peremptorily, "Children! We insist on speaking to your parents! At once!" Gail moved forward. Soames now saw a small tripod near the ship. Something spun swiftly at its top. It had plainly been brought out from inside the strange vessel. For a hundred yards in every direction there was no wind or snow. More than that, the calm air was also warm. It was unbelievable.

"Do you hear me?" demanded Captain Moggs. "Children!"

Gail said in a friendly fashion, smiling at the girls, "I'm sure you don't understand a word I say, but won't you invite us to visit?"

Her tone and manner were plainly familiar to the children. With something of the self-consciously grownup air of a young girl acting in her mother's place, one of the two girls smiled and bobbed, not a curtsy, but still something comparable to learned politeness. She made a gesture which was plainly hospitable. She stood aside for Gail to enter the ship.

Gail did enter, and Captain Moggs strode after her. Gail was not a tall girl, but she had to bend her head to go through the doorway. Soames put his hand in his pocket. There was the automatic pistol, in readiness. One of the boys beckoned politely to him.

"Yes," said Soames grimly. "I'll walk into your parlor. But it's possible that you've walked into ours."

He moved to the ship's door. 'There was no menace in the children. Soames felt, abruptly, that if there was any menace present it was himself. He was in the position of a savage in an encounter with a civilization so superior that it must destroy the culture the savage had grown up in. Yet he had a normal adult's instinctive response to children who might need help. And then it occurred to him that Gail was involved in any disaster the coming of highly civilized aliens might bring to Earth. His throat went dry.

He entered the ship, ducking to pass through the door. It was quite as bright inside the ship as it was out-of-doors. There were no lights. It was simply bright. A part of the floor had buckled upward, and the rest was not level, but the first impression was of brilliance and the second was of a kind of simplicity that was bewildering. And there was a third. It was of haste. The ship

seemed to have been put together with such urgent haste that nothing had been done for mere finish or decoration. There had not even been that extra touch in design which gives strictly functional objects a Sort of beauty.

"I want to speak to the parents of these children!" said Captain Moggs firmly. "I insist upon it!" "I suspect," said Soames grimly, "that in the culture these children came Arom, the proper place for parents is the home. This is a child-size spaceship, you'll notice."

The size of the door proved it. Chairs proved it. He saw through a crumpled open doorway into the crushed part of the ship. There was machinery in view, but no shafts or gears or power-leads. He guessed it to be machinery because it could not be anything else. He saw a dented metal case with an. opened top. The boys had apparently dragged it into the relatively undamaged part of the ship to work upon its contents.

He could see coils of bare metal, and arrangements which might have been inductances. He took a sort of forlorn pride in guessing that the thing was some sort of communication device, but he was alarmed and angered by his inability to understand even the purpose of objects and devices on every hand. He felt as an Amazon Basin savage might feel if transported to the interior of a submarine with all its dials and gadgets.

There was a board with buttons on it. It might be a control board, but it didn't look like one. There was a metal box with a transparent plastic front. One could see cryptic shapes of metal inside. Two bright metal balls mounted on a side wall. They had holes in them, about the right size for the hands of children like these to enter. There was a two-foot, carefully machined spiral of metal, intruding into and lessening the living space of the ship. These things had functions he could not even guess at. He found himself resentful of things which were obviously the developments of science-and he could not even guess what they were for.

But alien? He looked at the boys. They were human children. There was absolutely nothing strange about them. The taller one turned his head, and Soames saw that small whorl where one's hair grows out radially to lie flat on the top of the head and both sides as well. Their eyes and eyelashes were normal. Their noses. Their lips. Their teeth. In every respect they were as human as he was, or Gail.

Gail chattered to the two girls. They could not understand her, but they plainly accepted her as a pleasing adult with whom reserve was unnecessary. Soames- despite his inner turmoil-felt an odd pride. Even these children from who-knows-where liked Gail instantly. Anybody would. Maybe Gail could so establish herself with the children that their parents would feel grateful and allow hei' to be exempted from the disaster which must certainly come to Earth from the shipwreck of these children upon it.

He saw that the girls were fascinated by her cold-weather garment and the zipper. He turned to the most urgent problem of the moment. He snapped pictures, before anything else. Gail showed the girl children her compact. They were charmed. She made a gesture which gave it to them. One of them took a tiny cord from about her neck and gave it to Gail. There was a tiny figurine as a pendant. The other girl zestfully insisted that Gail accept a similar gift from her.

One of the boys turned to the dented metal case. He began to arrange its contents in a somehow final fashion. Soames guessed that it had been damaged in the landing, and they'd made a repair. The second boy touched Soamer' elbow and showed him the box with the clear plastic front. He touched it, and an image appeared in the plastic. It was an image of the landscape outside. He shifted the box, and the landscape image flashed sidewise. He touched another control. The landscape flowed swiftly toward the viewer. It raced. Presently the ground seemed to drop away and Soames found himself staring at a picture which showed the ice-sheet and the sky and, very far away, the dark blue line which was the sea, now a hundred miles distant.

The boy nodded and made delicate adjustments. Then Soames looked at an image of the Gissel Bay base from which he and the others had set out an hour before. It was a remarkably clear image. Soames could even see the supply plane waiting on the runway until it was time for take-off. He knew that the box ,was something which was not a radar device, but performed all the functions of one and so many others that it was a different thing entirely.

Then Gail said, "Brad! Look at this!"

She held out the j~ecklaces the girls had given her. She showed him the ornaments at their ends. One was a very tiny horse. It was beautifully done, and obviously from life. The head was larger than an ordinary horse's head would be. The body was lightly built. Each of its tiny feet had three toes.

Gail watched Soames' face.

"You see? How about this?"

The ornament of the other necklace was a tiny metal fish. It had fins and a tail, but no scales. Instead, its body was protected by bony armor. It was a ganoid fish, like a sturgeon. But it was

not a sturgeon, though sturgeons are now the main representatives of what once were innumerable ganoid species.

Captain Moggs said plaintively, "Mr. Soames! Can't you ask these children where their parents are?"

"The children are alone," said Gail. She had lost some color. "They've just the air of very nice children receiving guests when their parents are out."

"But where did they come from?"

Gail looked at Soames. He shook his head.

"Could they be Russian?" Captain Moggs questioned indignantly. "But they couldn't be this far ahead of us in technology!"

"They're not Russians," said Soames. "The ship was built for children to operate, though I can't imagine why. But there's nothing like a weapon in view. If the Russians could make a ship like this, we'd know it! There'd be no United Nations. There'd be only unholy Russia. I'm going to call base before they get alarmed."

He went outside and called the base. He felt queer, almost numbed. He had to remember that by agreement all the bases used the same wave-length for communication with planes and snow-weasels. The theory was that help could be exchanged most easily if all aircraft could call all bases for help. But it was much more a sign of suspicion than anything else.

He made a report which sounded as if there were

some minor trouble with the 'copter and therefore he'd landed. It did not check with his last call speaking insistently of caution, but he couldn't help it. He said he'd call back. He intended to call for help-in handling the matter of the children-as soon as it would seem plausible that he needed help to get off the ground again.

But he felt shaky inside. The radar report and the static and earth-shock and concussion-wave of the night before had been improbable enough. But this was more incredible still. The children's ship must have appeared in the middle of all those unlikely phenomena. It was reasonable for it to have crashed amid such violence. But where had it come from, and why?

The children were human. Absolutely human! But they were members of a culture which made the current culture on Earth seem barbaric. It could not be an Earth civilization. It couldn't have developed, unknown to other races, to such a superior degree that it could make spaceships and devices even Soames could not imagine.

On a world where for thousands of years men had killed each other untidily in wars, and where they now prepared to destroy themselves wholly in a final one, there was no possibility of such a civilization existing in secret. But where was this culture? Why had the ship appeared four miles high, in a space where the radar had said something was about to happen before it did? Soames stood by the 'copter, staring bemusedly at the ship. The two boys came out They went briskly to the shattered part of the ship and picked up a metal girder neatly matching the one that leaned absurdly where it was fixed in the icy surface. By the ease of their movements, it could not be heavy. It would have to be aluminum or magnesium to be so light. Magnesium alloy, at a guess.

One boy held it upright by the slanting beam. The other produced a small object Soames could not see. He bent over the ice and moved his hand to and fro. The new girder sank into the ice. They slanted it to meet the one already fixed. They held it fast for a moment. They went back to the wrecked ship. The second girder remained fixed, like the first one.

Soames went to look. The metal beam was deeply irnbedded in the ice which somehow did not chill the air above it.

He heard a small sound. One of the boys-the one in the brown tunic-like shirt-swept something across the plating of the crumpled vessel. The plating parted like wet paper. Soames watched in detached amazement as a whole section of plating came away. The boy in the brown tunic very briskly trimmed plating away from a strength-member and had a third metal beam. Whatever instrument he used, it cut metal as if it were tallow or butter.

Both boys brought the third beam to where the others leaned. They swung this one up. The three beams would form a tripod. But this third bit of metal was curved. They lowered it, and the boy in the brown tunic matterof-factly sliced through the metal, took out a~ V-shaped piece, and made the rest of the metal whole once more. They raised it again, the boy moved his hand over the ice, it sank into it, they held it a moment only, and went off to the ship.

Soames, dazed, went to see what had happened. He picked up scraps of the trimmed-away metal. He felt like a savage who might examine sawdust in an effort to understand how a saw cut wood. Captain Moggs came out. She climbed into the 'copter while Soames puzzled over the metal scraps. They did not look cut. They had mirror-bright surfaces, as if melted apart. But there'd been no flame.

The boys reappeared with the dented case that Soames guessed was a communication device of some sort. They carried it to the new tripod. One of them also carried a complicated structure of small rods which could be an antenna system to transmit radiation of a type that Soames could not conceive of.

Captain Moggs descended from the 'copter.

"I called base," she observed. "Two snow-weasels will start here within the hour. Another 'copter is due in from an advanced observation post at any moment. It will be sent here as soon as it arrives."

Soames wondered numbly just how indiscreet she'd

been in a short-wave conversation that could be picked up by any of the other nations' bases that cared to listen in. But Gail came out of the ship just then with the two girls happily close to her. Very young girls adore to be close to an older person who likes them. She came to Soames. "Brad," she said anxiously. "Do you realize what those trinkets mean? There aren't any such creatures on Earth, but there were! Where do these children come from? They're not from the Earth we know."

Captain Moggs snorted.

"Don't be absurd, Gail! Of course they're human children! I can't understand how their parents let them go flying alone, and it's no wonder they crashed. But- what are those boys doing?" Soames knew. If the dented case contained a communicator, which would use so complicated an antenna as lay ready for use, there could only be one answer. And there could be only one thing for him to do, considering everything.

"They're shipwrecked," he said. "If you were ship~ wrecked, what would you try to do? You'd try to signal for help. They're setting up something to signal for help with. They've landed on a world of rather primitive savages. That's us. They want somebody to come and take them away."

"It musth't be permitted!" said Captain Moggs firmly. "The ship must be examined! In our modern world, with the military situation what it is. .

Soames looked at her ironically.

"I've got an automatic pistol in my pocket," he said. "Should I threaten the children with it? I'd rather not. I'm afraid they might be amused."

He had metal scraps in his hands, those he'd picked up a few moments before. There was a threadlike extension of metal from one scrap. He twisted it off and put it on his sleeve. He struck a light with his cigarette lighter. He touched it to the fibre of metal. There was a burst of flame. His sleeve was singed.

"Mostly magnesium," he mused. "It's possible that they don't think of fire as a danger. They may not use

fire any more. We don't light our houses with open flames any longer. They may not use flames at all "

He sorted through the bits of silvery metal. Another morsel had a wirelike ~projection. He saw the boy with the green tunic laying something on the snow, from the ship to the tripod.

"A power line," he said, appalled. "They've got to signal nobody knows how far, with nobody can guess how much power in the signal. And they use power-leads the size of sewing thread! But of course the people who built this ship would have superconductors!" Then he said, "I may be committing suicide, but I think I ought to, rather than let

He moved forward. His throat was dry. Oddly, it occurred to him that it did not seem that he did this out of a sense of duty but more for the protection of Gail, who would be endangered if the children's civilization learned of the existence of the human race on Earth, and moved upon it. H~ struck his lighter and touched the flame to the thread of metal on the second scrap. It flared. He threw the whole piece just as all the flammable alloy caught fire. In mid-air it became a ball of savage white incandescence that grew larger and fiercer as it flew. It was a full yard in diameter when it fell upon the dented case the boys had brought here.

That burst into flame, a vast sheet of white fury that was fathoms in extent. The newly made tripod caught. Flame leaped thirty feet into the air. Soames was scorched and blinded by the glare. Then the firo died swiftly and snow-white ash particles drifted down on every hand. The boy in the brown tunic cried out fiercely. He held out his hand with, the thing that had cut metal glittering in it. Gail flung herself before Soames.

He lifted her fiercely to one side.

"Get out of the way," he commanded. "I've destroyed their signalling device. I may have kept their civilization from destroying ours. Get out of the way!"

He faced the fourteen-year-old grimly. The boy's face was contorted. There was more than anger in it. The boy in the green tunic clenched and unclenched his

hands. His expression was 'one of pure horror. One girl sobbed. The other spoke in a tone of

despair so great and grief so acute that Soames was almost ashamed.

Then the boy in the brown tunic spoke bitterly to the girl who'd evidently said something to restrain him. He turned his eyes from Soames. He went into the ship, stumbling a little. The whole air of the three remaining children changed utterly. They had been composed and confident and 2ven zestful. They'd acted as if the wrecking of their ship were an adventure rather than a catastrophe. But now they were dazed by disaster. First one of the girls, and then the second boy, and then the other girl went despairingly into the ship.

Captain Moggs stated proudly, "You did very well, Mr. Soames. Of course they had to be prevented from signalling until proper authority passes upon the matter!"

Soames looked at Gail. The boy in the brown tunic had pointed at him with the object that cut metal plates in half. He'd been stopped, most likely, by the girl's grief-stricken words. Soames had a profound conviction that the boy could easily have killed him. He had an equally strong conviction that it could have been a low price to pay for preventing the rest of these children's race from finding Earth.

- "I thought," said Gail awkwardly, "that he was going to kill you."
- "So did I," said Soames. "The odd thing is that I have a pistol in my pocket and didn't think of using it. Because he's a kid."
- "I suppose," said Gail, "that you feel pretty badly."
- "I feel like a murderer," he told her grimly. "And of children, at that. I have probably kept them from ever seeing their families again."
- After a long time Gail said with a curiously mirthless attempt at humor, "Do you know, this is the biggest news story that's ever happened? And do you know that nobody would believe it?"
- "But this," said Captain Moggs firmly, "is a matter of such grave military importance that nothing must be said about it at all! Nothing!"

Soames made no comment, but he didn't think the matter could be kept secret.

They waited. The children stayed in the ship. Soames and Gail and Captain Moggs simply stood around, waiting for someone to come. Soames felt horribly guilty and doggedly unrepentent. He couldn't let in civilization upon his own barbarous culture. He knew too much of what followed such an event, and a glance inside the ship had finnly convinced him that the We~stern culture of the twentieth century was barbarous alongside that of

•the builders of the ship.

After a very long time the children reappeared. The girls' faces were tear-streaked. They brought small possessions and placed them neatly in the snow. They went back for more.

"At a guess," said Soames, "that super-radar of theirs has shown them a 'copter on the way. They know they can't stay here. I've made it impossible for them to hope to be found. They've got to let themselves be taken away."

The bringing out of small objects ended. The boy in the brown tunic went back in the ship. He stayed there for another long time.

When he re-emerged, he said something in a despairing, bitter voice. The girls turned their backs to the ship. The girl with brown eyes began to weep. The boy in the green tunic shifted the small tripod to a new position. As he carried it, the calmness and the warmth of the air changed remarkably. There was a monstrous gust of icy wind, and warm calm, and another gust. But when he put the tripod down again there was only calm once more.

Soames heard the droning of another 'copter, far away. The boy in the green tunic held out his hand. It had the glittering tiny object in it. From a fifty-foot distance, he swept his hand from one end to the other of the wrecked ship. Flame leaped up. The magnesiumalloy vessel burned with a brightness that dazzled their eyes. A monstrous, a colossal flaming flare leaped and soared-and died. Too late, Soames fumbled for his camera. There was no longer a wrecked ship on the ice. There were only a few, smoking, steaming fragments.

When the- second 'copter landed beside the first, the four children were waiting composedly' to be taken away.

3.

Т

HE WORLD'S AFFAIRS continued as usual. There had lately been international crises in Western Europe, the Balkans, and in the United Nations over Greenland. Earlier, the crises were in West Africa, Kashmir, and Iran. Presently there would be crises in South America, the Far East, and

Scandinavia. The initiative in world affairs lay with those who profited by turmoil, so turmoil had become the norm. Statesmen had abandoned the idea that the purpose of statesmanship was the maintainance of peace, and now acted on the principle that the function of a diplomat was to make a profit out of confusion. The atmosphere in high places was much like that in the Italian city-states during the time of Machiavelli. In that earlier period, however, diplomacy leaned heavily on assassinations and treachery. In its new and improved form, diplomacy preferred blackmail by threat of atomic war.

Naturally, even Antarctica could be used to create turmoil. The population of the continent was confined to the staffs of research bases established during the International Geophysical Year, and continued ever since. In theory the bases were an object-lesson in cooperation for a constructive purpose, which splendid spirit of mutual trust and confidence must spread through the world and some day lead to an era of blissful and unsuspicious peacefulness.

But that time was not here. To the contrary, there'd been an outburst of static of an unprecedented kind.

The squalling, agonized outcry had been heard in every operating radio and television set in the world. Automatic direction-finders had located its source as somewhere in Antarctica. )'herefore there was immediately much diplomatic conversation about Antarctica.

In itself, that was reasonable. A fifty-thousand-watt transmitter can cover half a continent with a signal on

-one wave-length. It wouldn't be too strong a signal, but it could be heard. Not only had, this burst of static covered the globe on all wave-lengths, but it was everywhere of absolute maximum volume. It had used many thousand times, probably some millions of times as much power as any signal ever heard before. No atom bomb could have made it. It was not a natural signal. The suggestion of lightning would have been ridiculous. It was artificial. It was alarming in the extreme to think of so much power available to anybody. Science and government, together, raised three very urgent questions. \Vho did it? How did they do it? Why did they do it? A crisis about such a subject was automatic. In Washington there was deep suspicion of the Russians. In Moscow there was deeper suspicion of the Americans. In Britain there was doubt of both and in France bitter resentment against everybody. As soon as scientists revealed the amount of power flung into the atmosphere to make pure noise, the average citizen suspected the worst Scientific progress had become the most urgent need of every nation, and was expected to be the end of all of them. At Gissel Bay, however, the two 'copters came droning in, and settled down, and Gail and Soames and Captain Moggs got out. Each instantly picked up a boy or girl and hurried to get them out of the bitter cold. Soames went back with a blanket for the odd boy-the one in the brown tunic-but he refused to be carried and walked into the base with his teeth chattering.

The staff reacted immediately to the children. They tried to be reassuring. They tried to find a language the children èould understand. They failed. Then, when the children spoke slowly and carefully, they searched for at least familiar root-sounds. They found nothing. But certainly the children felt themselves surrounded by people who wished them well.

Volunteers brought in their possessions from the 'copters. The youngsters were able to relax only a little despite the gruff kindliness about them. The two girls, of course, moved into the quarters set aside for Gail and Captain Moggs. A cosmic-particle man with two sons of his own back home offered to look after the two boys. Others hovered about, honestly anxious to be helpful. The base photographer developed and printed Soames' pictures. The design of the ship was clear and the children before it gave it scale. The interior pictures were not so good, wrongly focused. Still, there was plenty to substantiate Soani'es' report.

Aside from the pictures there were the things the children had selected to be brought. There was a cooking pot. Its substance conducted heat in one direction only. Heat could enter its outside surface, but not leave it. Heat could leave its inside surface, but not enter it. Consequently, when the lid was on, the outer surface absorbed heat from the air around it and the inner surface released it, and the contents of the pot boiled merrily without fuel, while the outside became coated with frost.

Some of the physicists went about in a state of shock, trying to figure out how it happened. Others, starry-eyed, pointed out that if the cooking pot had ,been a pipe, it could be submerged under a running river, yield live steam by cooling off the water that flowed past it, and that the water would regain normal river temperature in the course of a few miles of sunlit flow. In such a case, what price coal and petroleum? In fact, what price atomic power?

The small tripod went up outside the base's main building. Instantly the spinner began to turn, the wind ceased. In minutes the air ceased to be biting. In tens of minutes it was warm. Meteorologists, refusing to believe their senses, explored the boundaries of the calm area. They came back, frost-bitten, swearing that there was a drop of eighty degrees beyond the calm area,

and a rise of temperature beyond the cold belt. The tripod-

spinner was a different application of the principle of the cooking pot. Somehow the spinning thing made an area that heat could enter but not leave. And wind could not blow througI~ it. If the device could be reversed, deserts would become temperate zones. As it was, the Arctic and Antarctic could be made to bloom. The gadget was an out-of-doors heat-pump.

There was the box wit-h the plastic sheet in it. One of the boys, very composed, operated it. On request, he opened it up. There was nothing in the case but a~ few curiously shaped bits of metal. The thing was too simple to be comprehensible when one did not know the principle by which it worked.

The same trouble showed up with every device examined. Everything could be seen, but nothing understood. The photographs of the ship gave the same effect of baffling simplicities producing incredible results.

These were important matters. Captain Moggs visibly grew in her own estimation. She demanded a scrambler circuit to Washingtoii so she could report to military authorities. There was no scrambler at the base. It was a purely scientific research headquarters. Captain Moggs became agitated through pure frustration.

There was a supply plane on the ice runway. It was to have taken off hours later, but she commandeered it in the name of the armed forces of ~the United States. She demanded an immediate take-off. She secured it. She arranged for the plane to be refueled in mid-flight. She went direct to Washington with the news of the event she'd witnessed, prints of Soames' photographs, and samples of the children's possessions which could be carried on her person.

Back at the base Gail, after a conference with Soames, took one of the girls aside. The most urgent problem now was communication with the children. So Gail began gently to teach the taller girl some few English words as the first and most necessary of all things. Very shortly she greeted Soames anxiously when he came to see how the process went.

"Her name," said Gail, "is Zani. The other girl, the one with blue eyes, is Mal, and the boy in the brown tunic

is Fran and the one in the green is Hod. I think we'll manage. She understands that there's a language to be learned. She's writing in some fashion of her own. She was bewildered when I handed her a ball-point pen, but she understood after a moment."

Soames felt that Gail looked to him for approval. He gave it, feeling foolish. Gail said more anxiously still, "But

-what happens next? What's going to happen to the children? They've no friends, no family, nobody to care what happens to them! And Captain Moggs found out I piunned to teach them some English words, and she ordered me

-ordered me!-to add our numerical system to the English lessons. She says that statistics will be wanted from them. What do children know of statistics, Brad? They're in a terrible fix!"

"For which I'm responsible," said Soames grimly, "and about which I'm already jittery."

"I'm responsible too!" said Gail quickly. "I helped! What are you worrying about?"

"They burned up their ship," said Soames more grimly still. "Why?"

She shook her head, watching his expression.

"We're barbarians, compared to their people," said Soames. "And they know it. They treated us like harmless savages in the beginning. Then I destroyed their only hope of getting in touch with their families and friends. So they destroyed their ship, or one of the boys did. But the others knew, and got ready for it by bringing some possessions out of it. Why?"

"I'm not sure.. ." said Gail.

"If we'd captured their ship intact," Soames told her, "we'd have studied it. Either we'd have come to understand it, so we could build one too, or if we couldn't- being heathens-we'd have given up entirely. In either case the children wouldn't matter to us. They'd simply have been castaways. As it is, they've got us where they want us. I suspect they've got some trinkets to trade with us, as we might offer beads to bushmen. They'll try to whet our appetites for riches we can only get from their civilization. They'll bargain. Let them or help them signal to their families, they'll say, and their parents will

make us all rich. Bushels of beads and mirrors and metal hatchets or their equivalents! They probably picked out trinkets we can't hope to understand and duplicate. Intelligent children right here on Earth, cast away among barbarians, would try to get themselves returned to their families by promising huge ransoms. These kids are almost certainly set to use the same tactics." Gail considered this for a moment. Then she shook her head.

"It won't work. We've got newspapers and news broadcasts. People will be too scared to allow it." "Scared of four children?" demanded Soaines.

"You don't realize what newspapers are," Gail said with a trace of wryness. "They don't live by

printing news. They print 'true' stories-serials. 'True' crime stories, to be continued tomorrow. 'True' sex stories, see tomorrow's home edition for the next installment. 'True' international-crisis suspense stories, for the next thrilling chapter read tomorrow's paper or tune in to this station! That's what's printed and broadcast, Brad. It's what people want and insist on. Don't you realize how the children will be served up in the news?"

He shook his head in his turn.

"Alien Spaceship Wrecked on Earth! Crew Captured," she quoted. "Aliens Land on Earth! Invasion Near! Invasion From Space! Alien Scout-Ship Shot Down! Fleet On Way! Creatures From Space in Antarctica! Earth Helpless!" She grimaced. "There won't be any demand for human-interest stories by Gail Haynes, telling about four nicely raised children who need to be helped to get back to their parents. The public wouldn't like that so much. The children are in a very bad fix. I'm sorry for them."

He winced.

"If you're sure . .

"You'll see," said Gail. "I'm very much afraid, Brad, that presently you and I will be the only people in the world who don't think the children had better be killed, for safety. You did the right thing for us, in not letting them signal to their families. ~ut you don't need to worry about too much sympathy for the children!"

"And I got them into it," said Soames morosely.

"We did," insisted Gail. "And we did what we had to. But I'm going to do what I can to keep it from being worse for them than I can help. If you'll join me. .."

"Naturally!" said Soames.

He went incodily away. He was unaware of Gail's expression as she looked after him. She turned slowly to the girl with her.

He found the other three children. They were the center of an agitated group of staff members, trying to communicate by words and gestures, while the children tried'not to show disturbance at their vehemence. A cosmic-particle specialist told Soames the trouble. Among the children's possessions there was a coil of thread-fine copper wire. Somebody had snipped off a bit of it to test, and discovered that the wire was superconductive. A superconductor is a material which has no electrical resistance whatever. In current Earth science tin and mercury and a few alloys could be made into supercOnductors by being cooled below 18° Kelvin, or four hundred odd degrees below zero Fahrenheit. Above that temperature, superconductivity cUd not exist.

But the children's wire was a superconductor at room temperature. A thread the size of a cobweb could carry all the current turned out by Niagara without heating up. A heavy-duty dynamo could be replaced by a superconductive dynamo that would almost fit in oire's pocket. A thousand-horse-power motor would need to be hardly larger than the shaft it would turn. It would mean . "Leave 'em alone!" snapped Soames. "They couldn't tell you how it was made, even if they could speak English! Give them a chance to learn how to talk! They've have a bad time anyhow." He took the boys and the other girl away. He led then to his own quarters and whistled shrilly. There was a scratching of paws and a rushing and the dog Rex appeared.

The children stared at Rex, appalled. The two boys, bristling a little, moved between the dog and the girl. But then Rex panted cordially at them, and flattened his ears and offered a paw to each in turn at Soames' corn-

mand. Soames played with him, roughly,. and Rex respo~ded zestfully.

The boy's expression changed. One of the boys-Fran, in the brown tuni?~-tentatively essayed the same athletic play. Rex was entranced. There is an inherent sympathy between a boy and a dog. In three minutes the three children and the dog were bosom friends. They played happily together, which seemed wholly new to the children, but perfectly familiar and delightful to Rex. Soarnes showed them how to scratch behind the ears and along the back of the dog. Rex displayed that reflex of scratching with one hind leg which follows scratching on one side of a dog's spine. He licked lavishly in appreciation when Soames stopped. The childrei3 tried it. When one of them found that elusive spot near the base of his spine, and Rex wore an expression of almost painful bliss as it was scratched, they were fascinated.

Soames left three members of the group chattering and the fourth wagging his tail. He went out of his quarters and held his head. There are no wild dogs which are the ancestors of the domestic dog. Dogs were created by men, somehow, before even the hypothetical IndoEuropean mother-tongue was formed. There are some people who, consider the creation of the dog to be mankind's most creditable achievement.

But these children had never seen a dog before.

While Soames held his head, with this at least remarkable event to worry about, other matters productive of headaches developed. For example, Captain Moggs flew splendidly north to Washington,

there to pass on information perfectly calculated to bring about confusion. But at the base itself a completely natural routine event took place to make the confusion twice confounded.

The director of the Gissel Bay base made his normal, regular, short-wave report to the scientific organization which controlled and coordinated the base's activities and kept it supplied and equipped. The Gissel Bay director was an eminent scientist. He talked comfortably to an even more eminent scientist in the capital of the United States. Naturally, the static scream was mentioned in Washington. Naturally, the track-down of that static

to a preposterous wind-pattern on the snow and beyond that to a crashed spaceship came up. It was important It should be reported. It was.

The Gissel Bay director went into details about the children and about the gadgets they'd selected to be salvaged when they destroyed their ship. It was quite true that Captain Moggs, before her departure, had said with magnificent firmness that the matter must be kept secret. But this would not seem to apply between the director of the base arid the director of that and many other projects. Captain Moggs did not have the authority to keep a proper report from being made. A complete account preceded Captain Moggs to Washington, but not to the military. She was in charge of that angle.

The eminent scientist in Washington was, naturally, very much interested and concerned. He discussed the report with other scientists who would be as concerned as himself. Later in the morning, one of those scientists received a reporter. The reporter asked various routine questions. In all innocence, the scientist who had' been told by the scientist who had been told by the director at Gissel Bay, told the reporter.

And therefore, when Captain Moggs arrived in Washington with what she considered ultra-secret top classified information, she rode instantly to the Pentagon in a commandeered jeep, clutching her pictures and other evidence firmly in her hands. And the taxicab 'passed newsboys selling special editions of the Washington Post. She did not notice the headlines, but they had already been seen in the Pentagon.

SPACESHIP LANDS IN ANTARCTICA! Alien Life Forms Aboard Scientists Alarmed

No newspaper would spoil a good story by underplaying it Wire services would not let a good story go stale by failing to transmit it to their subscribing newspapers. There were other headlines all over the United States. The Pentagon knew about them, too. In New York the reaction was: ALIENS IN ANTARCTICA!

Extra-Terrestrials Land on Ice-Sheet! Spaceship Sighted From Gissel Bay

In Chicago there was less of accuracy and more of thrill in the banner-headings:

INVASION FROM SPACE! Landing on Antarctica, Prelude to Conquest! Resistance Hopeless, Say Experts

In San Francisco the matter was given a further fillip.

INVADERS FROM SPACE ON EARTH! Aliens Land at Gissel Bay! Size of Invasion Fleet Unknown

It should be added that the first editions of the first newspapers to print the story did mention that the invaders were in appearance like human children, but somehow it did not sound plausible. Also, other sorts of descriptions were more exciting. The description of children as invaders was classed as a guess. Then as a bad guess. Then as something so preposterous that it wasn't worth relating.

Anyhow, the point of the story was that a ship from off the Earth had landed, with intelligent beings in it, equipped with marvellous devices. And marvellous devices would naturally-in the state of the world at that time-be weapons. So rewrite men expanded the news service dispatches by the sound businesslike rule that the public is entitled to get what it wants. The public liked to be scared.

The newspapers gave the public what they believed it wanted.

Captain Moggs arrived at the Pentagon to find herself awaited by the highest brass, informed of

her coming by short-wave when they saw the headlines and exploded 'into questions. A lieutenantgeneral greeted her.

"This business is truer he demanded. "A spaceship has landed? It had a crew? The crew's still alive?"

Captain Moggs prepared to give her report according to the strictest military convention. The lieutenant-general wrecked her carefully prepared statement by questions. In minutes he barked, "Hell and damnation! What weapons have they got?"

Captain Moggs stammered. Before the interview was over, she would have been in tears, except tears are unmilitary. She managed to give answers that did not give an impression of a properly complete investigation of the landing of an alien spaceship. In particular, her statement that the crew of the ship was human children simply did not register.

"Hah!" stormed the lieutenant-general, "Nothing to go on! You, Captain whatever-your-name-is, you were there when the ship was found, you say. Very well. Keep your mouth shut. Get a plane and go back. Bring up all their stuff, the stuff they brought from their ship. Get the stray unburned parts of their ship." He glanced about. "See to this!" Now he ceased to address Captain Moggs. "Get our guided missile men set to work on them and find out how the drive worked. They ought to come up with something! Round up some special-weapons men to investigate those fragments too. See what they've got! Work from these pictures until we've got the samples." He swung back to Captain Moggs. "You go back and bring those aliens and everything that can be brought! Bring everything! And in the meantime," he looked around his office, "a lid goes on this! Top secret, top-top secret! The newspapers have to be choked off. Deny everything. Everything!"

He waved his hand. She left the office. Someone came after her to coordinate her actions with the orders of the lieutenant-general. His orders, of course, had been verbal. They had to be implemented on paper. There are people who love the complexities of paper-work and are never so happy as when-as in this case-in the processing of an order it has to be broken down into transportation, pay, allowatices, scheduling, logistic arrangements, Security precautions, proper documentation and such. In twelve hours some two hundred forty-seven orders, letters, authorizations, and memoranda of operational procedures

were developed, all dealing with the verbal order. Some were in quadruplicate, some in twelve copies, and a very few were only in triplicate. In another dozen hours they would all be filed away and forever forgotten.

But before they were quite out of mind, Captain Moggs headed back to Antarctica with a briefcase full of documents. Her plane was barely south of Virginia when a spokesman for the Pentagon assured a news conference that the Defense Department had no information about an alleged non-terrestrial spaceship landing in Antarctica. The newspaper reporters pulled newspapers from their pockets. The Pentagon had been denying things right and left, in obedience to orders. Now the newspapers printed reproductions of United Nations records, showing that at the request of the Defense Department four United Nations passports had been issued. The records said that the pasiports were for Jane and John Doe, and Ruth and Richard Roe, who obviously could not enter the United States without proper documents. The UN information on those persons was: birthplace, unknown; nationality, unknown; age, unknown; description, not given; race, unknown; occupation,

The spokesman for the Pentagon was embarrassed.

Presently newspapers all over the United States were appearing with such headlines.

unknown. And all the newspapers carried headlines about SPACESHIP CREW U.S. BOUND.

"TAKE US TO YOUR PRESIDENT'-ALIENS Spaceship Crew Demands Top-Level Conference Ultimatum Hinted at

SPACE EMBASSY TO WASHINGTON? Officials Silent; Uneasy Await Demands of Aliens

It was not, of course, exclusively an American affair. The London Times pointed out the remarkable amount of detailed speculation in the air, as compared with the minute amount of admitted fact. But elsewhere Pravda insisted that the aliens had refused to enter into discussions with America after learning of its capitalistic social system and tyrannical government. Ce Soir claimed exclusive private information concerning a report that the crew of the spaceship-which was twelve hundred metres long-was made up of winged monsters. The official newspaper in Bucharest, to the contrary, said that they were intelligent reptiles. In Cairo it was believed and printed that the spacecraft was manned by creatures of protean structure, remarkably resembling

legendary djinn.

There were other descriptions. Sober accounts declared them to be intelligent insects more nearly resembling colossal ferrets than anything else; batrachians; feathered creatures looking much like parrots; and even more eccentric biological oddities. It was also stated authoritatively that the alien monsters fought furiously when discovered and had massacred all but one member of the Gis~el Bay base, who reported while dying. Another source insisted that they had demanded to be taken to Washington, with variant versions saying that they demanded to be taken to Moscow, Peking, Buenos Aires, and the Republic of Ghana. They had all been killed by the Americans. None had been killed, and they had retired into the interior of Antarctica with weapons of incredible power, there to establish a base for their war-fleet to land. There was also a hopeful~story that they had blown themselves up, with their ship, when discovered.

And at Gissel Bay the staff became rather fond of four young people whose names were Zani, Fran, Hod, and Mal, because they had been very well brought up by their parents and were thoroughly likeable children.

The children themselves were tense, and they were desperately anxious and uneasy. But they displayed a resolute courage that made decent people like them very much. Most of the research staff wanted very badly to ask them questions, but that was impossible. Instead they studied the rather fuzzy photographs of the inside of the ship and poked helplessly at the things the children had brought with them and racked their brains to imagine how such things worked, and if they could be duplicated on Earth.

The spinning thing atop the tripod made it quite pleasant to be out-of-doors around the Gissel Bay base, though there were forty-mile winds and thermometers read ten below zero two hundred yards from the thing Hod had set up. The cooking pot boiled merrily without fuel, with an increasingly thick layer of frost on its outside. The thing Soames had called a super-radar allowed a penguin rookery to be watched in detail without disturbing the penguins, and Fran obligingly loaned his pocket instrument-the one that cut metal like butter-to the physicists on the staff.

He had to show them how to use it, though. It was a fiat metal case about the size of a pocket. cigarette lighter. It had two very simple controls and a highly ingenious gimmick which kept it from turning itself on by accident.

In an oblique fashion, it was a heat-pump. One control turned it on and intensified or diminished its effect. The other controlled the area it worked on. In any material but iron, it made heat flow together toward the center of its projected field. Pointed at a metal bar the heat from both ends flowed to the center where the pocket device was aimed. The center became intensely hot. The rest went intensely cold. In seconds a bronze bar turned red-hot along a line a hundredth of an inch thick. Then it melted. A layer the thickness of tissue paper turned to liquid and one could pull the bar apart or slide it sidewise to separate it. But one needed to hold the bar in thick gloves, because liquid air could drip off if one were not careful. And it did not work on iron or steel.

Soames took Fran, with Mal and Hod, to the improvised schoolroom where Gail labored to give Zani a minimum vocabulary of English words. Rex went happily along with the others.

Zani greeted the dog rapturously. She got down on the floor with him and played, her face beaming. She scratched him. She knew all the appropriate places, even that elusive one near the base of his spine.

Soames' mouth dropped open. The other children hadn't known there was such a thing as a dog. They'd had to learn to play with Rex. But Zani knew about

dogs and how to play with them on sight.

"I suppose," said Gail, not knowing of Soames astonishment, "Zani will help me teach the other children some words."

But the boy Hod had already picked up the ball-pomt pen Gail had needed to show Zani how to use. He didn't need to be shown. Without a glance at it, he began to write. A moment later he read off, siowiy and clumsily and from the completely cryptic marks he'd made, the English words that Gail had taught Zani. Fran and Mal joined him. They painstakingly practiced the pronunciation of words Gail had taught Zani but not them, while Zani played ecstatically with Rex, an animal she'd never seen before.

It was another development that did not make sense.

Т

HERE WERE SATELLITES ~fl the sky, pursuing orbits which often resembled the tracks of roller-coasters. They went far out from Earth and then plunged dangerously close to its atmosphere. Some of them still transmitted information down to the planet they circled. Two of them had tiny voices which made grunts, groans, howls, squeaks, and wheezes in seemingly random succession. This was one of the two kinds of languages which telemetering systems use. A third still-functioning satellite made noises which sounded like a blank phonograph record played after somebody had walked over it with hobnailed boots. But most of the hurtling tiny bodies in space around the earth were merely dead objects that proved the high development of guided missiles for military use.

As apprehension grew at Gissel Bay-which was the first place where actual danger developed-a fourteen-

month-old, gold-plated, spiked, dead satellite hit 'air dense enough to slow it below orbital velocity. It destroyed itself in a hunched-mile streak of meteoric flame somewhere over the South Pacific, where nobody happened to be near enough to see it.

There were other proofs of mankind's high estate, which the coming of the children was to undermine. There were atomic submarines under the polar ice-cap. There were lines of radar observation posts which crossed continents. Patrol ~planes flew over oceans using radar tomake sure that they were alone. There was an artificial island on stilts off the northeastern coast of America. It also was a radar station. These things were triumphs in their separate ways. But they were also proofs of the complete failure of human beings to use their science and their brains to get along with each other on a planet of limited area where people must ultimately get along together or die together. The moment for decision drew nearer.

The approaching new crisis was first recognized for what it was at Gissel Bay. There, men outside the base buildings heard a faint noise. It grew louder and became a harsh growling. A speck appeared in the sky to northward. It grew, and the growling increased in volume. Suddenly the speck was a jet transport, an onrushing, bellowing thing that grew to giant size and touched down on 'the ice and rolled up to the very buildings of the base itself.

There were men waiting for it. Captain Moggs descended and strode in a military manner toward the base headquarters. The men on the icy runway conferred urgently with the transport's crew. There was a scurrying, and two of the four children came racing around a building-corner with Rex in happy pursuit. They ducked aside and stood still, laughing. Rex tried to check himself and failed. He went skidding onward, his paws scratching furiously at the icy surface with no effect upon his motion. In the end he stopped and then ran to the children and leaped upon them joyously. They embraced him together.

Captain Moggs went past where they stood, on her

way to the building's entrance.

"Children,'•' she barked, "go inside and pack up. We are going back to the United States." The girl Ma! said '~ery politely, "How." A pause.

"Excellent!" said Captain Moggs. "I see you are learning to speak. Run in, now, and tell the others that we are going back to America."

She paraded splendidly into the base's main building. She came upon Soames, feverishly making up bundles of~ objects the children had brought out of their ship before Fran-in the brown tunic-had burned it. Captain Moggs said approvingly, "You must have anticipated my orders! But I thought it unwise to tell you by radio on the inter-base wave-length."

Soames said curtly, "I don't know anything about your orders. They're refuelling your ship now. We need to get it aloft with Gail and the kids inside of fifteen minutes."

Captain Moggs stared at him.

"Absurd! Why? There has to be an invoice of the objects from the spaceship! There are papers to be signed! There has to be. . . Absurd!"

Soames lashed a cord tight around a parceL He knotted it swiftly and tossed it to one side. He knotted up another.

"We were clearing away a snow-we~.sel to take to the woods," he growled. "Not the woods, but the wilds. We've got company coming."

"Impossible!" said Captain Moggs. "I have top-level orders for this whole affair to be hushed up! The existence of the children is to be denied! Everybody is to deny everything. Visitors cannot be permitted!"

Soames grinned mirthlessly.

"It's six hours since the French asked if they might come over for a social call. We stalled them. The English suggested a conference about the extrawd'n'ry burst of static the other night. They were stalled off too. But just about an hour ago the Russians pulled their stunt. Emergency S.O.S. One of their planes with engine trouble. Can't get home. It's heading this way for an emergency landing, convoyed by another plane. Can you imagine our refusing permission for a ship in trouble to land?"

- "I don't believe it'sln trouble!" said Captain Moggs angrily.
- "Neither do I," said Soames.
- He passed a wrapped parcel to one side.

"They must be acting on orders," he said coldly. "And we, don't know what their orders are. Until we realized you'd get here first, we were making ready to take the kids off in a snow-weasel. If we kept to soft snow, no plane could land near them. It's just possible somebody could claim the kids asked protection from us decadent, warmongering Americans, and they might be equipped to shoot it out. We aren't." He continued in a different tone, "This is the last. You can take these out now."

Two geophysicists, a meteorologist, a cosmic-ray specialist, and the base's cook and his helper burdened themselves with the parcels Soames had tied up. They carried their loads out the door, to put them in the transport.

Gail appeared, muffled up for travel. Fran and Zani were with her, similarly clothed. They carried garments for the others.

- "I looked out the window," she said. "They're really pouring fuel into that plane!"
- "This is terrible!" whined Captain Moggs. "I must call Washington at once!"
- She fled to the communications room to demand radio contact to Washington. But the radio was busy. The French, having been stalled off when they suggested a visit, were now urged to call immediately. The English, similarly put off, were now invited to drop in for tea. As Captain Moggs sputtered, the radio went~ on to organize a full-scale conference on common observational problems, plus a seminar on Antarctic scientific research in general. Even the Belgians and Danes were called in to complete the party. It would be a beautiful example of whole-hearted cooperation among scientific groups of different nationalities. It should set a charming example for the rest of the world. But members of the staff,
- arranging this swift block of possible trouble-making by unwelcome visitors, wore the unpleasant expression of people who are preparing to be very polite to people attempting to put something over on them. It was notable that the few sporting weapons at the base were passed out to those who could use them most effectively if the need arose.
- The transport's fuel tanks were topped. The remaining two children struggled into flying garments. The boy Hod took down the small tripod with its spuming thing on top. Instantly the area about the base main building became bitter cold. The children climbed into the transport after Gail. Soames, swearing, climbed in after a still expostulating Captain Moggs. He did not like the idea of leaving while any chance of trouble stayed behind. But actually his leaving with the others
- removed nearly the last chance of it.

  The transport roared and hurled itself down the runway and into the air. Twin dots appeared in the sky just above the horizon. The transport headed north.
- Soames growled to himself. Gail said anxiously, "What is it, Brad?"
- "There's absolutely nothing," said Soames angrily, "that's quite as unsatisfying as doing the discreet, the intelligent, the completely virtuous thing-such as we're doing by going away-instead of obliging somebody who comes looking for trouble."
- He glowered at the back of the pilot's compartment as the transport plane lifted and roared away toward the Barrier and the open sea.
- Leaving the base was the only rational thing to do. The Russians would land and volubly explain the emergency that made their landing necessary. Then they'd produce vodka for refreshment. Then the ships from other bases would begin to arrive and instead of their creating a nasty incident which might set off anything from peripheral~ disorder to atomic warfare, they'd find themselves urbanely committed to a scientific conference.
- Of course, while the conference lasted the Russians would poke blandly into every corner of the American
- base, and assure themselves that there were no extra-terrestrials in hiding nor any signs of a spaceship anywhere about. And the conference would do some good. The extraordinary btirst of static would be discussed, with no conclusion whatever. But the Americans would be able to make an agreement on methods of observation with the other bases, so that observations in the future would yield a little more information than had been secured before.
- But that was all to come. The transport flew n'orth. Just east of north, to be exact. The

supposedly crippled Russian plane landed, far behind it. The transport went across leagues of icy dark blue ocean. It came to land and crossed the lower limit of the Andes mountain chain at thirty-five thousand feet, and streaked across the southernmost portion of the Argentine Republic., Presently it flew into night. Far below, the dark earth was just a little less than blackness because of the light of innumerable stars.

The children huddled together so they could see out. So long as daylight lasted they watched the earth below them. From time to time they spoke absorbedly to each other, as if agreeing that something they'd expected to see was not present to be seen. When darkness surrounded the plane they fell asleep, huddled together almost like so many kittens.

- Gail kept a quasi-maternal eye on them until they dozed off. But she watched Soames' expression, too. She and Soames and Captain Moggs rode in the passenger section of the transport a few seats behind the children.
- "I wish I could understand," said Gail, in a low tone to Soames. "The other children know everything I've taught Zani, and there's been no way for them to know! They know things they weren't in the room to learn, and Zani didn't have time to tell them. Yet it doesn't seem like telepathy. If they were telepaths they could exchange thoughts without speaking. But they chatter all the time!"
- "If they'd been telepaths," said Soames, "they'd have known I was going to burn their signalling apparatus.
- They could have stopped me, or tried to anyhow."
- Captain Moggs had paid no attention. Now she said worriedly,, "I'm terribly concerned! High authority-very, very high authority-insists that the children must be hidden and their existence denied. There must be no information at all given out!"
- "You might as well try to censor news of a tidal wave or a cyclone disaster," Soames told her curtly. "You said the newspapers already had the story. You can be sure they won't drop it."
  "But why?" demanded Captain Moggs. "Why should the public insist on details of matters the .military think should be kept secret?"
- "Because," said Gail briefly, "it's the public that- gets drowned by a tidal wave or killed by a cyclone. If strangers from space discover Earth, it's the public that will suffer."
- "But," said Captain Moggs querulously, "it is necessary for this to be kept secret! We must learn all we can from the children, and we must try to keep it to ourselves!"
- "Unfortunately," said Soames, "the story broke before that decision was made."
- "But perhaps if there is no more news," said Captain Moggs hopefully, "the story will die away?" Gail said briefly, "My employers have been sending frantic messages demanding an on-the-spot report from me. There've been not less than eighty messages offer. ing all sorts of money for signed stories about the spaceship and its company."
- "I can't understand it!" protested Captain Moggs.
- Soames shrugged. It was inevitable that everybody should see the situation only from their own viewpoint. Captain Moggs had what she considered the military viewpoint. Gail had the newspaper woman's angle, tempered and modified by something else that Soames would not be likely to suspect. His own attitude was remarkably mixed. Doggedly, he considered that he'd done the right thing in destroying the children's communication, device before they could make use of it to make contact with others of their civilization. He was uncomfortable because he felt that he'd had to do the children great
- harm out of necessity. He was acutely concerned over the dangers he foresaw largely because Gail would be involved in them. Oddly enough, the possible disasters to humanity as a whole' were summed up in apprehension for Gail. And he had an immense, a fascinated yearning to work with the innumerable possibilities the technology of the children's race suggested.
- "I don't like any of this," he commented to Gail. "If the children's people find out where they are I don't see how we humans of Earth can survive the contact with so superior a culture. The American Indians collapsed from meeting a civilization not nearly so far ahead of them. The Polynesians died of mere contact with a whale-ship culture. But we've got to try to face something a lot more deadly. And in the meantime. .

  He grimaced.
- "In the meantime what?"
- "It's ridiculous," said Soames. "Having seen the kids' gadgets, I yearn to have a few days alone with some low-temperature apparatus. That hand tool of Fran's bothers me."
- Gail glanced at the children and back at him.
- "What has low temperature to do
- "They've got some wire that's a superconductor at room temperature. We can't have superconductors above 18° Kelvin, which is colder than liquid hydrogen. But a superconductor acts like a magnetic

- shield-no, not exactly. But you can't touch a magnet to one. Induced currents in the superconductor fight its approach. I'd like to know what happens to the magnetic field. Does it cancel, or bounce, or what? Could it, for instance, be focused?"
- "I don't see. . ."
- "Neither do I," said Soames. "But I've got a hunch that the little pocket gadget Fran carries has some superconductor in it. I think I could make something that wouldn't be his instrument, at all. It would do different things, but that gadget does suggest some possibilities I fairly ache to try out."
- The jet transport roared through the night. In the pressurized cabin there was no need for oxygen ap
- paratus. The children slept. Now and again one of them stirred.
- "And I," said Gail, with a faint smile, "I ache to try to write something that nobody would print. My syndicate wants an on-the-spot story from me. But they want what the public is supposed to want. I'd like to write the real story as I see it-the children from a viewpoint nobody will want to see."
- He looked at her, puzzled.
- "I've forgotten who said that nobody had ever lost money by under-estimating the public taste," said Gail, "but I do know what I'm asked to say. My syndicate wants a story about the children that nobody will have to think about. No recognition of a problem in plain decency with the children considered as human as they are, but just a story that everybody could read without thinking anything but what they wanted to. They're nice children. Somebody brought them up very well. But with most people nowadays thinking that if children aren't ill-bred they're frustrated .
- She made a helpless gesture as the plane bellowed onward. Presently a brightness appeared in the sky to the east. It was a strictly localized brightness. Presently, again, the moon came up over a horizon which was formed by the tops of cloudbanks. It was large and very brilliant. It shone in the ports of the transport ship. It shone on Fran's face.
- He moved in his sleep. After a while he opened his eyes and gasped a little. He looked around, startled, an
- instinct anyone would have upon waking in a strange place. Then he turned back. He saw the moon. He uttered a little cry. His face contorted. He stared at the misshapen, incompletely round companion of Earth as if its appearance had some extraordinary, horrifying meaning for him. His hands clenched.
- Behind him, Gail whispered, "Brad! He's-horrified! Does that mean that he and the other children need to signal to someone?"
- Captain Moggs had fallen into an uneasy doze. Her head nodded forward, and lifted, and nodded forward again.
- "I doubt it very much," said Soames. "If his parents and Qompanions had landed on the moon, and I stopped him from signalling tç $\sim$  them, he might look hopefully at it, or longingly, but not the way he does."
- Fran touched the other boy, Hod. Hod waked, and Fran spoke to him in an urgent whisper. Hod jerked his head about and stared at the moon as Fran had done. He made a little whimpering noise. Then Mal made a bubbling sound, as from a bad dream. She waked. Then Zani roused and began to ask what was obviously a question, and stopped short.
- The four children gazed out a port at the disk of the moon. Their expressions displayed four different versions of shock, in each case more or less mingled with horror. They spoke to each other in hushed voices in that unintelligible language of theirs.
- "I've got an idea," said Soames in a flat, unbelieving tone. "Let's see."
- He stood up. Captain Moggs still dozed, her head nodding forward and lifting up again, to nod once more. She heard nothing, saw nothing, knew nothing.
- Soames went forward and into the pilot's compartment. He came back with binoculars. He touched Fran and offerecF them to him. Fran stared up at him with dazed eyes, not really attending to Soames at all. He looked back at the moon.
- "You don't know what binoculars are?" asked Soames. "Here. I'll show you."
- He focused them. They were excellent glasses. The ring-mountains at the edge of sunshine on the moon were very distinct. He could see those tiny speckles of light on the dark side of the terminator which were mountaintops rising out of darkness into the sunshine. There was Aristarchus and Copernicus and Tycho. There were the vast, featureless mares-those plains of once-liquid lava which had welled out when monstrous missiles the size of counties buried themselves deep in the moon's substance. The moon could be seen as battered; shattered, devastated.
- Soames touched Fran's shoulder and showed him how one looked through the binoculars. Fran's hand

## shook

- as he took them. He put them to his eyes.,
- Zani put her hands over her eyes with a little cry. It was as if she tried to shut out the sight that Fran saw. Mal began to cry quietly. Hod made little gasping noises.
- Fran lowered the binoculars. He spoke with infinite bitterness. He looked at Soames with a terrible hatred in his eyes.
- Soames went back to Gail, leaving the binoculars with the children. He found himself sweating. He took his seat beside Captain Moggs, who dozed and snorted and knew nothing.
- "When," asked Soames harshly, "were the mountains on the moon made? It's an interesting question. I just got an answer. They were made when there were three-toed horses and many ~ganoid fishes on the earth, and maybe on Planet Five."

## Gail waited.

- "The children knew the moon when it-wasn't the way it is now," he said with some difficulty. "You know what that is! Ring-mountains sometimes hundreds of miles across, splashings of stone from the impact of asteroids and moonlets and islands of rock and metal falling from the sky. The mares are where the moon's crust was punctured and lava poured out. The streaks are where up-flung stuff was thrown hundreds of miles! You know what it's like."
- "I-yes, I know," said GaiL
- "It was a guess," said Soames. "But it's not a guess
- any longer. There was a Fifth Planet, and it either exploded or was blown to bits. The moon was bombarded by the wreckage, and so was Earth. Mountain-ranges fell from the sky right here on this world, too. There was destruction on Earth to match that on the moon. Perhaps here and there some place remained undestroyed, an acre, perhaps a square mile a thousand miles away. Some life survived, and now it's all forgotten. There are rains and winds and frost. Earth's scars wore away through millions of years. We don't even know where the wounds were. But there were people theneither here on Earth or on the Fifth Planet."
- Captain Moggs snored softly, her head drooped forward. Gail unconsciously wrung her hands. "And they were civii,ized," said Soames. "They had superconductors and one-way conductors of heat. They had reached the point where they didn't need fire any more, and they built ships of magnesium alloy. They saw the Fifth Planet, or were on it, when it began to fly apart. They knew wLat must happen to Earth with the whole solar system filled with a planet's debris. The Fifth Planet would no longer be in existence and Earth would be smashed, wrecked, depopulated, made like the moon is now! Maybe they had ships that went to other planets, but not enough to carry all the race. And the only other planets they could possibly use were the inner ones-and they'd be smashed, like the Earth and moon. What could they do? There might be one or two survivors here and there, bound to lapse into savagery because they were so few. But where could the civilized race go?"

  Gail made an inarticulate sound.
- "They might," said Soames in a flat voice, "they might try to go into the future; into the time beyond the catastrophe, when Earth would have healed its wounds. They might send someone ahead to see if it were possible. Yet if they sent one ship first-with everyone left behind doomed to die-if they sent one ship first, it's reasonable that they'd give children the chance of survival. It's even reasonable that they'd send two boys and two girls . . ."

  Gail's teeth chattered a little.
- "They-had a transmitter," she said, as if breathing hurt her. "You destroyed it. They meant to signal, not for help as we thought, but for their people to join them. Maybe now they're hoping to get the material and the power to build another transmitter. Since everything they use is so simple, the boys might have been taught how. They were taught to repair the one they had. They did repair it! Maybe they can make one, and hope we'll help them! They'd have been especially trained.
- The jet transport boomed onward through the night. The four children no longer looked at the moon. Zani
- and Mal wept softly, frightened by what they had seen. There was no one who could comfort them. Captain Moggs snored on.
- "Nice, isn't it?" asked Soames. "They were sent here in some fashion to make a beachhead for the landing of their people. A civilization that's starkly, simply doomed unless it can migrate. No mere conquest, with tribute to be paid to it. It' has to take over a whole planet! It has to take over Earth, or die!" He winced. "And the kids, now, think of their parents as waiting for mountains to fall upon them from the sky, and I've doomed them to keep on waiting. Now the kids must be hoping desperately that they can get us to give them the means to save everything and everybody they care about— even though we're destroyed in the process! Isn't it pretty?"

  Gail said hopelessly, "And they're such nice children!"

"Admirable children," said Soames in a dismayed voice. "I admire them very much. I even admire the families who raised them so well, and who carefully arranged for them to come out of. time above the Antarctic, where there should be no danger from beasts or savages. But we were there, both savages and beasts."

Gail said unhappily, "If-if it's found out, the children willbe..."

"Kified," said Soames. "Yes. You and I, we know what they're here for. I think that if anybOdy else finds out, the children will be hated as nobody was ever hated before. They'll be known for the deadly danger they are. They must be here in some fashion to open Earth for the migration of a whole population which has to flee or be destroyed, which can't be defeated but has to come to here and now or be exterminated! And it's a civilization before which we're helpless! We're primitives beside them! We'll have to fight, because there's no room for the population of another whole world here! There's' no food for more people! We can't let them come, and they must die if they don't come, and the children must be here to open the way for them to come in hordes." Gail wrung her hands again. The transport roared

and roared and roared. The boys talked in low, tense tones while the girls sobbed quietly because they were afraid.

"I don't understand,'' said Soames grimly, "why one ship had to come first. I don't understand why they didn't send a fleet to fight for and capture a beachhead for invasion. But I do know that the children mustn't be allowed to build anything we don't understand or that might let them open communication with their people. If they try, they'll be trying to serve their own race by destroying this one. They'd have to destroy us and "-his voice was fierce-"I'm not going to let anything happen to you!"

Gail's cheeks were white, but a trace of color came into them then. Yet she looked remorseful as she glanced forward to where the children murmured hopelessly together.

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un WORLD WAS SMALL these days. There'd been a I time when it was two days from New York to Philadelphia and four months to California and at least a month to Europe. Of course such remoteness had its disadvantages to the great-great-great-grandparents of the folk now alive. News traveled slowly, and sometimes this was regrettable. But there were advantages, too. Men knew that time had passed since the last event they'd heard of. Things had happened after the event and before its tidings arrived. A provocative action, an apparent cause for war, an incident which could rouse public opinion to belligerence-the news of such things always carried in its slowness a warning that the provocation might have been withdrawn, the seeming cause for war explained away, and the infuriating incident somehow atoned for. Men did not act hastily because they knew they were bound to be acting on stale information.

If the children had been picked up as castaways a century earlier, say by a whaling ship off Antarctica, the news would not have reached any center of civilization for months. More months would have elapsed before all the centers of civilization had a reasonably complete set of the facts. Then nobody would have felt any alarm over technical information to be obtained from the children's possessions. The world was then a very large place and such danger as the children might represent would seem very remote.

There'd have been interest in them, of course. Even ardent interest. Savants and learned men would have traveled laboriously across oceans and continents to learn everything that could become known through the children and their possessions. But they wouldn't be scared. Because the world was so large.

A famine in China, in those times, would hardly be known in America before its victims were dead by millions, and before help could be sent the famine would have ended itself by new crops maturing. A despot with an army of enormous size was not a matter of concern two thousand miles away. Two thousand miles was a long, long distance. No army was dangerous two thousand miles away. Those were happier times.

Now no place was remote. A new' kind of influenza that appeared in Bombay today might have victims in St. Louis in two weeks. A new and deadly weapon, devised in laboratories in the Urals, would be discussed in Rio and in Ottowa before its proving-ground trials were complete. The speed of travel in modern times was highly convenient for people who wanted to make money. It enabled them to do much more business in the same time. But it served no other satisfying purpose, because only bad news comes from far away. Good news is not good news until the value is near at hand.

The coming of the children, then, was a disaster largely because there were no more far-away places, and danger anywhere was no longer remote. Now all dangers had to be acted upon instantly, or they could

become disasters. While in olden days men acted cautiously because they knew their information might be stale, in modern times m~en had to act recklessly because they could not risk believing that their information was false.

Therefore the jet transport got new flight orders while it was in the air over South Carolina. A new value had been established for the children and their ship, through mathematics applied to the static burst which was somehow connected with the ship.

The mathematics said 'that the children were not merely shipwrecked space-voyagers. Their coming was not just something to play politics with and make public announcements about. Their ship was not simply something one should try to understand and duplicate, because their coming had produced or been accompanied by a burst of static whose power had now been computed. It had blanketed the whole earth. It had filled every wave-length of the electromagnetic spectrum. It came out of every communication device on Earth. As a natural phenomenom, it simply could not have happened. Also it was .linked with the appearance of the children's ship-but nobody believed the ship actually contained children-and therefore it was artificial. And the power, the energy, the sheer mo.nstrous quantity of power involved was incredible.

Atomic energy was not even a probable approach to it. In the winter time, New York City alone consumed each day as much power as ninety twenty-kiloton fission bombs produced, and more. It used that much for heating purposes alone. For elevators and subways and machines it required extra. Yet a twenty-kiloton atomic bomb releases all its energy in the hundred-millionth of a second. Now, calculations said that the static burst had required the peak power-output of a Hiroshimatype atom bomb to be delivered continuously for three hundred million times its normal duration, for three full, incredible seconds. That much power had been released as electromagnetic radiation when the children's ship appeared. The figures went to defense departments and heads of state. They reacted. And in consequence the jet plane carrying Gail and the children and Soames was ordered to change course.

The order came when dawn had just begun to tint the clouds and the occasionally glimpsed ground below. The ship swung in its flight and turned to pursue the darkness toward the west. It was a roaring in emptiness. Above it there was only deep blue sky, dark, deep blue sky in which stars now winked out reluctantly. Far below it, clouds of gray shadow and ruddy top-tints lightened very gradually as the dawn broke. Somewhere over Kentucky a shape swam upward and took the lead, and then dropped down a long dangling tube with a funnel at its end. The jet transport surged ahead, making peculiar stabs at that funnel with the unicornlike horn that projected before it. Roaring and bellowing, it linked itself to the shape that had come up from below and which now flew slightly before and above it.

It flew on abstractedly for a certain length of time. It drank deeply of the fuel which was its life-blood. Then it disengaged its horn and the larger ship rode and whirled and dived downward and was seen no more. But the transport bellowed on.

Daylight arrived. Flinging itself forward as it would, the transport could not keep ahead of the morning. Colorings faded and the clouds beneath it became white. Presently it boomed for a while through sides in which there were no clouds at all, and beneath it ploughed land looked like a mosaic of tiny bits of green and tawny colorings. But always the ship bellowed thunderously, though the sound was muted inside it, and always it flung on through emptiness.

It traveled west for hours, over the farmlands and the area which once was oddly called the Great American Desert. In time the Rockies appeared before it, as masses of stone reaching up through clouds which hid their feet. Little, invisible messages flickered back and forth. The sound of the jet motors changed subtly. It descended gradually until it was a mere four miles above the level of the sea. It found a place where it was

assured that it could safely swim through the thick white fleecy stuff below it. It went down. The universe' outside it ceased to be visible: Only whiteness could be seen.

Then it came again to clear air underneath the clouds. Mountain-flanks rose on either side. It floated on and on, descending, and presently it dived abruptly for solidness, and very strangely it touched on a runway which was the color of grass and was mottled as if streams ran across it, and there were patches of brushwood on wheeled trucks which had been trundled off to one side, waiting to be rolled back.

The transport rolled for a long way. A hillside rose before it. A vast, grass-covered area lifted up. It was a great door. The transport rolled deliberately into a monstrous, windowless, artificial cavern and the hillside closed behind it.

This was a base, too, but not like the one at Cissel Bay. The existence of this one would be

denied. It was hoped that it would be forever unused for its designed purpose. Soames never saw any part of it that he was not supposed to see. Nobody ever mentioned to him any function it could perform except the hiding of children from a spaceship that happened to have crashed on Antarctica. But he guessed that if atomic war should ever burst on Earth, rockets rising from this place and others like it would avenge the destruction done to America.

At the moment, though, he climbed stiffly down out of the transport, and helped Gail to the ground, then the children. But Captain Moggs refused his arm.

Presently Gail and the children were installed in a remarkably ordinary small cottage, and Soames frowned. They'd arrived at the village by elevator from a tunnel hundreds of feet underground, but the village in which the cottage stood looked exactly like any other remote and sleepy settlement. Soames began a protest against Gail's being so isolated and so much alone. He was shown that there was an electrified fence, with guards, and another a mile beyond, and a third still farther, with watch-posts beyond that. Nobody would intrude upon the village. But from the air it would look perfecily commonplace. There was no indication at all of shafts from the deep underground to what appeared an ordinary 'country general. store. There was no sign of tunnels from the different houses to that merchandizing mart.

"You'd seem to be safe from prowlers," Soames grudgingly told Gail. "If there's any place where precautions are taken against such things, it seems to be here. But I thought we were headed for Washington. Something's happened."

It~ had. The computation of the amount of power released when the ship appeared had taken effect. An accepted guess was that it was the power needed to bring a space-traveling ship to a stop, after a journey across interstellar distances. The guess about space travel was wrong, but the computation of the amount of power in the static scream was right. So the children, in their capacity as crew of the wrecked ship, were now the center of the tensest diplomatic crisis in history. It would have been extremely unwise to land them in Washington. Nobody could guess their whereabouts now. But also nobody could find out what they were like. That wasn't such a good idea. Still, they were safer here than they'd have been anywhere else. And so was Gail.

Soames went off to be assigned other quarters and to talk about the spaceship's technical aspects. He' noticed two physicists heading for the children to begin the first of the interviews the poor kids would have to face.

He wanted to work on some items that had come into his mind during the last hours of the flight. He'd guessed, to Gail, that the children came out of remotest time. There was evidence for it, but it need not be true. So he'd made a test.

When the children had breakfasted he drew on a sketch-pad a diagram of part of the solar system. A dot for the sun, and a circle with a dot on it for Mercury, the innermost planet. Another dot on a circle for Venus, the second world out. A third circle and a dot for Earth and its orbit, and beside the dot indicating Earth he drew a crescent, for the moon. Alongside the dot standing for Mars he drew two crescents, because Mars has two tiny moons.

The children discussed the diagram. Zani ended it with a decisive remark in the language they used. Fran drew a fifth circle, placed a dot to indicate a fifth planet, and put four crescents beside it, then drew a sixth circle with a large dot and drew twelve crescents beside that. Soames drew a deep breath. The twelve-moon planet was~ certainly Jupiter, which is now next out from the sun after Mars. The number of moons made it unmistakable. But Fran had put a fifth planet, with four moons, where now there is only planetary debris-the asteroids.

The diagram quite distinctly proved, to Soames' satisfaction, that the hypothetical Fifth Planet had existed, with four moons. Also, because the Fifth Planet hadn't been in existence for millions of years, the diagram proved that the children had come out of time rather than across space. He was now grimly sure about the reason for the children's coming to Earth of here and now. What he was still puzzled about was whether the children were originally from Planet Five and traveled through time to escape the explosion, or whether they were from Earth and fled to the future to escape bombardment from Planet Five's debris.

Bombardment from space is not unknown. In 1914 there was a meteoric fall in Siberia which knocked down every tree for fifty miles around. Eight or ten thousand years earlier Canon Diablo crater was formed in Colorado by a missile from the heavens which wiped out all life within a thousand—mile radius. Even earlier a much larger crater was formed in Canada, and there are traces of a still more remote monster-missile landing in South Africa. The ring-mountain there is largely worn away, but it was many miles across.

The situation of the children's race would have amounted to an infinitely speeded-up bombardment instead of a millenial sniping from the sky. The Fifth Planet was newly shattered into bits. Its fragments plunged upon Earth and moon as they had weeks earlier battered Mars, and as fortnights later they would devastate Venus and plunge upon Mercury. Jagged portions

of the detonated planet filled the sky of Earth with flames.

The ground shook continuously. With a mad 'imprecision of timing, mountain ranges plummeted out of the sky at utterly unpredictable times and places. Anywhere on Earth, at nighttime, living creatures might look upward and see the stars blotted out in irregular shaped, swiftly enlarging areas which would grow until there was only blackness overhead. But that could not last. It turned abruptly to white-hot incandescence as the falling enormity touched atmosphere-and crashed down upon them.

No living thing which saw the sky all turned to flame lived to remember it. Not one could have survived. They were turned to wisps of incandescent gas, exploding past the normal limits of Earth's air. Some may have witnessed the plungings from many miles away and died of the concussion alone. The ground heaved in great waves which ran furiously in all directions. Vast chasms opened in the soil, and flames flowed out of them. Seashores were overwhelmed by mountainous tidal waves caused by cubic miles of seawater turned to steam when islands fell into the ocean at tens of miles per second.

This was what happened to Earth in the time from which the children came. Perhaps their elders had foreseen the disaster in time to take some measures such as the children's ship. But that ship had been built very hastily. It could have been begun before the bombardment started, or it could have been completed only near the ,end, when asteroids already plunged into defenseless Earth and the planet heaved and writhed in agony.

Humans caught in such a cosmic trap would be in no mood to negotiate or make promises, if any sort of beachhead to the future could be set up. They would pour through. They could not be stopped. They could not be driven back. They must overrun Earth or die. And men would fight for their wives, and women would fight like lionesses for their children, and the world of the present must simply dissolve into incoherence when starkly, arbitrarily desperate hordes from the doomed past civilization poured into it. There could be no peace. It was unthinkable.

Soarnes, brooding over this matter, was in no enviable state of mind when the investigation team from the East came to learn from him all about the landing of the ship.

He told them, giving them the tape from the wave-guide radar and speaking with strict precision of every event up to the moment of his arrival at Gissel Bay with the children. He did not not refer to telepathy because his tale was unlikely enough without it, and he had only bewilderment to share. He did not talk about the moon because his theory involved time-travel, which was obviously impossible.

When the military men wanted information about instantly available super-weapons, asking as casually as if for instant coffee, he told them that he knew nothing of weapons. They'd have to judge from the gadgets the children had brought. Then the public relations men asked briskly from what other planet or solar system the spaceship had come, and when a search-ship' might be expected, looking for the children. He was ironic. He suggested that the children might give that information if asked in the proper language. He didn't know it. But the two physicists were men whose names he knew and respected. They listened to what he said. They'd look at the devices from the ship and then come back and talk to him.

He went back to his brooding. The children had traveled through time. Everything pointed to it, from the meteor-watch radar to the children's reaction at sight of the pock-marked moon and their knowledge that there should have been a Fifth Planet, to which they assigned four moons. It had happened. Positively. But there was one small difficulty. It was impossible.

If time-travel were possible, a man traveling about in the past might by some accident kill his grandfather as a small boy, before his grandfather was a father. In such a case the grandfather wouldn't live to become a father, the grandson could not be born, and hence he could not possibly go back in time and kill his grandfather. But if

he did not go back in time and kill his grandfather, he would be born so he could kill the grandfather. And so

on. If time-travel was possible, a grown man could prevent his own existence. But this was impossible. So time-travel was impossible.

On a higher technical level, there is just one law of nature which seems infallibly true since its latest modification to allow for nuclear energy. It is the law of the conservation of mass and energy. The total of energy and matter taken together in the universe as a whole, cannot change. Matter can be converted to energy and doubtless etiergy to matter, but the total is fixed for all time and for each instant of time. So, if a ship could move from one time-period to another, if would lessen the total of matter and energy in the time-period it left, and increase the total where and when it arrived. And this would mean that the law of the conservation of mass and energy

was wrong. But it wasn't.

Soames tried to reconcile what he had to accept with what he knew. He failed. He provisionally conceded that the children's civilization did something which in his frame of reference was impossible. They had other frames of reference than his. He tried to find their frame of reference in something 'simpler than time-travel. He picked one impossible accomplishment and tried to duplicate it, then to approach it, then to parallel it. He scribbled and diagrammed and scowled and sweated. He had no real hope, of course. But presently he swore abruptly and stared at what he had drawn. He went 'over it carefully. At the end he mopped his forehead. He smoked, purposely turning away from what he'd drawn. When he'd finished his pipe he looked again.

He'd begun a second set of diagrams when the two physicists of the investigation team came back. They knocked and came in. There was a short, man and a thin one. They looked dazed.

"They are children," said the thin man in a very thin voice, "and they are human children, and their science makes us ridiculous. They are centuries ahead of us. I could not understand any device they had. I cannot imagine how any of them worked."

The short man struck a match to light a cigarette. His hand trembled.

"We are finished, as men," he said with no expression at all. "I will never be able to hope to accomplish anything again. It's done. They've done it. I feel like a Yahoo."

"it is impossible to talk at a distance," said Soames.

After a moment the thin man turned his head.

"Now, what do you mean by that?"

"I mean," said Soames, "that it is impossible to talk at a distance. Sound diminishes as the square of the distance. You can't make a sound-unless you use a cannon-that can be heard ten miles away. It's impossible to talk at a distance."

The short man said heavily, "I feel crazy too. But there are telephones."

"It's not the same as talking at a distance. You talk to a microphone at a few inches. Someone listens to a receiver held against his ear. You don't talk to the man, but the microphone. He doesn't listen to you, but a receiver. The effect is the same as talking at a distance, so you ignore the fact that it isn't. I've played a game with the things the children brought I won itone game."

The thin man seemed numbed.

"I've been pretending," said Soames, "that I'm a member of the kids' race, cast away as they are on Earth. As a castaway I know that things can be done that the local savages, us, consider impossible. But I need special materials to do them with. My civilization has provided them. They don't exist here. But I refuse to sink to barbarism. Yet I can't reconstruct my civilization. It's a situation very much like wanting to talk at a distance. What can I do?"

The thin physicist suddenly raised his head. The short man looked up.

"I'll take what materials the savages of Earth can supply," said Soaines. "I can't do what I want-I can't talk at a distance, as I said-but I figure out a way to do something that will have somewhere near the same meaning as talking at a distance, or whatever I want to do. I'll settle for an approximation. And in practice, as a castaway in a savage environment, I'll

wind up with a civilization which isn't that of the savages, and isn't of my own race, but in some ways is better than either because it's tailored to fit the materials at hand and the environment I'm in."

The short physicist said slowly, "I think I see what you're driving at. But it's just an idea. . . "I tried it on that one-way heat conductor," said Soames. "I can't duplicate it. But I've designed something that will mean nearly, but not quite, what their cooking pot does. Take a look at this." He spread out the completed diagram of the first thing he'd worked on. It was quite clear. He'd helped design the meteor-watch radar at Gissel Bay, and his use of electronic symbols was normal. There was only one part of 'the device that he'd needed to sketch in some detail. The thin. physicist traced the diagram.

"You've designed a coil with extremely low self-induction."

"Not low," corrected Soames. "Negative. This has less than no self-induction. It feeds back to instead of fighting an applied current. Put any current in it, and it feeds back to increase the magnetism until it reaches saturation. Then it starts to lose its magnetism and that feeds back a counter-emf which increases the demagnetizing current until it's saturated with opposite polarity. You get an alternating magnet, which doesn't evolve heat because of its magnetic instability, but absorbs heat trying to maintain its stability. This thing will absorb heat from anywhere-the air, water, sunlight or what have you-and give out electric current."

The two scientists stared, and traced the diagram again, and ogled each other.

"It should!" said the thin man. "It-it has to! This is magnificent! It's more important than one-way heat conduction! This is . . ."

"This is not nearly as convenient as a pot that gets cold on the outside so it can get hot on the inside," observed Soames. "From a castaway's standpoint it's crude. But this is what can happen from two civiliza

tions affecting each other without immediately resorting to murder. You might try it."

The two physicists blinked. Then the short man said uneasily, "Can we do it?"

The thin man said more feverishly than before, "Of course! Look at that weather-making thing! We can't duplicate it exactly, but when you think. . . . There's no Hall effect in liquids. Nobody ever tried to find one in ionized gases. But when you think. .

The short man gulped. Then he said, "You won't change the temperature, and to make an equation. ."

They talked to each other feverishly. They scribbled. They almost babbled in their haste. When the other members of the investigating team arrived, they had the look of men who might be walking on clouds.

The military men were not happy. They were empty-handed. They could not even get statistical information from the children. Gail had tried to instruct them in numerals, but the way the children wrote numbers was as different from the modern system as Roman numerals 'or binary systems, or the way the Greeks and the Hebrews made letters of the alphabet serve as figures also. The military men had no useful information. Fran's pocket instrument was cryptic, and held no promise as a weapon. They could not hope to duplicate what Soames had called a super-radar. The cooking pot, if duplicated, might by modification supply power for ships and submarines, or even planes. But there were no weapons. Not one.

The public relations men were frightened. The children's coming would surely produce a financial panic. All of Earth's civilization was demonstrably out of date. Earth technology was so old-fashioned that as soon as its obsolescence was realized, our economic system must fall apart. Only the two physicists were pleased. They'd learned no scientific facts from the children or their equipment, but they'd picked up a trick of thinking from Soames. They beamed as they departed.

By that time it was night. Soames went again to the

surprisingly usual cottage that Gail occupied with the four children. It was startling to go outof-doors and find only darkness with trees and grass and occasional bright stars shining through between cloud masses.

"I've had quite a day," said Gail tiredly. "I'd like to take a ride some place, Brad, and just stop thinking."

Soames hardened himself and said, "I couldn't offer to take you for a drive in a car. But if things were different I could take you for a ride on a motorcycle."

"I'd love it, " Gail told him.

She was silent for a moment. "With two days of English lessons," she went on, "the children were expected to name, identifiably, their home solar system. They were asked questions about the economic system there. They were asked to describe weapons we could make immediately. They were asked to estimate in Earth-miles or Earth light-years, the distance to where they came from!" Soames said, "You didn't simplify things by suggesting that they be asked when they came from?" She shook her head. Then abruptly she began to tremble.

"I'm worried," she said unsteadily. "For them. For you. For myself. I'm-I'm terrffied, Brad!" He put out his hands. He steadied her. Then, without intending it, he held her close. She did not resist. She cried wearily on his shoulder from pure' nervous strain.

"I'm worried!" she gasped a moment later. "What will the children's people do when they don't hear from them? Will they send more ships? What will happen? There'll be fighting. You'll be in the thick of it! There..."

He kissed her.

It seemed to him only instants before there was a heavy, military step nearby and Captain Moggs appeared. Gail was immediately composed and remote. But one hand, holding Soames' sleeve, still quivered a little.

"Gail?" bellowed Captain Moggs in the darkness. "It's you?"

"Yes. We've been talldng over the problem of the children," said Gail.

"It's dreadful!" gasped Captain Moggs. She came close to the pair of them. "You'll ne'~~er be able to believe what's happened! The Russians have pictures of the spaceship, the pictures Mr. Soames took! They know everything! They must have gotten the pictures when their planes landed at Gissel Bay! But how?"

Soames could have answered, and quite accurately. Some enterprising member of the Russian scientific team had been left alone in the developing room at the base. He'd have made the most of it, searching swiftly for anything in the way ~f photographs that the Americans would intend to

keep to themselves. It wouldn't occur to an American, but Russian scientists were required to do all sorts of things.

"They gave copies of the pictures to the UN Assembly," wailed Captain Moggs. "All of them! They say they are pictures of the alien ship which landed, and they say that we Americans took the crew to the United States

-which we did-but they claim we're making a treaty with the non-human monsters who came in the ship! They think we're selling out the rest of humanity! That we're making a bargain to betray the world to horrors out of space-in return for our own safety. They demand the United Nations take over the ship and its crew."

Soames whistled softly. The wild claims were just insane enough to be believed. There was no longer any ship and the children were far from monsters. So there was no way to convince anyone that America made an honest attempt to satisfy or answer the complaint. The matter of the children and their ship had been badly handled. But there was no way to handle it well. The coming of the children was a catastrophe any way you looked at it. But they were so damned likeable.

"There was nothing to be done," mourned Captain Moggs, "but state the facts. Our delegation said the ship crashed on landing, and its occupants needed time to recover from the shock and to develop some way to communicate with us. Our delegation said a complete report hadn't even been made to our government, but that one will be prepared and made public immediately. Oh, it~s terrible! When I think what we could have

learned if only the whole matter had been kept secret!" Gail looked up at Soames in the darkness. He nodded.

- "That report," said Soames. "That's us. Particularly you."
- "Yes," said Gail confidently. "Now is the time for all good men to come to the aid of their government. I'll write half the report, Brad. I like these children. They're nice. You write the technical side, and I'll do a human-interest story for the UN that wifi make everybody love them!" Captain Moggs mopped at her brow.
- "I'll report that you've volunteered for the task," she said less despondently. "Of course you know it will be revised by public relations experts."
- "Over my dead body!" said Gail. "If public relations experts knew anything about writing they wouldn't be public relations experts."
- "I'll report that too," said Captain Moggs. "But you are willing to do your part, and so is Mr. Soames."
- She went away toward the pseudo-general store, from which she would descend three hundred feet underground to an extremely improbable environment, from which in turn she would talk by long-distance telephone with uncomfortable persons in the East.
- "I-I should be ashamed," said Gail, looking up at Soames. "But I needed something to happen right! And for you to act as you did."
- "I'd sworn to myself I wouldn't," said Soames. "I'll never be a rich man, Gail! Marrying me is the craziest idea. .
- "Hush!" said Gail. "I'll learn how to ride on the back seat of a motorcycle, darling!" She laughed softly a little later. Then she freed herself and stepped back.
- "Let's talk a little sense," she said. "About this report. I've always wanted to write one really big story, and this is it! You're the one to tell about machinery and science and stuff, but when I'm through telling about the children, every woman in the world will love them! Monsters? I'll make them want to cuddle Mal," she said vaingloriously, "and adore Zani, and make them feel about the boys as the men at Gissel Bay did. I'll write a story. .
- Soames felt like a scoundrel.
- "Hold it," he said unhappily. "It's all right to make the kids attractive, but not too much. Do you remember why?"
- Gail stopped short.
- "They don't come from an existing solar system to which they can return," said Soames, more unhappily still. "They come either from Flanet Five or from Earth, from another time, when there are mountains falling from the sky. They have nowhere to go. And the children's families have to stay right where they are until flaming islands turn their sky to flame and crash down on them to destroy them. Because we can't let them com~e here."
- Gail stared up at him, and all the life went out of her face.
- "Oh, surely!" she said with bitterness. "Surely! That's right! We can't afford it! I don't know about you or the rest of the world, but I'm going to hate myself all the rest of my life!"

## Ii..

}rEN SOAMES AWOKE next morning he realized that VY he'd let Gail promise to marry him. She was very

foolish and he was a heel to let it happen. He also knew that if she was insane enough to be willing to marry him, the world and all its affairs could go to hell in a hand-basket, but the marriage would take place.

Being the sort of person he was, he needed to justify his own attitude. So he discovered himself arguing reasonably that it was all too likely, anyhow, that the coming of the children would mean the collapse of civilization. There might presently be only bomb craters where great cities had been. Mankind might have to build up, labori

ously, from the barbarism to which it could reduce itself in a mere few hours of atomic war. If such destruction lay ahead, then bank balances wouldn't matter, nor whether a man could or could not afford to own a car or hold title to a suburban split-level house. Such things would no longer be important. If the world went mad and smashed itself, the desirable quality in a husband would be his willingness to fight in defense of his wife. Within months the most desirable possible husband might simply be one who'd have to be killed before his wife could be harmed, and would be hard to kill.

Soames assured himself that in such a state of affairs he'd rate at least as high as the next man. For Gail, he'd do better than most. So he would not insist that she change her mind. He must, nevertheless, try .to keep the children's coming-and he was responsible, in a way

-from making his marriage to Gail practicable only in that manner.

He'd done nearly everything he could. He'd started two capable men at a highly technical game of pretending to be castaways. If disaster held off long enough, that alone might prevent absolute catastrophe. For another thing, the children themselves should be protected. Gail was already resolute about that, but there was another consideration. If the world of now did destroy itself, then there would be reason to deliver the wrecked and largely depopulated post-atom-war Earth to the ancestors of those who had committed suicide. The children could bring them. But it must not be permitted unless the modern world did destroy itself.

This was the grimmest of attitudes to take toward the grimmest of possible eventualities. But Soames adopted it. He was responsible for the children's danger in the world of now. He had just taken on himself the responsibility for Gail's safety, too. Until the worst happened he would do all he could to prevent the worst. Until then...

He reached these conclusions and put them aside. They would guide him if the all-too-probable took place. Meanwhile it was only rational to go along with

the world as it was. So, during the morning, he managed to get two puppies for the children to play with. They d belonged to the family of a staff sergeant in the missile base below ground. His family occupied one of the other cottages in the villages. The puppies were round-bellied, with ingratiating manners and ceaselessly waving tails and with tongues that licked wetly on the slightest of provocations.

Soames had delivered them and was inside Gail's cottage when Captain Moggs turned up. He watched Mal and Hod, outside on the lawn, playing with the two small dogs. Zani sat at a table indoors, drawing. Gail had shown her pictures of cities and provided her with paper and soft pencils. Zani grasped the idea immediately. She drew, without remarkable skill but with a certain pleasing directness. Now she drew a city while Gail hovered near.

"I have to report, Mr. Soames," said Captain Moggs with gratification, "that your status has been clarified. The papers are on the way here now."

Soames started a little. From where he stood, he could watch Mal and Hod out of a window, and by turning his eyes he could see Zani. She could not see what went on where Mal cuddled one puppy, girl-fashion, while Hod played in quite another fashion with the other. The window was behind Zani

Soames had not been too attentive. He realized it.

- "What's that, Captain?"
- "Your status is clarified," said Captain Moggs, authoritatively. "You have been appointed a civilian consultant. You had no o~cial status before. The bookkeeping problem was serious. Now you have a civil service status, a rating, an assimilated rank and a security classification. The last is not very high, but I'm sure you don't mind."

Soames considered.

"I don't mind," he said, "but aren't the children topsecret?"

- "For the present," said Captain Moggs. "They are. Yes."
- "And with a low security classffication," said Soames, "I shouldn't know anything about them. Or should I?"

(delete this)

Captain Moggs looked confused.

- "I think there should be a ruling," said Soames, "on whether I'm allowed to listen, with a low security classification, while I answer questions about the top-secret children."
- Captain Moggs fretted visibly. Soames turned his eyes back to the children out-of-doors. Fran caine around from the back of the cottage. He carried something in his hands. It was a white rabbit, also belonging to the staff sergeant's children. He'd brought it to show Ma! and Hod. They put down the puppies and gazed at it in amazement, stroking its fur and talking inaudibly. Soames looked swiftly at Zani. Her pencil had ceased to make strokes upon the paper. She had the
- expression of someone watching absorbedly, though her eyes were on the paper before her. Gail stirred, and Soames made a gesture to her. Puzzled, she came to his side. He said quietly,
- Gail stirred, and Soames made a gesture to her. Puzzled, she came to his side. He said quietly, "Watch the kids outside and Zani at the same time."
- Fran retrieved the rabbit and went away with it, to give it back to its owners. Zani returned to her drawing. The two children outside went back to the puppies. One small dog sprawled triumphantly over the other with an expression of bland amiability on his face. For no reason at all, he began to chew meditatively on the other puppy's ear. His victim protested with no indignation at all.
- Zani, with her back to the scene, giggled to herself. The two children outdoors separated the puppies to play with them again, individually.
- Zani drew at her picture. Soames and Gail looked at each other. Captain Moggs had moved away. "Zani knew," said Soames under his breath. "She knew what the others saw."
- "It happens all the time," said Gail in a similar low tone. "I've noticed, since you pointed it out. But they aren't telepaths! They talk to each other constantly. They chatter. If they were telepaths they wouldn't need to."
- Captain Moggs exclaimed. She'd gone to look at Zani's drawing. Now she said in an indignant tone, "Really, Gail, the child draws very nicelyt But do you think she
- should waste time on pictures like this, when it's so important that she and the others learn English?"
- Gail said quietly, "She~s drawing pictures of her own world. That's a city like her people build. I thought it would be a good idea to get such pictures from her."
- "Hm. Ha. Yes. To be sure!" Then Captain Moggs looked uncomfortable. "About the child psychologist matter that I mentioned early this morning, I shall' report to Washington that you protest."
  "They'll have to take me away from the children to do it," said Gail, "and if that happens my news
- syndicate will get the most sensational news story that ever saw print! It won't look well in other languages, either!"
- Captain Moggs said placatingly, "I can see how you would feel, Gail. And of course the child psychologists agree that you should stay with the children. They should not be subjected to a second traumatic experience in losing you, so soon after their casting-away. It is considered that the girls have accepted you as a mother-substitute in their very trying situation."
- "Meaning," said Gail, "that they like me. I think they do. They like Brad, too."
- "I deny," said Soames, "that I am a father-substitute. I just learned that I'm a civilian consultant with an assimilated rank and a low security rating."
- Captain Moggs looked at him blankly. She went away. It was not until she was outside that she resumed her usual military manner.
- "What's all this?" asked Soames. "What are you threatening to tell all about?"
- "Yesterday's interviews didn't go too well," explained Gail. "The children weren't informative enough. How àould they be? So someone suggested a drug-reinforced attempt by a child psychologist to drag out of their minds what they don't know how to tell us, or perhaps don't know at all. They say drugs may help. It appears, "Gail's voice was very steady, "it appears that very authoritative theoreticians are making some very beastly Suggestions."
- Soames said, "There'd he relief in a good many quarters if something tragic and final happened to the
- children. You were right about the newspaper treatment of the whole business. Have you seen the papers?"
- "I have," said Gail fiercely. "There's something wrong about this, Brad! It isn't the way to handle the thing. The children shouldn't be dangerous to us. They're helpless! It isn't fair that

nobody dares act just simply and naturally to protect them when they need it! It's wrong. And it can't be intelligent if it's wrong!"

"Unfortunately," said Soaines, "it's not the children but their race that scares people."

"But-but I'm frightened for the children!" said Gail as fiercely as before. "Look here, Brad!"

She went to look at the drawing at which Zani labored with a young girl's absorption in something she knows will be approved by a grown-up when it's done. With a gesture, Gail invited Soames to look. He did.

Zani had drawn the sky line of a city, but it was a peculiar sky line. There were, to be sure, tall buildings, but their walls were draping, catenary curves. There were splendid towers and soaring highways, which leaped across emptiness to magnificent landings. There were groups of structures with no straight line visible anywhere.

"Fascinating," said Soames. "That kind of building has been suggested as ultra-modem architecture. They don't have an external steel frame. There's a central mast from which all the floors are hung. They have to be braced by cables, which make catenary curves like suspension-bridges on end."

Zani went on with her drawing. Gail said, "It isn't whimsy, then. Look at this. It's a-maybe you'll call it a car. Only it looks like a sled. Or," she smiled very faintly, "maybe a motorcycle."

She showed him a finished sketch. With a childish directness, yet a singular effect of clear observation, Zani had drawn a vehicle. It did not have wheels. It rested on what looked like two short, thick runners or skids.

"This isn't fantasy, either," said Soames. "There've been wheelless vehicles built lately. They're held an inch or so above the ground by columns of air pouring out.

They ride on cushions of air. But they require perfect highways. It isn't likely that, a child would draw them if she hadn't seen them."

In silence, Gail showed other sketches. A man and woman in costumes somehow related to those the children had worn at the beginning. There was a picture of a group . of people.

"Odd," said Soames. "Everybody wears a belt such as the children have on now. Everybody! As if it were official."

He glanced at Zani. She wore a belt over American-style young-girl's clothing today. The belt was neither leather nor plastic nor anything that could have a name put to it. It had two medallions placed on each side of the fastening-which was not a buckle. Hod and Mal, outside, wore similar belts. Fran wore the same. Soames puzzled over it for a moment.

Gail offered him another sheet of paper.

"I'm going to tear this up when you've seen it."

It was a landscape, sketched in with surprisingly bold strokes of the soft pencil. The time was night. Near the bottom of the picture there was a city of the strange, catenary curve architecture. It was drawn so small, though, that most of the picture was black sky. But there was a blazing light upon the city, and it came from something monstrous, jagged and incandescent and vast, plunging upon the city from the sky, trailing flames behind it.

"And this," said Gail, very quietly.

It was a picture of a crater, a ring-mountain, the scene of the impact of something terrible and huge. It was a chasm with circular, broken rocky walls. There was a fallen tree in the foreground, near the spot from which the sketch seemed to have been made.

Soames stared in amazement. He looked at the drawings more closely, examining each detail. All at once he grabbed Gail and said, "My GodI Do you know what these pictures prove? They show that the children fear bombardment-not explosion! That means they're from Earth originally, not from the Fifth Planet! From Earth

-our ancestors. Why, they have as much right to be

here as we do, yet the arrival of their race can only mean doom for us."

Gail looked blankly at Soames and then asked, "But how can you be sure about this, sure that they're from Earth?"

"Oh, I should have realized it before. If they'd been from Planet Five they would have had to travel through both time and space. And if they had traveled through space the radar would have tracked them in the usual way. It wouldn't have reacted in such a peculiar manner, trying to pick up something which wasn't in existence because it was emerging out of time-something the radar couldn't handle. These drawings confirm the fact that the children came from Earth because they don't depict the explosion of their own planet. They show the bombardment of it."

Soames turned away and began pacing up and down the room, thinking over his theory when suddenly Zani giggled. Then she jumped. But her eyes were on the paper before her. Soames glanced out the window. Mal had toppled over, and one of the puppies had climbed valiantly on her back and was

pulling with all his tiny might at a puppy-mouthful of her hair. His tail wagged vigorously all the while. Hod laughed, and Mal giggled, and inside the cottage Zani, who could not have seen what had happened, giggled with them.

"She couldn't see it, but she knew 'what happened," said Soames. "I suspect this place is so top-secret that it's a breach of security to remember it outside. If anybody notices that little trick the kids can do, they'll be snspected of casually inspecting high-secrecy stuff while drawing pictures or playing with little dogs."

He remembered that less than eighty hours ago, not yet four days, he was showing Gail and Captain Moggs the wave-guide radar at Gissel Bay. There were then no children. There was no more reason to be any more afraid than for years past. Now things were in quite another state. The children had been sent from a place of infinite peril on an errand through time. Children had been chosen because it was less dangerous to go than to stay where their elders did. Two boys and two girls because they might well be the only survivors of the race. Death could come so quickly to the rest.

"But there were survivors," said Soames to himself, while Gail watched him frowning. He looked up. "Maybe a ten-thousandth of all Earth went undevastated, so there were seeds and plants and some animals left to carry on the business of life. Maybe only a few dozen survived of all the children's race. They went back to savagery because every tool and every book was lost. And they were our ancestors."

Then he grimaced. He nodded to Gail and went back to his quarters. He set to work upon the task of pretending that he was a castaway from the children's civilization in order to improvise conveniences that, as a castaway, he'd consider crude but as an aborigine amazing. He worked doggedly. Shipwrecked among savages, a civilized man might think it of the first importance to devise new weapons for himself, but Soames held his mind away from that for now. He worked at much more urgent matters.

From time to time, though, he wondered sardonically about the public relations program on the children. They had to be revealed, now. He'd prepared a complete report about the ship, telling in detail about its arrival and adding everything he could infer about the civilization that had made it-except that civilization's existence on the Earth of eons ago and its imminent doom. Gail had written what she considered the best human interest story of her life about the children. Neither report was asked for. Nobody knew where either was to be sent. Soames, more amused than annoyed, guessed at a change of policy somewhere. Practically anything was likely to happen, anyhow. But the problem justified worry. The simple, relatively insignificant problem of the children here and now, with all their thought of flaming skies and upheaved earth was put firmly aside. The children had to be revealed. But the world would automatically assume that the crew of an alien spaceship must be in some fashion monsters. Europe would

accept werewolves as prototypes of a spaceship's crew. China would go for dragons. Newly industrialized nations might think independent metallic robots the most convincing spacetravelers.

There were innumerable freakish creatures that would have been accepted without question as shipwrecked, intelligent aliens. But four nice, decent children? Space-travelers? Spaceships navigated by boys and girls who liked to play with puppies? Such innocuous persons to represent the most deadly danger the modern world~ had ever faced?

But they did represent it. There was no way out of the fact. And somehow the facts had to be put across. The public relations counsellors who had interviewed the children pointed out the means. They got the job.

The advance publicity was thoroughly professional. The spaceship's company was to be revealed fri the most stupendous TV broadcast of all time. For the second time in history, a trans-Atlantic relay patrol would form two relay-channels from North America to Europe. It would reach Japan via the Aleutians and a relay-ship, by wire from Japan to all Asia and, again relayed, to Australia. South Africa would get the coverage by land-wire down the continent from the Pillars of Hercules. The Mediterranean basin, the Near East, Scandinavia, and even Iceland would see the spectacle. There was not a television-equipped city 'on Earth where the broadcast would not be available. Orders came to the missile base where the children, with Gail, inhabited an eighty-year-old cottage in a seemingly proper little mountain village. There were detailed orders about the instructions she was to give the children. Reading them, Soames did not anticipate a very lively show. But the instructions confidently disposed of that objection.

The top feminine TV personality of America would serve as hostess, substituting for Gail, who must try to make the children understand. Miss Linda Beach could establish a personal contact with any audience. One had only to look at her to respond to her charm, her wholesomeness, her adroit sincerity. She had sold soap, auto-

mobiles, vitamin tablets and soup. Obviously, she was the perfect saleswoman for the children out of space.

Soames considered the situation ironic-and hopeless. But Gail was relieved.

"Linda Beach is charming," she told Soames. "You'll like her. Everybody does. She'll know how to make people see that the children are just-children. That it isn't sensible to expect them to help us equal and defy their civilization. She's just the right person to make everyone feel sorry for them and wish them well, even if they have no hope of'ever seeing their people again."

"We hope they've no hope," said Soames. "And I hope the professionals know what they're doing. I'm a simple soul who'd be inclined to tell the truth without trimmings. It might not be easy, and it might not be comfortable, but it would be fact. But I'm a simple soul."

He still felt that the predicament of the children was his doing. It was. But he also felt that he'd taken the only possible course of action when he kept the children from signalling back to the race that had sent them. Now that he had a clearer idea of the situation, it still seemed the right thing, cruel to the children, but the best thing. The world couldn't permit the desperate, doomed people of another civilization to invade them, smother them, and probably starve them. In such a case both civilizations would die together in a welter of fighting, hatred and disaster. A small, fast transport came to get the children, Gail and Soames. ft took off. The children were unconcerned. The girls, in any case, had acquired a trust in Gail which kept them quite confident so long as she was with them. Hod appeared to share their dependence upon her. But Fran sat apart, thinking somberly, and Soames suspected that he was haunted by the knowledge of his race's predicament, which he'd been sent to relieve.

Soames took a seat beside him. Fran politely but reservedly made room. Soames took out a pencil and a pad of paper. He drew a sketch of a boy flying a kite, and added a close-up drawing of the kite. He drew a boy walking on stilts, and a drawing of how stilts were made. Soames hadn't actually seen a boy walking on

stilts for years, and it might now be a lost art, but Fran showed interest. Soames drew a bicycle with a boy on it, and then, for no reason, modffied the bike into a motorcycle. He hoped his sketches would strike Fran as interesting things a boy might do for his own satisfaction. Fran was intrigued. Presently he took the pencil and made sketches of his own. A boy with a belt like his rode something which vaguely resembled a motorcycle. He made a detailed drawing of a runner. This was an air-sled, such as Zani had pictured in more elaborate form. Fran sketched the air-column generator, and it was utterly simple. A boy of fourteen could make it. After painful scrutiny Soames realized that it was a ram-jet engine which would start itself and operate in still air. In the modern world, it would make gas-turbine engines practical for locomotives and

Fran saw his reaction. Generously, because he was appreciated, he busily drew one thing after another until the transport landed at Idlewild. His attitude toward Soames was distinctly more friendly by that time.

A motorcycle escort surrounded the car with drawn curtains which carried the children into New York In time the car dived down into the height entrance of the new Communications Building on 59th Street. Secret-service men had cleared all corridors so the children reached their dressing-rooms unseen. This was showmanship. The secret-service men went away. And then-it was part of the seamy side of television-there was an indefinitely long and tedious wait.

Linda Beach appeared an hour later. She showed a mere flicker of surprise at the completely normal appearance of the children. She seemed even a trifle dubious. But she briskly began the rehearsal. There were an indefinite number of people without neckties who at odd moments dashed out of nowhere, interrupted everything, and had things changed. There were long pauses while lights were arranged. There were strips of adhesive on the floor marking where people were supposed to stand at this moment and that.

The children gathered the purpose of the thing by

watching the monitors. They chattered together, and the girls. went pleasantly through what was expected of them. Hod seemed quite numb, and Fran scowled. But he was more gracious when he saw Soames going through similar antics. In a quiet moment he got Soames aside and re-drew the sketch of stilts that Soames had made. He plainly wanted corrections. None were needed.

The rehearsal ended. There was another long wait. This was to introduce the children from a totally unknown and superior civilization to a world which considered them strangers from space, when they were actually from a much more improbable homeland. The world was waiting to see them. Time dragged. Gail tried to speak to Linda Beach, and was interrupted a dozen times, and suddenly found herself alone.

Soames waited restlessly for the ordeal to begin. Once he heard an argument. Someone was insisting that makeup should be applied to the children to make them look less human. It was overruled.

Once he wandered out of the studio and looked down at the street outside. There was already a small crowd there, almost filling the street to the wall about Central Park. It was not an ordinary crowd. There were shoutings in it. Self-appointed prophets harangued. Soames guessed that the people below hoped to see the arrival of the spaceship's crew, and so achieve some sort of distinction

This crowd, though, was a minor one. All over the world people without television sets of their own took early places before store-windows which provided them. On other continents, people were already up to get the early-morning first glimpse of creatures whose coming might mean the end of the world. Where the broadcast would come late at night, practically nobody went to bed. In New York the normal tra~c practically ceased, and in San Francisco offices prepared to suspend operations until the show was over.

Presently it began.

For making information available to a multitude, it was a magnificently organized job. Two lines of planes

flew at thirty thousand feet above the Atlantic, each column invisible from the sea and from each other. Each plane in sequence received a signal which was composed of some eight million odd items per second. Each plane in turn clarified it, amplified it, and deftly passed it on to the next in line. It arrived at two separate points upon another continent. There land-lines took over. They again multiplied it and this time separated it into many fractions-each of which was complete-and carried the broadcast to a thousand cities and more.

There were also ships tossing on narrow seas, which received the signal and flung it on to other lands until it reached the ends of the earth where it met itself, having rounded the world in the other direction by equally complex means.

Counting pilots and the ground-personnel to serve them, plus the ships on the seas, the tenders of the relay-stations along the land lines, and the operators of local broadcasting stations, there were some tens of thousands of people involved in making the broadcast available to everybody, everywhere. It was computed that over half the human race would look at and hear every word and gesture uttered before the cameras in the studin in New York. Some of them were not in the habit of watching television broadcasts, but most of them were. It was the scale of the operation which made it remarkable as a feat in the dissemination of information.

But the information itself was handled by publicrelations experts who had been handling other information with a high degree of expertness.

The show, naturally, began with a tremendous fanfare of trumpets, played from tape. An under-under-Secretary of State, in correct but informal costume, addressed the world. Most of what he had to say was not listened to, even when translated into other languages. The audience heard the trumpets and a male voice speaking with fine, commercial-type sincerity. It sounded exactly like an effective, depth-motivation commercial. It had been rehearsed under the direction of experts for the calculated effect of simple honesty. But the civilized world

had been forced to build up an automatic resistance to depth-motivation commercials. Eyes glazed slightly and people continued to watch but ceased to attend. Perhaps the message registered on the audience's subconscious, but it did not register anywhere else.

Then Linda Beach appeared. Her gown was admirable. The female half of her audience examined it in detail, and did not notice what she said. The male part thought such thoughts as are natural when watching the opening of TV spectacles. Very many television shows begin with charming, confidential chats by the star with the public. So did this one. It was soothing because it was

utterly familiar. The only persons fully attentive from this time on were the small children who waited to see monsters, the crew of a wrecked spaceship. Many of those interested small persons wore space-helmets and had ray-guns ready for the moment when the monsters should appear. Linda Beach introduced Gail and Soames and Captain Moggs. This also was in the pattern of commercial TV. It was standard to introduce guest stars and have them gaily make a plug for their latest pictures. It was familiar. It is accepted everywhere as inevitable. The audience continued

latest pictures. It was familiar. It is accepted everywhere as inevitable. The audience continued to look at the screen, but insensibly and by long custom nearly all of it fell into the mood of relaxed semi-awareness which is the ideal of sponsors.

Public relations counsellors consider~that a really good commercial program has the effect of a slightly euphoric tranquilizer. Which, of course, is a splendid medium for subconscious selling purposes. It allows the sponsors to put into purchased air-time any number of unrecognized urgings for their customers to go out and buy something. It is the most highly developed form of salesmanship known to man.

But this broadcast was supposed to be strictly informative. It was, however, produced with the attitude and the technique and the fine professionalism of specialists in the sale of soap. So it put its audience into the exact mood of people who surrender themselves to mildly lulling make-

believe. When Captain Moggs told of the finding of the ship, her authoritative manner and self-importance made most people feel, without regard to their thoughts, that she was an un-funny comedian. This, also, is one of the most familiar sights of modem television.

The show, in sort, was a stupendous production, created by people who knew exactly how to produce stupendous productions. It was as nearly as possible like all other stupendous productions, so people reacted to its kind. They relaxed, and those at home vaguely intended to get some beer when the next commercial came

on. They remembered with decreasing concern that some interesting monsters were supposed to be in the show later and that they were waiting to see them. Meanwhile they sank into that partially dazed state in which people watch professional and ultimately numbing television broadcasts. The introduction of the children was a disappointment, but a mild one. When they were produced and identified, the television-watching syndrome was fully developed. There was a feeling, of course, that the show fell down in interest and that it did not live up to its advance publicity. But the television audience is used to that. Its members continued to watch with dulled eyes, listening with only partly attentive ears, automatically waiting for a commercial when it could get some beer or an equivalent without missing anything.

Even when tumult and confusion began, when Linda Beach tried to hold the show together in the teeth of uproar behind her, the tranquillized state of the audience continued. There was usually some slapstick on a show like this. When Linda Beach's necklace was snatched from her neck it seemed intended to be funny.

It wasn't until the very end that anything occurred really to break the apathetic spell professionally produced shows are designed to cast. That occurrence startled the viewers out of their semi-comatose state, just as blatant obscenity or intolerable profanity would have done. Linda Beach, in fine sincerity and in tribute to the children, made a statement which was utterly explosive. When the show ended, people all over the world were roused and horrified and enraged. Only small children, waiting in space-helmets and with ray-guns ready, complained aggrievedly that there hadn't been any monsters. The adults felt that there had been. That there were. They hated the children with a strictly personal hatred based on panic combined with shame.

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OAMES' REHEARSED PART in the broadcast finished after he and Gail and Captain Moggs had tol& the story of the finding of the ship. Their narratives were deftly guided by Linda Beach's questions. Soames felt like a fool because the things that seemed important to him were apparently of no importance at all on television. He wasn't allowed to make accurate statements because the demand was for sensational ones. Gail, also, seemed frustrated. She wanted to prepare people to like the children when they were revealed, but the design of the performance called for them to be pure surprise. Captain Moggs, alone, rose to the occasion. She revelled in the dramatic phrasing of her answers, and they were perfectly suited to so stupendous a production.

When Soames was done, he wanted to get out of sight. He was not wholly surprised-after all, it had been rehearsed-but he was sunk in gloom. It was a circus instead of what he would have considered a presentation of the facts, though nearly everything said had been factual. But he wanted to get away. He went behind scenery, away from the cameras. Presently he escaped from the studio altogether.

There was naturally no studio audience, but the place ;warrned with hatless, tieless people who dashed madly ibout like waterbugs, agilely avoiding ever being seen m camera. It was much better in the empty corridor )utside the studio. When he'd put a corner or two

behind him, he felt better still. Presently he found himself staring out a window, down at the crowd before the Communications Building.

It was a restless crowd, now. The ground-floor plate-glass windows had been filled with television screens, and those near them could see the broadcast and hear it from out-door loud-speakers. But this crowd was a special one, in that it hadn't gathered to see the broadcast but extraterrestrial monsters, in the flesh or fur or scales or however they might appear. It now knew that the monsters had arrived and there was no chance of seeing them direct. The crowd had been harangued by orators and by people who already began to call themselves humanity-firsters. It felt cheated.

There were a large number of teen-agers in the crowd. Soames looked down gloomily. He was at a

window some distance from the studio, around two corners of the innumerable corridors which led everywhere. But there was a monitor TV set somewhere nearby. He could hear Linda Beach talking to an eminent French scientist. The children had been presented while he was making his way here. The eminent French scientist fumed. He wanted to know from what planet or star-system the children claimed to come. He was patently disappointed and incredulous because they were human children. Linda Beach explained charmingly to him and the world that, not knowing any terrestrial language, they had not been able to explain. It was not especially convincing.

At the window, Soames recognized the oddness of the crowd below him. An ordinary, curiosity-seeking crowd would contain a considerable percentage of women. This did not. There were shouting voices which Sciames heard faintly. They were oratots declaiming assorted emotional opinions about monsters from space, obviously in the belief that their words were beyond dispute and should be acted on at once. There was competition among these orators. Some had bands of supporters around them to aid their e-ectiveness by applause and loud agreement. Soames saw, too, at least one hilarious group of college-age boys who might have been organized by a college humor magazine, They waved cardboard signs. Space-Monsters Go Home! Earth For Humans! and Humans of the World, Unite! The unattended monitor set, placed around some corner in a corridor, gave out an excellently modulated reproduction of the program going on the air. An Italian physicist had replaced the French scientist. He asked questions about the qualifications of such young children as space navigators. Soames listened without paying much attention. He knew unhappily that if the children weren't convincing as visitors from space, they'd be much less plausible in their true roles as fugitives out of time.

There were many teen-agers in the crowd outside. The collegians surged here and there, making a demonstration in favor of mirth. There were also youthful members of less innocuous groups-swaggering, consciously ominous members of organizations known as the Maharajas and the Comets and the Toppers. Members of these groups eyed members of other such groups with challenging, level gazes.

Voices raged. Collegians attempted to sing what must have seemed to them a deliciously satirical song. We hate all space aggressors, As we hate all other messers, With the way our granddadr built and ran our world, We'll chase them back to Sirius, With fury quite delirious. . . In the planning stage of their demonstration it probably seemed extremely amusing. But it did not please the non-collegian Maharajas or Comets or the Toppers.

A Russian scientist took over from the Italian. He had been flown to the United States especially for the occasion. He asked elaborate and carefully loaded questions. They had been prepared as propaganda stumpers by people who, in their way, were as skilled in public relations as the producers of this show. Linda Beach applied the charm which had sold soap, vitamins, automobiles and soup. Soames heard the exchanges from the monitor set.

Outside, in the street, a brick suddenly fell among the collegians. More bricks fell among those engaged in an impromptu meeting of Humanity Firsters. Police whis

ties blew. A plate-glass window crashed. A collegian suddenly had a bloody face and a flying wedge of Maharajas scornfully cut through the singing group, wielding belts and bludgeons for the honor of having started a riot. They fought past the college crowd and into a band of the Comets. There they found a rumble ready-made. Arguing orators found themselves jostled. Fights broke out among members of groups that had come to stage demonstrations against extra-terrestrials. The fighting spread to individuals. Here a single pair slugged at each other or used less innocent weapons than fists. There a group battled indiscriminately. A knot of adherents of a particularly leatherlunged orator battled with righteous indignation against everybody not of their own persuasion. Police-car sirens wailed. Squad-cars came careening out of uptown-traffic streets and converged on the tumult. The sirens produced violent surgings of -the crowd. There was a wild rush in this direction as a siren sounded from that, and then an equally wild rush in another direction as blazing headlights and a moving howl came from elsewhere. Some timorous persons climbed the stone wall of Central Park, dropped down into it, and ceased to be part of the uproar. But not all. Rushing figures surged against the doors to the lobby of the Communications Building. A Topper was crushed against a policeman there. The officer's arms were so tightly pinned by the crush that he was helpless. The Topper was moved to a deed of infinite daring. He would brag about it for months in the candy-store which was his gang's headquarters. He was torn away from the policeman by the movement of the mob. But he had the cop's gun!

He aimed it into the air and magnificently pulled the trigger, emptying it. The gunfire produced panic out of all conceivable reason. More plate- $g\sim la\sim s$  crashed, and terror-stricken folk scrambled through,,/looking frantically for escape. Th poured into  $\sim J\sim e$  lobby of the Communications Building just as th $\sim glass$  doors gave way and gasping people pushed  $\sim rI$ , thrust irresistibly by the crowd behind.

Members' of the Toppers and the Comets and the Maharajas considered the lobby a dead end. They raced up its great stairway 'to find a down-stair and an exit to some concealing alley. They reached a maze of cor-'ridors. They panicked.

The invasion of an occupied building was a serious matter. They fled along the carpeted corridors, came to blind ends, opened doors at random, ran out ag~in, and blundered into others of their kind. A' squealing rush of fear jammed the downstairs lobby to suffocation. Then there was an unconcerted rush up the stairs to avoid the crush, and it seemed that the whole building swarmed with people who had no business being there.

But some of them were fanatics. And in such a crush they were anonymous. There was a sign On the Air lighted from behind outside the studio in which the world-wide broadcast was in progress. There was a door. Jammed people opened it.

The watching world heard the racket as a former Nobel Prize winner's stilted questions about the children were drowned out. This was not a planned invasion. It was a totally chaotic rushing-about of people who'd been half hysterical to start with, who had been crushed in a senselessly swaying mob, had been pushed bodily into a building lobby jammed past endurance, and escaped -into a maze from which they'd blundered into a studio with a broadcast going on. Stagehands and tie-less persons rushed to throw them out. But the noise grew greater while Linda Beach tried gamely to cover it up.

It was not easy. In fact, it was impossible. An orator from the street realized that he was in the iniquitous place from which the monsters he'd been denouncing were being shown to the world. He shouted, dementedly. Stagehands concentrated on him, and a member of the Toppers darted agilely behind frontless sets and ran wild. Fellow Toppers imitated him, some more and some less successfully. One of them, superbly daring, found himself cornered by an assistant director and two handlers of idiot cards and dashed triumphantly across that sacrosanct space, the area in a camera's field of

vision. He raced behind Linda Beach who smiled pleasantly and talked at the top of her voice to cover the noise behind her. The Topper snatched as he went by. He'd been greatly admired by other Toppers for his skill in exactly this exercise. Linda Beach staggered, and her necklace broke, and this particular juvenile delinquent plunged into the crowd by the doorway and wormed his way through to lose himself in the ~crush outside.

But now the cops from the squad-cars were at work. They dispersed the mob in the street. They invaded the lobby and began to push the people out, diminishing the intolerable pressure there. Somebody carried two fainting women to one side. A man with a broken arm talked volubly.

The lobby began to be partially cleared. Fugitives from panic came down into the street where they were commanded to get moving and keep moving. They did.

And Soames arrived at the studio. He'd fought his way there with a sort of white-hot passion, because Gail was where this lunatic mob might trample her. He raged, and then he saw her standing with precarious composure out of the way of everything.

Fran dragged fiercely at his arm. His eyes burned. He thrust something upon Soames and frantically repeated the one word of his scanty English vocabulary which seemd to fit. The word was "Try! Tr~'! Try!" He reached around Soames' waist and linked a belt about him.

Abruptly Soames had the conviction that he was truly going mad. He stood, himself, in the studio where the tumult was now almost ended. But strangely he could look up at himself from the level of his own breast. Also he was down in the lobby of the Communications Building, mingling with the thinning mob there, allowing himself to be herded out into the street. There he was surrounded by people taller than himself. That part of his awareness reached the open air and moved swiftly westward. That part of him put his hand in his pocket-but Soames had nothing to do with the actionand felt things there. There was a chain with sharp-edged, faceted things on it. There was a belt with

shaped metallic objects fastened to it. -"Try!" cried Fran desperately. "Try!"

And suddenly Soames realized. He heard the street-sounds through someone else's ears. He saw the street through someone else's eyes. Simultaneously he saw himself in the studio through someone else's eyes-Fran s. And this explained the behavior of the children with puppies and English lessons and items of information which all of them seemed to know when one knew. The children were not telepathic. They - could not read each other's minds. But some one or all of the decorative medallions on their belts enabled them to share each other's sense-impressions. They were both broadcasters and receivers of sensory impressions. And therefore it was because Soames had Mal's belt about him that he could see what Fran saw, and hear what Fran heard-and also he saw and heard and felt what an oily-haired member of the Toppers saw and heard and felt with Hod's belt in his pocket beside Linda Beach's necklace, snatched from her neck right before the camera.

But there was no sign that the oily-haired person saw or heard or felt what Soames did. Perhaps

because he was not wearing the belt, but only had it crumpled together in his pocket. "Right!" said Soames harshly. "I'll get it back!"

He plunged toward the studio door. There had been secret-service men assigned to guard the children. They'd been in the way and sent elsewhere during the broadcast. They'd turned up immediately after the invasion and now helped the stagehands get the invaders out. Soames caught one of them by the shoulder.

"The kids have been robbed," he snapped in the secret-service man's ear. "Secret device! We've got to get it back! I can do it! Come along!"

The secret-service man instantly followed him. And Soames tore through the scared people still aimlessly wandering about. He plunged down the stairs. A squad-car cop moved to check his rush, and the secret-service man panted an identification and a need. The cop abandoned all other matters and followed, too.

Soames needed to close his eyes to see what the

Topper saw. He blinked them shut while he ran three paces. The Topper walked, now. He'd been joined by two friends. Soames heard his voice-he even felt the motions of his lips and tongue in speech. He boasted that he'd snatched the beads off Linda Beach's neck, and got a fancy belt one of those funny-dressed kids was wearing. -

Half a block. Two more of the Toppers joined the bragging snatcher. They also heard of his grand achievement. The Topper drew his loot partly from his pocket to prove his boast. They looked, and swaggered, and whooped to others of their fellowship.

Soames pelted around a corner, turning it without warning. The secret-service man and the cop lost a dozen paces. Soames raced ahead. There was a cluster of late-teen-age boys on the sidewalk of Eighth Avenue. They were at what the police resignedly consider the delinquent age. There were nearly a dozen of them.

Soames plunged into the gang. Without a word, he tackled and bore to the ground the one in whose pocket Hod's belt and Linda Beach's necklace still reposed.

Their reaction was instant. The Toppers were in a close group. Soames fell to the ground atop one of their number. The others instantly attacked him as if by reflex action. They stamped and kicked viciously in that deadly and sophisticated form of murderous assault which allows the maximum damage in the minimum time so one can run away before the cops come.

But there was a cop and a secret-service man on the way. They struck. The Toppers turned to fight and fled instead at the sight of two adults already administering punishment to those within reach and coming on to reach others.

The two officers pulled Soames to his feet. In seconds he'd been badly battered. He pulled Hod's belt out from the pocket of the snarling, now-pallid member of the Toppers, who was half-strangled and shaken. He got the necklace. Numbly, he felt again and found a stray stone or two.

"All right," he said thickly. "I got it. I'll get back to the kids with it."

The cop took the Topper. Soames and the secret-service man got back to the studio. The show was still on. Soames exhaustedly handed Hod his belt, and stripped off the other belt that Fran had put on him. He gave it back to Fran. Fran's eyes still burned, but he regarded Soames with definite respect. Perhaps there was even liking. And Soames held up the recovered necklace for Linda Beach to see, though she was then still before the camera.

She was a seasoned performer. Without blinking an eye she changed what she was saying, called on Gail to have the children demonstrate the devices they'd brought from the wrecked ship, and came - to Soames. She counted the stones swiftly, asking questions the while.

He told her. It would come out, necessarily. The children had, built into their belts, devices which produced an effect on the order of telepathy. But it was not telepathy. Undoubtedly the devices could be turned on or off. Turned on, they linked together the senses of those who wore them, not the minds, but the senses. Each saw what the others saw, heard what the others heard, and felt with the rest. But thoughts were not shared. Such a device would not be confusing if one were used to it, and two men working together could cooperate with a thousand times the effectiveness of men without them. Children playing together could have a degree of companionship otherwise impossible. And four children upon a desperate voyage, without adults to reassure them, would need this close linkage with their fellows. It would give them courage. They could be more resolute.

Linda Beach went back to camera-position and waited until the demonstration of the pocket metal-cutting device, by Fran, was ended. Then she signalled for her own camera and put on the charm. She showed the necklace. She said it had been stolen. She said that the children were telepaths, and by the reading of the criminal's mind he had been tracked down through the crowded streets outside the studio, and her necklace recovered. She did not refer to the tumult. She left it to be presumed that it came from- the discovery of the theft. If anybody remembered having seen

the snatch-they could think about it. She did not try to explain.

She repeated, with enthusiasm and gratitude that the children had read the mind of the thief who'd stolen her necklace, and he'd been identified in a crowded street and the necklace recovered-because the children were telepaths.

It is always better to say something that is not quite the truth but is perfectly understandable, than something which is true but bewildering. This •is a cardinal rule in television. Never bewilder your audience! So Linda Beach did not bewilder her audience by an accurate statement. She told them something they would understand. It made the children convincingly more than merely ordinary children.

It shocked her world-wide television audience out of that bemused condition the professionalism of the broadcast had produced. It lifted them out of their seats- those who were seated. It tended to lift the hair of the rest-those who realized that monsters from space who could read human minds were utterly invincible and infinitely to be dreaded. No matter what the children looked like, now, they had been declared on an official fact-revealing broadcast to be extra-terrestrial monsters who could read human minds!

It raised hell.

Once said, it could not be withdrawn. It could be denied, but it would still be believed. In higher echelons of government all over the world it produced such raging hatred of the children and the United States together as to make all previous tensions seem love-feasts by comparison. In Russia it was instantly believed that all Soviet military secrets were now in process of being plucked from Russian brains and given to the American military. Rage came from helplessness in the face of such an achievement. There could be no way to stop such espionage, and military action would be hopeless if the Americans knew all about it before it was tried. In more tranquil nations there was deep uneasiness, and

in some there was terror. And everywhere that men hated or stole or schemed-which was everywherethe belief that secrets were open to the children filled people with rage.

It did not help that the belief was a blunder. Enormous revelations had been expected of the broadcast. This was not what had been looked for, but it was more appalling than anything short of a fixed date for doom would have been. Even American military officers were upset at the idea of military secrets plucked out of thin air, while uneasily hopeful of learning the secrets of foreign military men.

The underworld was shocked. The children could smash the most profitable of rackets by revealing its details. They could stop the peddling of human flesh and the sale of narcotic dreams. Even ordinary people like Joe Doakes and John Q. Public shivered over the idea that their shabby sins could -be found out if the children put their minds on them. -

But the bitterest hatred of all was felt by the officials of some of America's allies, who felt that now each and every minor treachery they had committed could become known, with every ruthless plan they'd formed suddenly considered for America's destruction.

Of all public relations enterprises in history, the world-wide broadcast about the children was most disastrous.

Soames and Gail could realize the absurdity of the thing, without any hope of stopping or correcting it. There was a ~certain amount of complacency in the United States, of course. Most people considered themselves too unimportant to have their sins revealed. Such people reflected that now America was safe from spies and treachery, and therefore they could safely go a little deeper into debt. There were some politicians who debated hopefully whether the children's splendid ability might justify a cut in defense spending and therefore a politically blessed cut in taxes. But these same people, who loved the idea of what the children could do, felt a marked aversion to them for fear of their choice of targets. -

Very few people anywhere would have felt even formal regret if something lethal happened to the four castaways, even though danger might return with their deaths. Certainly there was nobody but Soames and Gail who could feel the faintest glimmer of lilting for them or sympathy with their condition.

They went swiftly back to the hidden base in the Rockies. Soames stayed to have certain minor injuries attended to. Also he needed to get in touch with two physicists who had seen the children and known despair, but who now played at being castaways with gratifying consultations with people who wanted urgently to disbelieve everything he said, and managed to hold on to a great deal of doubt.

Meanwhile there came about a sullen and infuriated lessening of international tension. No nation would dare plan a sneak attack on the Pearl Harbor model, if there was even the slightest chance that America could know every detail in advance. And nobody dared make threats if the United States could know exactly how much of the threat was genuine.

Captain Moggs flew busily back and forth between the East and the hidden missile base to which the children had been returned. She informed Soaines that the decorated belts had been taken away from the children. One of them had been opened up and the round and square medallions on it examined. One' decoration was undoubtedly the case for the sensory-linkage apparatus. There was a way to turn it on and off. It contained a couple of eccentrically shaped bits of metal. That was all. Duplicated, the duplicates did nothing whatever. The other medallions seemed to contain apparatus for purposes yet unguessed at. One actually had a minute moving part in it. But what it did was past imagining.

"We're savages," Soames told her dourly. "If a civilized man were among savages, what would they make of his watch? Of his ball-point pen? Of his handkerchief? With no idea of time-telling or writing or our ideas of refinement, such things would seem as meaningless as - his billfold and notebook and small change! So how can we guess the purpose such things had for the children when they were homeP We simply don't know!" -

Captain Moggs said with determination, "It will be found out. Of course right now all research is concentrated on the telepathic device. It will be developed and before long-this is top-secret, of course-we will be thoroughly informed about the weapons and the councils of other nations. It will be magnificent! We'll no longer have reason to be apprehensive of attack, and we can evaluate every military situation with absolute precision!"

"Please!" said Soames irritably. "I have a low security rating! You told me so. You shouldn't say such things in my hearing! How is Gail and how are the children?"

"Gail is disturbed," said Captain Moggs. "The children are more nervous than they used to be. Gail insists that little Mal loses weight. Hod is no longer a merry boy. Zani looks pale. And Fran. .

"What?"

"He glowers!" said Captain Moggs. "But they study feverishly to learn English. They are not being questioned any more, as of now. It develops that the only people likely to learn much from them happen to know things it is not desirable for the children to know-military matters."

"Damrnit!" snapped Soames. "Th& gadgets aren't telepathic! They don't transmit thoughts! They only exchange sensory information! And there's no danger of the children finding out anything by telepathy when they can only share the sensations of someone wearing a special device. What would they do with military information if they had it?"

Captain Moggs looked mysterious. She departed, and Soames again cursed bitterly the situation he'd happened to create. But still he did not see how he could- have done otherwise than to destroy the children's high-power signalling device when they would have used it back on Antarctica. But he was not happy about the consequences of his act.

He found time to get in touch with the physicists who'd come out to the Rocky Mountain base. They'd found some others who could put themselves into the

mental state of castaways who knew that a given device could' be made, and then tried to make something which wasn't quite it but had some of its properties. In a way it was deliberate self-deception, but it was deliberate to circumvent a natural habit of the educated mind. A trained man almost invariably tries to see what can be done with what he has and knows, instead of imagining what he wants and then trying to make something more or less like it, even if he has to look for the knowledge he will need. It took a particular type of mind to use Soames' trick. It was necessary, for example, to imagine limitations to the operation of a desired device, or one's starting-point became mere fantasy.

But Soames found frustration rampant even among the men who were most successful with the fantasy trick. There were new devices. They were triumphs. They were plainly the beginnings of progress of a brandnew kind, not derived wholly from the present, and certainly not imitative of the children's. But the devices couldn't be used. Their existence couldn't be revealed. Because anything of unprecedented design would seem to have been learned from the children, and the United States insisted-truthfully-that so far it had learned -nothing from them. But nobody would believe it if a spate of astonishing technological improvements began to appear in the United States. Dislike of America rose to new heights anyway. But presently some trace of suspicion began to appear in the actions of the anti-American nations. Before the broadcast, a dirty trick had been prepared against America. It developed and succeeded, and it was not discovered until too late. Somebody tried another one. It wasn't anticipated or stopped. A very lively and extremely tempting idea occurred in quarters where the United States was much disliked. But nobody quite dared to believe it-yet.

Then Fran disappeared. He vanished as if into thin air. At one moment he was in the heavily guarded surface area over the hidden base in the Rockies. The next instant he was gone. Three separate lines of electrified fence protected the area from intrusion, with sentries

and watching-posts besides. But Fran disappeared as if he'd never been. It was not easy to imagine that he'd run away. His English was still very limited. His ignorance of modern American ways was abysmal. He couldn't hope to hide and find food while accomplishing anything at all. On the other hand, for him to have been kidnaped out of the top-secret base was unthinkable. Yet if he had. Soarnes got transportation to the Rocky Mountain installation. He was in much disfavor because he was responsible for the presence of the children. Nobody considered what would have been the result if he'd let them signal to their home race. Rut he was the occasion of a world-wide case of jitters. Therefore he was disapproved of. But there were, some physicists turning out apparatus and designs which would mean very much indeed, if anybody ever dared use them. Those physicists credited Soames with their entire program, and therefore it was desirable to treat him with some respect. So a plane took him to the mountain base.

The atmosphere was changed, there, and he noticed it instantly. When the plane touched down, the masses of brushwood on rollers which moved aside on the green-painted runway, moved back into place before the plane had ceased to roll. The hillside that lifted up revealed mobile anti-aircraft guns ready to rush out upon the landing-strip and fight the cause of any airborne reason for alarm. When Soames climbed down out of the plane, armed guards immediately flanked him and accompanied him for an identification check. Security precautions had been tight enough before. Now they were almost preposterously strict.

Strain and stress was everywhere in the atmosphere underground. No top-secret area is restful, even after a man has worked in it a long time and should be used to it. In this base-which was not even admitted to exist- the feeling of tension was extreme. -

Soames had never seen more than the landing-strip and this hangar-cavern and the tunnels leading directly to the quarters he'd been assigned before, and the threehundred-foot elevator shaft leading to the apparently

sleepy village above ground. He saw no more now. But a guard walked with him to his quarters, and waited while Soames went inside, and then they went to the elevator and the guard accompanied him on the way up to the surface.

The general store was empty, and the guard stayed in it while Soames walked through the singularly quiet group of buildings. He'd arrived just before sunset. The identity check and visit to his quarters had taken time. It was~ now night. There were lights in the houses, but they had no occupants. The village was merely a stage-set-a stage-set occupied only by Gail and the remaining children. The group of families of staff sergeants and the like were gone. And the almost hysterical precautions underground had made Soames sensitive. He realized that though Gail and the children might now be the only inhabitants of the village, it did not follow that they were unguarded or unwatched. There had been electrified fences and watch-posts before. There were surely no fewer now. But there was no companionship for Gail and the three children still with her. They were utterly isolated, but in a sense they would be less alone than ever. Soames scowled. It was the telepathic scare. The children had possessed a means of communication which enabled them to share sensory sensations but not thoughts. But it was not possible fdr somebody who'd never used a sensory communicator to grasp the distinction exactly. And nobody who suspected them of telepathic powers would believe that taking away a mechanical or an electronic device would take those powers away. The children were darkly suspected of ability to read minds, to pick brains, to extract the most conscientiously kept military secret from the most security

information was allowed in their neighborhood at all. Soames was angry when he neared the cottage. Lights burned within. Gail waited at the edge of the cottage's lawn.

minded of people. So nobody wanted to be near them. In fact, nobody possessed of confidential

He was shocked when he saw her.

В.

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 ${ t H}^{\sim}$  SMTLED FArN-L-Ly in the darkness, but her face had changed some since Soames last had seen her  ${ t He}$ 

knew she was desperately tired and frightened. He rushed toward her and kissed her.

"I'm glad," she said quietly, "that you feel the way you did. I'm thinner. I'm not very pretty just now. But it's because I'm worried, Brad."

He muttered angrily. He felt that infuriated rage which was appropriate because something worried Gail.

"I told the children you were coming," Gail added. "I think they'll be glad to see you. I've an idea Fran especially liked you, Brad."

"No word of him?"

- "N-no," said Gail in an odd tone.
- "Did he run away?" demanded Soames. They were walking through a soft warm dusk toward the cottage where Gail stayed with the children.
- Gail said in a low tone, "Careful! The idea of telepathy is alarming. Everything's overheard, Brad. The children are watched every second. I-even think there are microphones." Soames scowled.
- "It's security," said Cail. "It would be taking too big a gamble to assume that the children can only receive sensory impressions and only through those little devices lii their belts. Nobody's been able to make the beltdevices do anything, but they can't be sure . . . You destroyed their signalling device. But you don't feel safe. Well, they've taken the sensory devices, but they still don't feel sure that the children can't do more."
- The night was now almost pitch black. There were yellow lights the color of kerosine lamps in the windows of the houses. Soames and Gail reached the cottage and Gail continued talking to him in excitement.
- "And-I thought it was wise to tell Captain Moggs about-us. To explain why you might want to come back here. They know I'm rather protective of the children. An explanation for you to come back seemed wise. The children are hated since they've been thought able to read minds. So I wanted you to be able to come back without anybody suspecting you of friendly feelings for them."
- "I'd have come back on account of you," growled Soames. "So it mustn't appear that anybody wants to be decent to them, eh?" Then he said abruptly, "About  $Fr \sim tn$ .
- "He ran away," said Gail with a hint of defiance. "I'll tell you more later-maybe."
- They entered the cottage, and Soames remirided himself that anything he said would very probably be overheard and recorded on tape. They went inside. The boy Hod, and the younger girl Ma! lay on their stomachs on the floor, doggedly working at what would be lessons. Zani sat in a chair with a book before her and her hand seemingly shielding her eyes. Her expression was abstracted. As they entered, Hod made a clicking sound in his throat. Zani put one hand quickly in her pocket
- and opened her eyes. They had been closed. She smiled shakily at Soames and stood up to difer him her hand with the old-ladyish air which was distinctively hers. Ma! grinned shyly, ani Hod got up politely.
- Soames had a flash of insight. He'd worn a belt with a built-in quasi-telepathic device just once and for the briefest of times. While he wore it, too, he'd been fiercely intent upon the use of it to recover another such device that had been looted in the broadcast studio during the most disastrous of all public relations enterprises. He'd had no time for experiment, no time to accustom himself to the peculiar feeling of seeming to inhabit more than one body at a time. He'd had no opportunity to explore the possibilities of the device. But he'd worked out some angles since.
- And because of it, he knew intuitively what Zani had
- been doing when he arrived. With closed eyes, hidden by her hand, she'd been receiving something that came from somewhere else. The two other children had kept silent. Hod clicked his tongue as a warning of Gail s and Soames' approach. And Zani put her hand in her pocket quickly and opened her eyes. She'd put something away. Soames knew with certainty that she'd been receiving a message from Fran, in the teeth of merciless watching and probably microphonic eavesdropping on every word.
- But the children's belts with the sensory-transmitters and receivers had been taken from them. "They've learned a surprising amount of English," said Gail, "but I don't know what good it will do them."
- Soames looked at her again in the light.
- "You'd better look after yourself," he said. "You're wearing yourself out, worrying!"
- "The children need me, Brad," said Gail placatingly, "and I'll do all right. But I had my share in getting them into the fix they're in, you know! Since the broadcast they know they're hated. They believe that you and I-that we're the only people in the world who don't hate them. So I'm not going to abandon them. It would be monstrous! We may be the only people alive who think of them without fear!"
- "Likely enough," agreed Soames dourly.
- Little Mal said politely, "Fran." A pause. "Where is?"
- "I'd like to know," Soames told her.
- "That's almost the only thing they're ever questioned about nowadays," said Gail. "As a security measure only Captain Moggs and enlisted personnel without classified information and the police who're hunting for Fran, are allowed to talk to them."
- "Fran's been gone~ how long? A week? Over?" Soames scowled. "How can he hide? He knows little English! He doesn't even know how to behave so he won't be spotted if he walks down a street!"

- Gail said with an odd intonation, "I'm afraid he's in the wilds somewhere. He won't know how to get food. He'll be in danger from wild animals. I'm terribly afraid for him!" Soames looked at her sharply.
- "How'd he get away?"
- "He roamed around, like boys do,"- said Gail. "He made friends, more or less, with the children of the staff sergeant's family, where you got the puppies. It was thought there could be no harm in that. And one morning he left here apparently to go and play with them. They didn't see him-and he hasn't been seen since."
- Hod was on his stomach again, doggedly working over a book, murmuring English words as he turned the pages from one picture to another. Mal and Zani looked from the face of Soames to that of Gail, and back again.
- "They understand more than they can speak," said Gail.
- Soames searched the walls of the room. Gail had said microphones were probable. He looked intently at Zani. He duplicated the position she'd been in when he'd entered and her actions-the quick movement of her hand to her pocket and the opening of her eyes. She tensed, staring at him. He shook his head warningly and put his finger to his lips.
- She caught her breath and looked at him strangely. He settled down to visit. Gail, with the air of someone doing something that did not matter, had the children display their English. Their accent was good. Their vocabularies were small. Soames guess~d that Gail drilled them unceasingly in pronunciation so they wouldn't acquire so many words that they could be expected to answer involved questions. It was a way to postpone pressure upon them.
- But it was not a good idea for Soames to have too parental or too solicitous an attitude. He said with inner irony, "I'm disappointed in Fran. He shouldn't have run away. He made some' sketches for me, of things boys his age make at home. I wanted to get more such pictures from him. Did he leave any sketches around when he disappeared?"
- Gail shook her head.
- "No. Every scrap of paper the children use is gathered up every night, for study. They don't like it. It disturbs them. Actually, I believe language experts are trying to
- find out something about their language, but they feel it's enmity. They're jumpy."
- "And with reason," said Soames. He stirred. "I'm disappointed. I'll go talk to the people who're hunting Fran. Walk back with me to the store, Gail?"
- Gail rose. Zani stared at Soames. She was pale. He nodded to her again.
- Gail and Soames went out into the now fully 'fallen night. Soames said gruffly, "We'd better Walk closer togç~ther."
- Gail hesitated. They went on, in step. Soames scowled to himself.
- "When we're married," he said abruptly, "I doubt we'll hide many things from each other. We'd better start being frank right now. The kids' belts may have been taken away, but they've got sensory-transmission gadgets just the same. Zani was using one when we went in the cottage." Gail's footsteps faltered. The light was faint, now, coming only from the stars. Mountains hid much of the sky, towering above this place as they did on every hand. She offered no denial. "What are you going to do?"
- "Give some good advice," said Soames. "Tell the kids you know about it. Point out that the security people have three of the four belts and they can wear them. I wore one once. They'll pick up communications. Sooner or later they will and the kids will be caught. If Fran talks aloud they can pick up and identify his voice. If Zani writes and looks at what she's written so he can read it through her eyes, Zani's hand or her dress in what she sees could identify her. I'm telling you to remind Zani that communication by those sensory transmitters can be overheard-eavesdropped. Sooner or later it will be. She must work out ways to avoid being identified. If they think more people of her race have landed, that's all right. But it may be bad if she's caught communicating with Fran."
- Gail said nothing for a long time.
- "That's-that's all?"
- "Just about. I'm Fran's antagonist in one matter only.
- I'll do anyt,hing I can to keep him from calling all his race to come here. I hate it, but I'll do it. Outside of that, I feel that he's here thiough my fault I do not want bun to be psychologically vivisected by people who want everything he knows,, and won't believe there are limits to it. So long as he's at large, there probably won't be frenzied questioning of the others."
- "But-"
- "I'm going to talk to the people who're hunting him," said Soames grimly. "I shall not tell them what I just fold you. Or did I need to say so?"

- "N-no," said Gail shakily. "You didn't. I'm awfully glad you're the kind of person you are, Brad! I'd love you anyhow, but. .."
- They stopped in the darkness. After what seemed only instants they went on. They drew near the seeming general store. About them and overhead there were trees. The air was cool. The first stars of the night winked through the slowly moving clouds above.
- "The things in the belt are very simple," said Gail unsteadily, "and the children were scared and jumpy when they were taken away. So Fran told me. He'd picked up some scraps of metal. Copper, it was. And I watched for him."

Soames said nothing.

- "He took a straw," said Gail, "and used it as a sort of blow-pipe. He could direct the flame of a candle I made for him. It would be heat-treatment?"
- Soames nodded in the darkness. "It would. A patterii of heat-treatment might give a metal all sorts of properties we haven't guessed at." He added sardonically, "And it could be so simple that a boy could remember and do it!"
- "He made six communicators," said Gail. "I insisted on six. And then I chose two at random for safety's sake, I suppose. And he and the other children hid theirs. I tried these two. They work." Soames said nothing. Gail said, "One is for you, of course."
- She fumbled something into his hand. It was tiny, hardly larger than a match.
- "You push in the end and it works as long as you push it."
- Soames pressed on one end where there was something that felt like the head of a pin. It probably was. It gave a little, and instantly he saw what Gail saw and felt what she felt, his hand clasping hers. He released the tiny object and again was only himself.
- "Turn yours off," he said harshly. "Remind the kids that this sort of thing can be intercepted." "I'll tell them," said Gail. -
- "They're much worse off than they were," he told her. "A little while ago all the world wanted to learn from the kids. Now it's afraid they'll learn from the world-about the people in it. I think everybody'd be quite willing to forego all possible benefits from their coming, if only something would happen to them."
- "But they can't pry into secrets!" protested Gail. "You know they can't read minds. They can't!"
  "But they have the reputation and have to suffer for it," said Soames.
- They were then very close to the pseudo-general store. Gail put her hand lightly on Soames' arm.
- "Brad," she whispered, "you're going to talk to the security people about Fran. Why?"
- "I'm responsible for him," said Soames. "Not to them, but to myself."
- "I think I know what you're going to do," said Gail very softly. "It's crazy, Brad! It's hopeless!" He shrugged. She whispered. "But I like you very much for trying it."
- He moved suddenly. For an instant they were very close together.
- "If somebody was watching," he growled, "they'd feel quite sure that we're interested in each other!" Then he grinned. "And how right they'd be!"
- He turned away. He went into the general store. He went through to the stockroom behind, pressed a button, and an elevator door opened in a rather surprising maimer. He stepped inside and the elevator lowered him three hundred feet into the earth.
- On the way out from the East he'd sunk into gloomy meditation about the situation of the children and, for
- that matter, of the world since their arrival. Fran's flight into a hostile world bespoke a desperation the other children did not seem to share. But Fran's attitude of somber resolution was also something the other children did not seem to experience. Fran had an urgent mission he felt he must perform at any risk. He couldn t do it on the missile base.
- Fran felt the hatred surrounding all of them from the conclusion of the broadcast. He knew that nobody, anywhere, would help him do something he had to do. The children evidently had intended to learn with miraculous speed to speak and explain the purpose for which they were sent. Now they knew that they were hated and their purpose would never be consented to. So Fran must have fled to try to carry out their mission without consent. Obviously, he'd try somehow to send the signal Soames had prevented from beside the wrecked spaceship.
- But why must Fran send it? Why hadn't an automatic device been used? Something which could be so ruggedly built that it could not possibly smash .
- And suddenly there was an explanation.
- Up to this moment Soames had doggedly accepted the idea that the children came out of a past so remote that numbers of years simply had no meaning. The law of the conservation of mass and energy denied the possibility of time-travel, but the evidence for it was overwhelming. Now, abruptly, Soames saw the infinitely simple answer. Time-travel was possible, provided certain conditions were met. Those conditions would at first instance inevitably produce a monstrous burst of static

and an implosion to cause an earth-shock and a -concussion wave audible at eighty miles distant. Once communication between time-frames had been established, however . .

The flight of Fran instantly became something so much more alarming than mere danger to Fran that there was only one thing Soames could possibly do. He'd said he was not Fran's enemy. But he must do anything-absolutely anything-to keep Fran from carrying out the mission he'd been sent on. So when Soames got out of the elevator from the village store, three hundred feet down in the substance of a mountain, he knew exactly what had to be done. He found his way along corridors where he had very frequently to identify himself, and presently was in the subterranean office of a harried security officer.

"I'm worried about the boy Fran, who ran away, he observed. "Can you tell me what happened?"
"I'd like somebody to tell me!" said the security officer morbidly. "If he ran, he had wings on
his shoes. And now that he's out he's got me scared! You know those telepathic gadgets in the
belts the cbildren wore? We took 'em away. We opened one of 'em up, but we left the others in
working order. We tried them. When two men wear them, with both turned on, they sort of halfway
read each other's minds. Each man knows what the other is doing and seeing. But one man by himself
can't do a thing. Two men can do a lot. It's been suggested that if they knew the trick of it,
three men could do all the telepathy they wanted-read minds and all that. We haven't found out the
trick, though."

Soames nodded, marvelling at the ability of the human race to find reasons to believe anything it wanted to, whether for sweet vanity's sake or for the sake of scaring itself to death.

"When we first got the belts from the kids," pursued the security officer, "we figured there might be some other folks of the kid's race on Earth, figuring on ways to get 'em loose. We had a belt worn night and day. Nothing. So we stopped monitoring. Then this Fran got away and we started monitoring all over again, trying to pick up any working of belts like these that we didn't know about. And we started picking up stuff right away!"

Soames stared. Zani'd been using one such instrument. He had one-the size of three wooden matches taped together.

"A man's got one of those belts on," said the security man, frowning, "and it's as if he didn't. Nothing happens at all. But after maybe hours, maybe a day or two, suddenly, with his eyes closed, he sees a page of outlandish

writing. The kind of writing those kids do. It can't be photographed, because it's only inside your head that you see it.— You can't make sense of it. The alphabet isn't ours. The words are the language they talk among themselves. I figure there's a ship somewhere, broadcasting a call to the kids. The call's printed. If the kids had their belts on, and turned on, they could read it. But we got their belts. So this Fran, he broke away to try to make some kind of way to answer that call!"

Soames said nothing. But he was unhappily am~ised at himself as well as the security officer. He'd gone to some pains to tell Gail how the children, might communicate with Fran without being caught at it. But they knew. They'd produced this theory of a hovering ship of space, broadcasting to Earth to four children hidden somewhere on it. There was no ship. There was only Fran, desperate to perform the task he'd been sent here to do, keeping in touch with the other three children by a tiny unit he'd made out of scrap copper and a straw and a candle flame. And it was so natural that the fact wasn't guessed!

The four out of time were children. They came from a world where there were children. And all children have zestful secrets they are sure no adult can penetrate. Where sensory-perception transmitters were commonplace, obviously children would have secret ways of using them for their mysteries-and to tease adults. It was as natural as it is for children to use pig-Latin, and there is no nation on earth in which children do not have

- a mysterious language they fondly believe no adult can understand,
- So Fran and the others hadn't needed Soames' advice. They knew how to communicate without exposing themselves.
- "How's he managing to eat?" asked Soames. "He's no money and next to no English $\sim$  and he doesn't know how to act.-.."
- "He's smart!" said the security officer grimly. "He's hiding by day. At night... People don't usually tell the cops about a bottle of milk missing from their doorsteps. A grocer doesn't report one loaf of bread missing from
- the package left in front of his store before daybreak. The boy's been living that way." Soames suspected Gail of a part in this. Perhaps, tense and anxious, and aware that he would starve without advice, she had managed to advise Zani how Fran could find food with little risk of discovery.
- "That kid's plenty smart!" insisted the security officer. "He'd pick a loaf of bread today and a

bottle of milk tomorrow. Sometimes he'd skip. But we figured it out. We got every town in five hundred miles to check up. Bread-truck drivers asked grocery stores. Any bread missing? Milk-men asked their customers. Has anybody been pinching your milk? We found where he was. In Bluevale, close to the Navajo Dam, you know. We sent cops to watch. Almost got him yesterday morning. He was after a loaf of bread. A cop fired five shots at him, but he got away. Dropped the loaf of bread, too."

Soames wanted to be sick. Fran -was possibly fourteen years old and desperate because his whole civilization depended on him-now that Hod and Mal and Zani were closely watched-to save them from the destruction falling out of the sky. He was a fugitive on a strange world. He was hated by all that world's inhabitants. He was shot at when he tried to snatch a loaf of bread to live by. And all he wanted was to save his people.

Then Soames' mouth went dry as he realized. Fran had been shot at in Bluevale, which was near the Navajo Dam. The Navajo Dam generated almost as much electric power as Niagara.

"I had a hunch," said the security officer with some grimness. "The kid got past three electric fences, and we don't know how. He must know plenty about electricity. I've got a nephew no older than he is, who can fix a television set as good as a service man. Kids can be smart that way. So I began to wonder if he might be hoping to answer that broadcast signal with a signal of his own. He was in Bluevale. We checked up. A roofer lost some sheet copper a couple of days ago. Somebody broke in a storehouse and got away with forty or fifty feet of heavy-gauge copper wire. A man'd have stolen the whole roll. It would be only a kid that'd break off as much as he could carry. See?"

Soames found his throat constricting. He nodded. The security officer leaned forward and tapped on his desk with his finger.

"He's getting set to make something, and we know he's near Bluevale. He'll need tools. I've got Bluevale crammed with cops and plainclothesmen. That whole town is one big trap for that kid right now. And the cops will shoot! Because we don't know what that kid will make. If those kids had something that'll read your mind, made by grownups, - maybe he'll make something that'll burn it out! He looks human, but he came out of space from God knows where. Maybe he'll make death rays!" Soames swallowed. He knew what Fran would want to make. A mere local projector of death rays would be trivial beside the consequences of what Fran was desperately resolved to do for his own people. He heard himself say something relatively soothing. "Maybe," he observed, "he's not that dangerous. You're worried about how he passed those electrified fences. He used stilts. He knew about them. They interested him. So he must have made a pair some seven or eight feet high, and learned to walk on them. And then he simply went to a tree near the fence, climbed up it and mounted the stilts, and then walked to the fence and stepped over it. At his age he wouldn't realize the danger. He'd do it and worm his way past watchers. He could have done that!"

The security officer swore.

"Yes! Dammit, yes! We should've watched him closer, like we're watching the others. But we'll get him!"

"I want to get back East," said So-ames. "I was hoping he'd left behind some drawings. I'd gotten him interested in things boys make here, and he'd sketched some playthings boys make back at his home. Gail-Miss Haynes- says he left nothing in the way of sketches."

"He didn't leave anything but lesson papers," said the security officer. "When do you want to head East?"

"Now," said Soames. "We've got a project started that's more or less linked to the kids' gadgets, even though we

don't understand them. The sooner I can get back, the better."

The security officer used the telephone. It was now well into the night, and air traffic into the hidden base was unthinkable, because a lighted air field would cast a glow against the sky. But there was a plane due to take off shortly, with shielded blue lights on the ground to guide it. Soames could get passage on that plane, not to the East, but to a military airfield outside Denver where a cab could be had to take him to the commercial airport.

Before starting on this trip he'd suspected that he might need to take part in the search for Fran. He'd cleaned out his bank account and had the cash in his pocket. In half an hour he was on board the outbound plane. A quarter-hour later it roared down a runway in the darkness. It lifted and went booming upward between mountain flanks which were purest Stygian darkness. Presently it broke through clouds, clearly visible in starlight before the moonrise. It streaked away above them through the night.

In two hours Soames was in Denver. In three he was lost beyond all discovery. He'd taken an interurban bus instead of a plane out of Denver, and gotten off at a tiny town whose name he did not even notice. During the night, with closed eyes and in a silent hotel room in the little town, he pressed one end of the miniature device that Fran had made and Gail had given him. He felt a queer sensation. He inhabited two bodies at once. It was eerie. The other body did nothing. It only breathed and waited. Soames investigated the symptoms of sensory linkage. The other body sat in a comfortable chair. It saw nothing because its eyes were closed. It heard nothing because it was in a room as silent as that occupied by Soames. No . . . There were very

nothing because it was in a room as silent as that occupied by Soames. No . . . There were very small sounds. Footsteps on concrete. The remote, infinitesimal sound of a far-away door closed. A persistent faint clicking. A typewriter. The sounds were not attended to by the body to whose sensory system Soames was linked. It was used to them and did not actually realize that it heard them. Soames, though, knew what they

were. They were the unnoticeable background noises of the hidden base from which he'd come. Someone wore one of the children's belts and patiently waited to eavesdrop on any communication that might be made by similar devices.

Soames waited for morning. Very early, again with closed eyes and with his body made comfortable so that he felt no distinct sensation from it, he pressed the end of the miniature instrument. He saw writing of the kind the children used for memoranda about their English lessons. He released the turn-on switch, which was probably the head of a pin. He turned on a light. He opened a notebook. Its first page showed two sketches. One was of the runner of a boy-made air-sled. Fran had sketched it for Soames on the plane headed for New York and the disastrous broadcast. The other was a sketch of a boy on stilts. Soames had drawn that for Fran. Nobody but Soames would have looked at such drawings for Fran to see through his eyes. They were at once a call and an identification of Soames as a person using a device like a tiny copper firecracker, with the head of a pin where a fuse would belong.

He turned on the device again while looking at the sketches. He felt that he shared the physical sensations of two other bodies-no, three. He was mo, pientarily convinced of a third. All three now, kept their eyes tightly closed. All three saw only through his eyes-saw rough sketches which would have meaning only to two. Soames felt that he heard a smothered noise which only he would have known was a suppressed giggle.

Then he felt one of the other bodies shaking hands with itself. That would be Fran, acknowledging the message of the drawings that only Soames would know about. He shook hands with himself for Soames to experience. Then he patted his knee as one would pat a dog, and scratched his knee as one scratches a dog. He'd learned that in Antarctica. Fran had met Rex in Antarctica. He had identified himself. There was the stirring of another of the bodies with which Soames was linked. That would be the security officer, wearing a belt which brought him these sensations, He could have no idea, however, who was communicating with whom, and patting and scratchings would have no meaning at all.

Soames waited. He'd guessed that in a society which used sensory transmitters as a matter of course-and Zani's drawings showed the special belts as parts of everyone's costume-children would use them to tell secrets and play tricks upon grown-ups. They would communicate in mysterious fashion, by touches and gestures. Much gleeful teasing must have been accomplished in this way. More sensations came to Soames. There was zest in the pats and touches and movements with which Fran asked Soames a question. Soames was clumsy in his reply, but he knew that to the security man who shared in this, it would all be simply bewildering. It would take reflection and a consciously childlike viewpoint to unriddle such touch-talk even when one knew who was involved. But the security man could only know that first there was writing, then two sketches, and then hand shaking and pats and scratches, and then gestures and shakings and noddings of invisible heads, and that the weird experience stopped when someone shook hands with himself. That was all. But Soames rose and dressed with many forebodings. Fran would not meet him. Soames had given warning of traps and close hunting. But Fran would not meet him. It looked bad.

He bought a -second-hand motorcycle at ten o'clock in the morning. He knew motorcycles. He'd owned one before he went to Antarctica. By three in the afternoon he threaded through the traffic of Bluevale. To him, on the watch for such matters, there seemed an unusual preponderance of men on the streets of that small town. There is a percentage of visible males to visible females for each size of town at different hours of the day. There were too many men in Bluevale. Fran wouldn't notice it. Soames did. But he wasn't noticed. He'd bought a leather jacket and a cap. He rode a battered motorbike. He didn't even faintly resemble Fran.

He rode casually through Bluevale and along the wide,

smooth highway to the much smaller village of Navajo Dam-at the edge of the big lake the dam had backed up behind it. Then he rode at a leisurely pace along the same highway as it went over the crest of that massive structure. The lake to his right rose within feet of the highway. To the left there was a chasm, with a winding truck-road going down to the generator buildings at the dam's foot.

Soames jittered. He went two miles on and into forest, dragging the motorcycle out of sight from the road. He made himself as comfortable as possible, to avoid transmitting any information about his whereabouts. From four o'clock to eight, at irregular intervals, he turned on the sensory-linkage device for a second or two at a time. He came to recognize the physical sensations of the man who, back in the hidden missile base, wore a child's belt and monitored for sensory communications. Between seven and eight the identity of that man changed. Someone else took the place of the first.

At ten o'clock there was the briefest possible sensation of a third body. Soames knew it was Fran. He shook hands with himself, quickly. Fran would recognize it as a greeting. Soames had contrived a way to offer argument, but he only felt a boy's small, smooth hands shaking each other in reply, and then Fran was gone out of communication.

He did not come back.

Soames sweated. At eleven Fran was not to be perceived via the communicator. There were only the physical sensations of a man, somewhere, stolidly waiting to receive the perceptions that would be completely cryptic to him.

At midnight Soames got his motorcycle out of the woods and onto the highway. He rode slowly back toward Bluevale. He did not enter that small town. He stopped at a hot-dog stand outside it. He got coffee and a sandwich, He walked behind the stand and in the extreme quietude there he pressed the end of the little instrument in his pocket. He heard snores. The security man on monitor duty had gone to sleep from boredom.

At one, nothing .had happened. Soames- was close enough to the town to have heard any tumult, certainly any shots.

At two and three-nothing.

At- four o'clock, without warning, there was a flash of intolerably vivid blue-green light. It came from the chasm below the Navajo Dam. The lights across the dam's curving crest went out. The street lights of Blue-vale and the little village of Navajo Dam went out. The world went dark, while a mountainous blue-green flame shed intolerably bright light toward the stars.

It went out, too.

Soames, cold with fear, pressed the end of the sensory device. He felt pain-lancing, excruciating pain. He heard Fran's voice gasping hopelessly, "Try! Try! Try!"

He felt Fran's body turn in pain, and he 'saw that Fran's eyes looked up at stars, and the stars were cut off at one side by the curving bulk of the monstrous concrete dam.

Soames shook hands with himself. He let go the button. He started the motorcycle. He raced toward the dam. He did not again press on the sensory device until he'd gone frantically through the village and hatr-raisingly down the truck-road to the generator buildings. There he cut off the motor, and he heard men's voices, profane and agitated and alarmed. He saw the small flickerings of flashlights.

He found Fran, crumpled on the ground and trying desperately not to make sounds of pain. Soames knew where the hurt was. He'd experienced it as - Fran did. He'd guessed its cause and seriousness.

He put Fran swiftly on the saddle behind his own on the motorcycle. He gave the motorcycle all the gas it would take and went racketing up the truck-road from the chasm below the dam.

He made it. The motorcycle, its lights turned off, was across the dam and streaking for the first curve beyond before the flickerings of car headlights began to show on the road from Bluevale. Fran held on fiercely. But presently Soames felt the quiverings behind him. He stopped the motorcycle where

the road was empty. Fran ground his teeth and stared at him defiantly in the reflected light of the now functioning single headlight.

"If I were you," said Soames, not expecting to be understood, but speaking as one man to another, "if I were you I wouldn't be ashamed of crying. I feel pretty much like it myself-from relief that your signalling device blew out."

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mm COLOR of the blue-green flame which had flared so fiercely outside the generator buildings was no mystery at all. It was the color of vaporized copper, the same coloring found in burning driftwood in which copper nails have rusted. Its cause was no mystery, either. There'd been a

gigantic short-circuit where the main power-leads left the dynamo-rooms to connect with cross-country power lines. Massive bus-bars not only melted but vaporized, and the more-than-white-hot metallic steam was conductive enough to carry the current which maintained the arc. 'l~'he flame, in fact, looked like something that properly belonged on another planet than Earth, but there was nothing remarkable about it. Officially there was only concern because the short-circuit did damage which left five counties without electric light and power.

Soames and Fran knew directly, and some few security officers guessed, that Fran had caused the short. There was melted-down, cryptic metal below the place where the short appeared. Fran had undoubtedly placed it. How he escaped electrocution the security officers did not try to figure out. But they knew he'd tried to do something with apparatus that burned itself out without operating, and that he'd tumbled down a ten-foot drop while fleeing from the searing green arc, and even

that he'd appealed for help with the words -"Try! Try! Try!" And they knew that somebody had helped him get away from the scene of his exploit and injury. But they didn't know how, nor that it was Soames. -

Soames was assumed to be on his way East to confer with a group of scientists who now had added certain skilled instrument makers to their number and triumphantly worked themselves to twitching exhaustion.

Fran's part in the affair was naturally a secret. Lights and power in five Colorado counties went off and stayed off. Local newspapers printed indignant editorials. The Chaffee County Dispatch bitterly listed the chicken hatcheries which had lost thousands of partly incubated chicks when electric current went off and stayed off for two days and nights. Six newspapers in Eagle County and nine in Pitkin County demanded that the state legislature, then in session, immediately require cross-connection of all utility lines so that when one generating plant broke down the others could take up its load. There was harrowing mention of the hardships of people whose oil furnaces would not run, whose electric stoves would not cook, and whose running-water systems failed to operate, all because of a short-circuit in one generating plant.

This was a strictly local view. In high official quarters the feeling was quite different. The reaction there was more like paralyzed horror. Fran was known to be behind the breakdown of the plant. He'd caused it by trying to tap its lines for a monstrous amount of power, needed for some private purpose of his own. He'd been trying to signal to so great a distance that tens of thousands of kilowatts were required. He'd failed, of course. The melted-down remains of his improvized apparatus proved that. The high brass knew with absolute certainty that he'd tried to signal to his own race. And to the high brass this meant that he'd tried to summon a space-fleet with invincible weapons to the conquest of Earth.

So there were two directives from the highest possible policy-making levels. First, Fran must be caught at any cost in effort, time, money, and manpower. Second, the

rest of the world must not know that one of the spaceship's four crew-members was at large and making the hair of informed officials stand on end whenever they thought of him, which was often. So the hunt for Fran intensified to a merciless degree, and nearly every city in the United States sent at least some of its plainclothesmen to help. Military forces without limit were ready to act upon any clue at any time. Simultaneously, secrecy clamped down in a dense and impenetrable fog. The lack of news about the children, indeed, was so conspicuous that it was news, itself. Naturally the news services tried to crack the blackout and the security forces to maintain it. The incarceration of the children in a hidden missile base, the existence of which was itself top-secret, helped the security people very much. They worried about Congress more than anything else.

A Congre~sional committee had to know the facts. Congressmen and senators have been known to leak information which would get them publicity. American security officers grew visibly more grayheaded during the days following the Navajo Dam incident. But nothing leaked.

Soames headed north. He wore a leather jacket, and he rode a battered, second-hand moforcycle, and on the saddle behind him an obvious kid brother rode leather-jacketed as Soames was, capped as he was, scowling as Soames did, and in all ways imitating his elder. Which was so familiar a sight that nobody noticed Fran at all. He was visibly a tough younger brother of the kind of young man who goes in for battered motorcycles because he can't afford anything better. Naturally no one suspected him of being a telepathic monster, a creature of space, or the object of a desperate,

multistate search by all the taciturn visitors appearing practically everywhere among the Rockies.

It was helpful that Soames was not missed at first and was not searched for. It was a full day after the Navajo Dam breakdown before anybody thought to have him check on the melted-down apparatus. It was two days before anybody was concerned about him, and three before flights out of Denver had been checked futilely for his name. Even then it seemed

more likely that he'd been the victim of foul play than that he was himself a fugitive. But on the fourth day after the green flame reached up toward the sky, Soames and a silent, scowling, supposed younger brother occupied a fishing shack on the shores of Calumet Lake. They were seven hundred miles from Denver, and the way they'd come was much longer than that. They were far removed from the tumult of the world. They'd made bivouacs in the open on the journey, and this would be the first time they'd settled anywhere long enough to take stock.

"Now," said Soames, as sunset-colorings filled the sky beyond the lake's farther edge, "now we figure out what we're going to do. We ought to be able to do something, though I don't yet know what. And first we - act the parts we're playing. We came here to catch some fish. You shouldn't be able to wait. So we go out and catch fish for our dinner."

He led the way to a tiny wharf where a small boat lay tied. He carried fishing rods and bait. He motioned for Fran to get into the boat.

"We're supposed to be up here so I, your older brother, can show you the fine points," he observed. "I doubt I'm that good, but we'll see."

He untied the boat and rowed out to the middle of the lake. He surveyed his surroundings and dropped anchor. He baited a hook, with Fran watching intently.

Soarnes handed him the rod. Fran waited. He imitated Soames' actions when Soames began to fish. He watched his line as closely as the deepening dusk permitted.

"The hell of this business," said Soames dourly, "is that people don't think straight. People in positions of authority, to begin with, and the general public to go on with, and me, and your people too, Fran. They don't think straight either."

He paused. It seemed that he had a nibble. He didn't. He went on.

"Mostly I think in diagrams. For electronics stuff, they do very well. But right now I can't diagram the situation.

I propose to explain- it to you in the hope of overhearing myself say something sensible. You'll catch maybe one word in five."

"Three," said Fran, distinctly.

"You understand more than you talk, then!"

But for a long tithe Soames did not talk. He filled his pipe, and lighted it, and scowled at the water and the sunset. Once Fran's line quivered. He heaved on. the rod. An eight-inch pickerel came up and into the boat. It flapped around on the bottom. Fran regarded it with wide, astonished eyes.

"New since your time, eh?" said Soames. He picked up the fish and disengaged the hook "Scaly fish weren't common on Earth in your day. Hm. I've forgotten to show you a horse. Try to do it, when there's nobody around to watch your reaction. We'll eat this fish presently."

Fran, amazed, dropped his hook and bait overboard again. Soames said, "Your ankle's doing all right. Lucky it was a wrench instead of a break or a sprain. Four days of riding and no walking have fixed it pretty well. It's fairly certain nobody knows where you are, too. But where do we go from here?"

Fran listened, watching his line.

"You lived on Earth thousands of years ago. and you came out of time," said Soames vexedly. "But time-travel can't be done. The natural law of -the conservation of matter and energy requires that the total of substance and force in the cosmos, taken together, be the same'

- at each instant that it was in the instant before and the one after. It's self-evident. That rules out traveling in time."

He jerked at his fishing-rod. He did not hook his fish.

"I don't think you understand me, " he observed. "No, " said Fran matter-of-factly.

"It doesn't matter," Soames told him. "I'm saying that you can't put a gallon of water in a full keg of wine. You can't, unless you draw off wine as fast as you add water. Unless you exchange. So you can't shift an object from time-frame A to time-frame B without shifting a corresponding amount of matter and energy from time-

frame B to time-frame A. Unless you keep the amount of matter and energy unchanged in each. Unless you exchange. So you came to here and now from there and then-your home time-frame, let's say-by a process of swapping. By transposition. By replacement. Transposition's the best word. The effect was time-travel but the process wasn't, like a telephone gives the effect of talking at a distance but the method is distinctly something else."

Fran jerked his fishing rod. A nine-inch lake trout flapped in the boat's bottom.

"I'm supposed to be teaching you how to fish!" said Soames.

He watched as Fran rather gingerly extracted the hook and rebaited as he'd seen Soames do.

"To continue my oration," said Soames, "your ship was transposed from your time into mine. Simultaneously, gram molecular weight for gram molecular weight, something had to be transposed

hooked together."

into yours. Since you were to come into my time twenty thousand feet high and there was nothing else handy to .be transposed into your time, air had to leave here and turn up there to make up the mass and energy of your ship and you and the other children."

As if to indicate that he listened, Fran said, "Zani, Mal, and Hod."

- "Right!" Soames jerked his rod and brought up a fingerling which he silently unhooked and threw back overboard. "Considering the thinness of the air where you came out, maybe half a cubic mile of it had to transpose into your time to let your ship come into this."

  He dropped the line overboard again.
- "Which means that there was an implosion of anywhere from a quarter to half a cubic mile of vacuum. It made an earth-shock and a concussion wave, and it battered your ship until it went out of control. It would seem to make sense that the tumult and the shouting would appear here, where plain force was operating without much guidance, but not in your time where the machinery and the controls were operating. Your people had to handle more energy there-and conse quently acted upon more energy here-than my people could produce with all the engines now on earth
- He fished, frowning thoughtfully. The sun sank slowly. The mountains all about grew faintly misty. Sunlight still shone brilliantly upon the very tip of the tallest peak within view.
- "I suspect," said Soames, after a long interval, "that with machinery and controls at this end as well as the other, instead of at one end only, time-transposition would be a fairly tranquil process. It would be under accurate control. It'd probably need infinitely less power. A ship would vanish from your time and a mass-and-energy equivalent would take its place. And a ship would appear in this time and a mass-and-energy equivalent would vanish to appear in your time. But I think it must have been because the whole business was done from one end that the exchange was so spectacular, with lightning, earthquakes, and all the rest. With equipment at both ends, there should be no static, no earth-shock, no concussion, nothing but a very peaceful transfer." Fran fished. Presently Soames' expression became sardonic.
- "Which I am prepared to prevent at any cost," he added. "Yet I've some responsibility to you, Fran. I think I'm getting an idea of a kind of bluff that we might pull off, if we could get the other kids safely.away. It would be a bluff, and the biggest in history. But we might just get away with it."
- Fran caught a three-quarter pound lake-trout. Soames caught one weighing half a pound. They caught two smaller ones before full darkness fell. Then Soames put up his fishing rod and picked up the oars. He began to row toward the shore.
- "I'll show you how to clean and cook the fish," he observed. "I think you'll like the flavor. But there's just one thing I'd like to know!" He pulled half a dozen strokes, and then said querulously, "Why in hell, if your people could work out the transposition of objects in -time, why in hell didn't they work out the transposition of objects in space? One wouldn't travel through space.
- It may be impossible. But one might set up apparatus to establish a transposition system on the planet of some distant sun.. If your people had only thought of that, why-they wouldn't be in the fix they're in! When trouble loomed, they'd simply have walked into a spatial transposer and walked out again on the beach of a pink ocean on a planet in Cygnus!" -
- He pulled hard on one oar, and swung the boat around, and caught One of the small piles of the wharf, Fran climbed up and Soames handed him the fish..
- "The only thing," Soames added as he scrambled up on the wharf, "the only thing is that if they'd done that little trick there wouldn't have been anybody left behind to survive the bombardment from the Fifth Planet and sink back into savagery and wind up as my ancestors. Your people should have thought of the trick. But if they had, I wouldn't be here!"
- He followed Fran shoreward toward the rickety little week-end cottage he'd rented. There he showed Fran how fish with scales are cleaned, and then how they can be cooked over an open fire. The cooking seemed fascinatingly primitive to Fran, and the two of them ate with excellent appetites. Then Fran went yawning off to bed.
- But Soames could not rest. He'd met a succession of emergencies without definite plans for the future. He could not imagine plans which would make possible a joining of the civilization of Fran's people and that of here and now. If it could be managed, the two cultures together could create a galactic civilization with no possible future limit to its growth and splendor. But he couldn't imagine it, and there were immediate daunting problems to be solved. The children owed their danger to him. He should try to get them to safety. There were deadly tensions on Earth which would produce the suicide of mankind in war-including the children. And all of these things he felt urged to accomplish seemed so wildly hopeless that he could not really think of them intelligently.

It occurred to him that he hadn't heard the news of the world for four days. On the run, as he and Fran

had been, they hadn't seen a newspaper or heard a news broadcast. Now Soames turned on the small radio that went with the fishing cottage, to give advance information on the weather.

News came on immediately. It was all bad. There'd been a time when people wanted to learn about the visitors from elsewhere and then a later time when people were afraid the visitors would learn about them. Now matters had developed a new and worsened complexion.

The United States had shown no signs of having profited by the telepathic powers of Fran and his companions. No spies were seized. A submarhie installation that could lob missiles into New York from the edge of the hundred-fathom line was not depth-bombed. There were other failures to act on information obtained through the children.

A deep and enraging suspicion grew. No nation could imagine another not making use of every secret it could learn from a brand-new scientific civilization. No nation could imagine another allowing spies to operate if it could detect them.

So a raging guess began to spread among the anti-American peoples of the world. The guess was that the broadcast was a lie. Nobody doubted the landing of a spaceship, of course. The static and the earth-shock were evidence, and the Russians had photographs. But the children were too suspiciously like human children. They could be child actors, coached to impersonate - aliens who could not be produced. And there was an easy answer to the question of why the true aliens weren't revealed. They could be dead. Earth's atmosphere might be fatal to them. They could have died of some infection against which they had no defense.

In exact proportion as they would have practiced fraud themselves, the politicians and- the rulers of the world suspected the United States of bad faith and trickery. They were not certain. But there were ways of making sure.

When Soames tuned in to the news at Calumet Lake, the United States had been forced to use a veto

the United Nations for the first time. A resolution passed, calling on the United States to turn over "the crew of an extra-terrestrial space vessel" to a committee to be appointed by the UN Assembly. The United States vetoed it. Ironically, with Fran having run away and not been found again, the United States could not have complied with the resolution in any case.

But the veto lent plausibility to suspicions. There was intensified distrust. The NATO countries asked to share in technical information obtained from outer space. There wasn't any. They asked to study the devices salvaged by the children. This could have been done, but recent political developments inside NATO made it certain that anything one particular nation learned would immediately be known to Russia.

The mess went farther. South America was so deeply suspicious of the Colossus of the north that various Latin nations sought engagements by European countries to defend them against aggression by the United States. There had been two great concentrations of military power on Earth. Russia headed one group of nations, and the United States the other. Now it looked as if there would soon be three. Russia would head one. A second would be a group detached from the United States. The third would be the United States standing alone.

It was an absolutely perfect set-up for instant, flaming, total war to be begun at any instant. The news told of the American Mediterranean fleet being asked to leave Italian harbors, and requested not to enter French, Spanish, Greek, Egyptian. It was asked not to enter any Mediterranean harbor at all. The American Embassy in Ankara was stoned, and Turkey was one of the firmest of America's former friends. In the English Parliament the party out of power essayed to become the party in power by a policy of anti-Americanism. In Mexico American tourists were mobbed. In Canada they were insulted. A proposal for the return of the Panama Canal to the Republic of Panama went on the agenda of the UN, and the Russians made the most out of playing up the supposed arrogance of the

Americans who kept the secrets of the spaceship to themselves.

Almost anything was rather more than likely to happen under circumstances like this. Rumors flew about the world, unconfirmed stories of enormous contracts let for the manufacture of novel weapons with which the world was to be subjugated, wild misquotations of American officials prophesying aggressive war within weeks or days. Crazy rumors.

The news Soames picked up on a cheap radio in a Calumet Lake fishing shack was enough to make any man heartsick. And Soames had to face the fact that it was partly his fault that this particular state of things existed. He'd kept the children from signalling to their doomed race. If he hadn't-but he had.

He sat numbly beside the radio, turned low while Fran slept. Music followed the news, with an announcer interrupting frequently to talk with insane enthusiasm about a housewife's detergent.

That program signed off. A voice said sharply, "Special Bulletin!" and Soames jerked to attention. But it was not news of disaster begun. It was the attention-getting first line of a commercial about a family laxative. Public relations counsellors were taking full advantage of the international situation. They were selling goods by using tie-ins with the one thing all America believed most dreadful and most likely-the outbreak of atomic war.

- In the next hour Soames heard commercials which began with the line "Special Bulletin!" (the one about
- the laxative); with the blunt statement "This is not a fictional broadcast," (It told alleged sworn-to facts about a superior brand of kitchen floor-covering); "Attention! In five seconds an important message!" (About the proper toothpaste to be used on dentures); and "Please be calm and listen carefully." This last was the opening pitch about a special offer of soap, which the announcer affected to believe would rouse his hearers to frantic efforts to take advantage of it. The morning news broadcasts were worse. A group of European nations delivered a joint note to the American government. Its text was not yet released, but the
- assortment of signatures lined up some of America's former allies with nations which were positively not friendly. It looked very bad indeed.
- The George Washington Bridge in New York was tied up for four hours by hordes of motorists trying to get their families out of the city before war came. It was rumored that the President and Cabinet had left Washington. There was no evidence to the contrary, and Washington's exit highways were scenes of riot. In Chicago there was hopeless confusion.
- Ten minutes after the news program ended, the music stopped short and an urgent voice broke in; "Special News Bulletin! Astro Home Air-conditioning units have proved themselves able to handle any climatic condition in the United States, one hundred per cent of cornforture throughout the year!"
- Soames immediately jumped up. Fran stirred and awakened. An unsmiling Soames greeted him. "We're going to ride again, Fran. I'm going to make a long-distance call," said Soames excitedly. They rode two hundred miles before noon, and Soames got silver from a filling station where he bought gas. At one of the out-of-door phone booths lately a part of the American scene, he put through a call to New York. He got the tall physicist who'd come West to the hidden missile base, and whom he'd persuaded to make a pretense that he was a castaway for the purpose of seeing technical problems from a new angle.
- "This is Soames," said Soames very distinctly. "I've got a tip for you. Pretend that you want to make something like the gadget that stops winds and warms places. You know the thing."

  The tall physicist's voice babbled. -
- "I know!" said Soames bitterly, "I'm supposed to be dead or a traitor or something. But listen to me! You're a castaway and savages snipe at you. You want to make something like the thing that stops wind, but you want it to stop arrows instead. It's quite a job. Perhaps the only useful thing you've got on this savage world is a way to make magnetic fields with minus self-induction. That's got to stop the arrows. You can assume the arrow-
- heads are metal. Do you follow me2"
- A pause. Half of a babbled sentence. Then another pause. Then a tinny voice, singularly calm and astonished at the same time, "Why, yes! A very interesting approach! In fact, we've got some very surprising results lately. One of them will fit in beautifully! Beautifully!"
- "If you design it for large enough areas," said Soames, "you'll know where to use it, and how. And," Soames' voice was sardonic indeed, "if you do get it, this is one thing that shouldn't be kept secret! Get it broadcast! Get it everywhere! Give it to the Russians and the Greeks and the Chinese and the French and everybody else! Understand?"
- The tinny voice said, "We just developed a thing to refine metals in ritu. An induction furnace that sets up the heating field at almost any distance from the elements that handle the power. It will fit in perfectly! Of course! Certainly! This is magnificent, Soames!"
- "You've got to get it working and in production before hell breaks loose," said Soames. "By the way, good luck!" -
- "Where are you, Soames? We need you on several matters."
- Soames hung up. His call, of course, could be traced. He'd traveled two hundred miles so that tracing it would do no good. He went back to where Fran dangled his legs from the back saddle of the motor-bike, and they headed back to Calumet Lake.

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OAMES MADE his long-distance call on a Monday, when war seemed likely to come perhaps within hours. All day Monday the tension continued. Traffic jams became the normal thing outside the larger cities,

which would be logical targets for long-range missiles. Every means of travel away from the great population centers was loaded far beyond capacity. But so far the movement of people from the cities was the result of apprehension, not panic. The public had been nourished for years on news of danger. It sold newspapers and secured listeners for sponsored broadcast programs. The average American had gotten used to it, but he never disbelieved it. So when the news got more than so bad, he moved out to the open country.

By Tuesday afternoon National Guard troops had been called out in ten states to keep traffic moving. By Wednesday the highways were no longer jammed, except at the exits from cities. The nation's population had spread itself out to very nearly the optimum distribution for avoiding casualties from atom bombing.

At Calumet Lake, however, there was no notable change. Soames and Fran still went fishing. In the boat Fran sometimes shut his eyes and pressed the end of one of the tiny sensory-perception communicators he had made. He turned it on for no longer than a second at a time. If he made contact with one of the other children he was prepared to speak swiftly, to assure them that he was safe and to ask for news of Zani and Mal and Hod-and Gail. He could do it very quickly indeed. Soames had insisted on only instants of communicator use.

"Maybe those gadgets can be directionally spotted," he said. "Security wants you, Fran. If there's a way to get a directional fix on you, they'll find it! So make it short!"

Fran nodded gravely. Soames wondered how much English Fran now understood. Certainly he slaved at acquiring a vocabulary. He'd filled a notebook with English words written in the squiggly script of his own tongue and -studied them at odd moments.

"If they can do directionals," added Soames, "they'll have found out already that the other kids are equipped. But they'll let them alone for a while to try to lure you into giving them a fix. You're number one on the wanted list."

Fran nodded again, but with less assurance. From time to time, then, he tried to pick up the sensations of another person, somewhere. Toward late afternoon of Tuesday he ground his teeth when he released the knob

- -the pin-head-which controlled his miniature gadget.
- "Somebody listening in?" asked Soames.

Fran nodded.

"No children?"

Fran shook his head. He baited a hook, cast it, and settled back scowling to wait for a fish to bite.

Over the whole nation, now, the larger cities were notably less populated than before. Already two million people had gotten out of Greater New York. A million out of Los Angeles. Three-quarters of a million out of Chicago. Three hundred thousand out of New Orleans. Ashtabula, Ohio, had parted with twenty thousand of its inhabitants. The exodus continued at the highest rate that overburdened transportation systems could arrange, but it was still only a movement based on apprehension. There was not yet actual panic.

On Thursday morning all broadcasts broke off to report that the DEW line of radar across Canada had reported objects in the air moving across the North Pole toward the United States. America clenched its fists and

- waited for missiles to strike or be blasted by counter-missiles, as fate or chance might determine. Twenty minutes later a correction came. 'The radar-detected objects had not been missiles, but aircraft flying in formation. They'd changed course and returned to their bases. They were probably foreign fighter planes patrolling far beyond their usual range.

Soames had held his breath with the rest of the country. He was just beginning to breathe freely again when Fran came running from the week-end shack. His eyes shone.

"I got-" he swallowed-"Zani. I said," he swallowed again, "we will come." He added, "Our language."

Soarnes looked at him sharply.

- "Maybe you do read minds. Was anybody listening in? Anybody else beside Zani?"
- "Two men," said Fran. "They talked. Fast. English."
- "One man would be a monitor," said Soames grimly. "Two means a directional fix. Let's go!" He went to the rental office for the shacks on Calumet Lake. He paid the rental due. He said

that he and his brother were going back to San Diego because of their family and all this war talk. He and Fran rode away on the motorcycle.

They were thirty miles away when a roaring sound filled all the air. Far away over the mountains they saw a huge formation of transport planes heading toward the place they'd left.

"They had directionals, all right," said Soames.

The motorcycle went on its noisy way. There would be a massive parachute drop all around the area pinpointed by the men wearing sensory instruments. Paratroopers would come down out of the sky. and join forces to form a cordon completely around Calumet Lake. They would be helped by other paratroopers arriving in other formations from other air bases. When nobody could possibly get out, they'd move in to capture Fran.

It was sound, prompt work. Its only defect was that Soames had anticipated it. Interceptors of a sensory communication would tend to think of their apparatus as reception devices, if only because they never attempted to transmit. When they picked up Fran, communicating, they'd report instantly and aloud that they had a contact, so the directional process could be set into motion. But it would take a little while, anyhow, to plot the coordinates. It might be only seconds, but stifi some time would elapse before the paratroopers were ordered into their equipment. More time would elapse before they could reach their planes and even if the planes had begun to warm up at the first signal, there would be inevitable lost time before they could take off.

Soames had counted on it, and it was enough. By the time the paratroopers were airborne they were miles away. By the time the planes neared Calurnet Lake they were thirty miles away, and by the time a tight cordon had been established they were a hundred miles outside of it. When night fell they were a long way away

indeed-a hundred miles south of Denver.

There was less chance than before that they would be spotted. Now the highways had many times their normal amount of traffic, even if they were no longer jammed. In surprisingly many and unlikely places, there were groups of cars parked together. They saved gasoline by their immobility, they furnished company and protection to each other by their nearness, and there was always one car radio going to bring in the news. They formed novel communities which gathered around blazing fires at night and discussed the day's news. Which got no better.

But the high population of remote places was a protection for Soames and Fran. He worried, though, about Gail. Her situation, and that of the three other children, was far from enviable. In the present increasing confusion and tension they were hardly likely to have any improvement in their state.

"I think," Soames told Fran reflectively, "that at night, and with the kind of disorganization that seems to be increasing, you can get away with talking to the kids again. Nobody'll try a parachute drop in these mountains in the darkness. They couldn't get organized before daybreak, and I doubt that they could block the highways. See if you can make contact, - eh? And find out how they're getting along?"

Privately, Soames hungered to hear from Gail. She'd suspected he was going to try to find Fran. She must have learned that he'd succeeded. They'd had very little time with each other considering that they expected to spend the rest of their lives together, and he wanted desperately to be near her, to see her, and at the least to hear from her. -

Fran nodded. He moved so that the heat of their fire would not fall on him, to tell that he camped out-ofdoors. He found a place to lie down on in comfort, so that there would be no distracting sensation. He closed his eyes. Soames saw him press the end of his tiny communicator and release it quickly. After an instant's pause he pressed it again. He held the conununicator on for several seconds, half a minute He released it and sat up.

"You try," he said in a puzzled fashion. "You try!" Soames closed his eyes. He pressed the little pin-head button at the end of the instrument which was hardly larger than a match slick. He felt the sensations of another body. That other body opened its eyes. Soames saw what it was-Gail's face was reflected in a mirror. She was pale. Her expression was drawn and harried. But she smiled at her reflejtion because she knew Soames would see what she saw.

He spoke, so she'd hear his voice as he did.

"Gail!"

He felt a hand, her hand, spill something on a leveled surface before her. It smoothed the spilled stuff. It was face-powder, spread on a dressing-table top. A finger wrote. She looked down. "Help Fran," he read. "You mustr

He felt her hand swiftly smoothing the message away. Rage swept over him. Instantly he knew what had happened. Fran's escape from Calumet Lake had proved that he knew that his communications were intercepted and directionally analyzed. Therefore the other children were no longer a means by which he might be trapped. So their communicators had been taken away from them for the second

time, and now thay were watched with an unceasing closeness. Every glance, every word, every gesture was noted.

"This has to be quick," said Soames coldly, for her to hear. "I would help him, but he'd want to get in touch with his people."

Gail opened her eyes again. Her image in the mirror nodded. -

"And if he did," said Soames as coldly as before, "they'd come here and conquer us. And I'd rather that we killed each other off than that the most kindly disposed of conquerors enslaved us."

He felt her hand again smoothing the spilled face powder. She wrote in it. He knew what she had written before she dropped her eyes to it. He couldn't believe

it. She'd written three words, no, two words and a numeral. Soames felt an almost physical shock. He was incredulous. If this was true, then . .

Suddenly he felt a hand close firmly on Gail's shoulder. Captain Moggs spoke, authoritative and stern and reproachful, "Gail! How could you! You have one of those horrible telepathic things toot This is a very grave matter, -Gail!"

Then the contact was broken. Captain Moggs had snatched away Gail's communicator.

Raging, Soames took Fran and they got away from there immediately. Perhaps haste was unnecessary. Traffic couldn't be watched in ordinary close fashion now. But they did move, and fast. And as they went away from that spot-now doubtlessly pin-pointed-Soames alternately raged and tried to realistically consider the meaning of the two words and the numeral which was completely unbelievable at first thought.

Shortly after sunrise he bought a two-day-old newspaper. It was the latest he could find for sale, He rode a certain distance and stopped where the highway made an especially dramatic turn and there was a turn-out for tourists to park in while they admired the view. He stopped there and deliberately read the news affecting war and peace and the children and therefore Gail. And at the end he folded the newspaper painstakingly and with careful self-control tore it to bits. Then he said angrily, "Fran, a question it never occurred to me to ask you before."

He posed the question. Fran could have answered it with two English words and a numeral, and the same words and numeral that Gail had used. But he didn't have the words. Especially, he did not have the number. His people, naturally, did not use either the Arabic numerals with which Soames was most familiar, nor the arrangement which gives the same symbol a value of units, hundreds, thousands or millions depending on its position in a group of such symbols. Fran's way of writing numbers was as complex as the system used in ancient Rome. And Soames had no key. It took a long time to grasp the quantity Fran had in mind. Then Soames had to make sure he had it right. Then, abruptly, he knew that it was true. He knew why it was true. It obscurely increased his

the situation and treatment of Gail. He thought of the children, to be sure, but he was angry about Gail. She was made unhappy. He scowled.

He kicked the torn-up newspaper with his toe.

anger over

"According to this paper," he said icily, "my ~fellow countrymen have decided to pay a decent resp~ct to the opinions of mankind and to sell you down the river. They suggest an international UN committee to receive custody of you children. That committee could then set to work on you to find out where you came from, why, and when you are likely to be searched for. Now, you know and so do I that part of what they found out they wouldn't accept. Time-travel is impossible. So when you children told them where you came from they wouldn~t believe it. They'd insist that you're from the Fifth Planet. They'd try to pry back behind what they'd consider a lie. They'd use different techniques of inquiry. They'd use inhibition-releasing drugs. They'd-"

Fran's expression did not change. Yet it was not passive.

"Which will not happen," said Soames in sudden fury, "except over my dead body! Gail feels the same way. So let's go! We've got to plan a really king-size monkey wrench .to throw into these works!"

He stepped on the motor-bike pedal. He swung on down the winding mountain road for the lowlands. Down in the foothill valleys there were many small towns about the size of Bluevale. They did not share the danger of the big cities. They were not probable targets for atom bombs. So they were open for business as usual, though their business was much greater than usual with the hordes of city folk now refugees.

It was no longer eccentric for anybody to camp out anywhere. Soames got out of the high mountains. He went into a relatively small town. He bought a pup-tent, pliers, a small camp-stove, a camp-lantern, blankets, matches.

They went back into the foothills and settled down to the strangest scientific conference in history. The scene of the conference was a remote and strictly improvised encampment by the side of a briskly flowing

trout stream. They fished. 'They talked. They drew diagrams for each other. They cooked their fish and drew diagrams and talked. When darkness fell, Soames lighted the camp lantern and set it in the pup-tent and went outside to make sure no stray gleam of light escaped. Then they drew more diagrams.

Fran's English had improved remarkably, but this was a highl~i technical disctission. It was two full days before Soame~ had the information he needed firmly in his mind. He made a working drawing of what had to be built. He realized that the drawing itself was a simplification of a much more complicated original device. It was adapted to be made out of locally available materials. It was what Fran had tried at Navajo Dam.

"Which," said Soames, frowning, "proved not to work. You didn't realize all the local resources. This thing works, obviously, because a terrifically strong electric field is cut off abruptly and collapses instantly. The original apparatus, the one I burnt, no doubt had a very fine gimmick to break a heavy current flow without making an arc. The trouble at Navajo Dam was that it did arc, and how! That was a mess!"

He paused, considering. Since Soames was not 'looking at him, Fran regarded him with infinite respect.

"The problem," said Soames, thinking hard, - "is a glorified job of turning off an electric light without making a spark at the switch. That's all. It doesn't matter how long the current flows. The thing is that it must stop instantly. So we turn the whole business inside out." --

Fran shifted position. He waited confidently. He watched Soames settle his problems. He liked Soames very much.

"Instead of making a terrific steady current and cutting it off, rm going to start with it not flowing and use a strobe-light pack. Every amateur photographer has one. They give a current of eight hundred amperes and twenty-five hundred volts for the - forty-thousandth of a second. The juice doesn't flow long enough to burn anything out. It cuts itself off. There's nothing to maintain an are. See?"

Fran nodded gravely. He'd have agreed to anything Soames said. At fourteen it is -possible to admire an adult very much indeed. Now Soarnes scowled in puzzlement at a part of his problems, the answer to which was not yet envisioned.

"The really tricky part," be said uncomfortably, "may be the stealing of a helicopter. But I - guess I can manage it."

He left Fran fishing and went down to the nearest town again to buy strange items and equipment, Copper foil. Strobe-light packs, two of them. He could use foil instead of large-area heat-dissipating units, because the current would flow so briefly. He would get a terrific current, of course. Two strobe-light packs in series would give him four million watts of power for part of the wink of an eyelid.

When he went back to the camp he carried a tiny transistor radio, too. Fran had fish cooked and ready for eating. Soames ate, listening to the news the radio reported. The situation remained exactly at the limit of possible strain. There were still anti-American nations who suspected darkly that the United States was playing possum, that it might have armed itself invincibly and secretly from the science of the wrecked spaceship, and might now wait to be attacked before it utterly destroyed all resistance to its slightest whim. Those who suspected this trick hesitated to commit themselves to war-yet. But the suspicion of a bluff was very strong. So tension remained at the absolute limit to which human nerves could be stretched. The exodus from the cities continued. It was now admitted that the government no longer functioned from Washington. The purpose was to remove the attractiveness of the city as a bomb target. It was now an almost deserted city.

"We\'e got to work," said Soames. "I don't think we've got much time. I had hopes of a castaway-gadget coming up, but it hasn't."

He began to assemble the device which would substitute for the larger, heavier, much more massive apparatus he'd destroyed on the Antarctic ice-sheet. The work went swiftly. Soames had redesigned the outfit,

and a man can always build a thing of his own design more easily than something from another man's drawings.

Before sunset the thing was done. Fran was very respectful. This apparatus was less than a quarter the size of the one his own people had prepared for the same purpose. And it was self-powered,

"I'd like to talk to your people about this," said Soames grimly. "I do think things can be transposed in space, and this should work that way as well as in time. But starting at one end has me stymied."

He abandoned the pup~tent and equipment.

"Either we won't need them," he said, "or we won't be around to need them."

The battered, ancient motorcycle pop-pop-popped away into the night. Soames had studied roadmaps and he and Fran had discussed in detail the route to Navajo Dam from the hidden missile base. They would use stilts to cross electrified fences. Soames was sure that with Fran's help he could find the lake village where Gail. and the children remained. It would call for a helicopter. But before that there was a highly necessary operation which would also go best with a helicopter to help. So when they left that pup-tent camp they headed toward a very minor, local airfield where Soames had once landed. It had hangars for half a dozen inexpensive private planes and for two helicopters used mostly for crop-dusting.

They drove through dusk and during the early night. They drove a long way along back roads. It was nearly midnight when they passed -through a suburban area and got - into farmland again. Then they came to the small airfield where there was no activity of any sort. Soames laid the motorcycle beside the edge ol~ the clear area and left Fran with it to wait. He moved quietly through the darkness .toward closed-up buildings with no lights anywhere except in one room reserved for a watchman.

Fran waited, breathing fast. He heard night insects and nothing else. It seemed a horribly long time, an age before he heard the grinding noise of a motor - being cranked. It caught immediately. There was a terrific

roaring inside a building. The large door of a hangar tilted and went upward, and a door opened from the watchman's room and he came outside, - shouting wildly.

The roaring of motors changed. The door of the hangar was wide open. A bellowing thing came moving out, whirling huge black vanes against the sky. It boomed more loudly still, and lifted, and then drifted with seeming clumsiness across the level airfield while the night-watchman shouted after it

Fran turned on the motorcycle headlight as he'd been told and picked up the apparatus Soames had made to use strobe-light packs in. The 'copter swept toward him, six feet above ground. It touched ground and Fran swarmed up into its cabin. Then the motors really thundered and the 'copter climbed for the sky.

Soames flew without lights. A part of the time he'd been in the buildings he'd spent hunting for and cutting the watchman's telephone line. It would not be easy for a startled and agitated man to get an accurate line on a 'copter ifight in darkness, without lights, and when it took a deceptive course, as Soames planned.

Presently the booming machine floated southward. A transcontinental highway appeared below. It was plainly marked by the headlights of the heavy traffic on it. He followed that highway, high above. He was a throbbing murmur in the sky, and no car remained underneath him for very long, so no car could have estimated his course.

Fran rode in a sort of rapture. Soames said, "Not worried, Fran?"

Fran shook his head. Then, boylike, he turned on the transistor radio to show his nonchalance. A voice spoke. He'd have shifted to music but Soames caught a word or two.

"Hold it!" he commanded. 'Put it so I can hear!"

Fran raised the volume and held the small radio so Soames could hear it above the motor noise. What he heard, at this moment, was the official United States broadcast announcing the ending of all real menace of atomic attack. By a fortunate freak of fate, somebody in authority realized that it was more important to get the news out than to make a professionalized production of it. So a tired but cor.fldent voice said very simply that American technicians seemed to have solved the problem of defense against attack by atomic bombs and guided missiles. There had been, the voice said steadily, recent marked improvements in electric induction furnaces. The basic principle of an induction furnace was the evolution of heat in the material it was desired to melt, instead of merely in a containd where the substance was to be melted. Within the past four days, the weary voice continued, induction-furnaces of a new type had proved able to induce heat in chosen objects up to miles. It had been expected to smelt metal ore in the veins in which it was found, and to make mines yield their product -as metal without digging up and puttering with useless rock.

But now this apparatus had been combined with radar. When a radar detected a missile or an enemy plane, the broadcast said carefully, an induction-furnace of the new type was turned upon the plane or missile. The effect was exactly that of enclosing the missile in a burning blast-furnace. It melted. The most careful tests assured America, then, that any city protected by radar-controlled remote-induction furnaces was safe against atomic attack.

And at the time of this broadcast, every major center of population in the United States was already protected by the new defense system. The cities which had been most vulnerable were now

the safest places in the nation. And it was found, added the contented voice,

- that atomic bombs were not detonated by the induction fields. The induced currents seemed to freeze firing mechanisms. It appeared impossible to design a detonating . device which would blow up a bomb before it melted.

The broadcast ended in a matter-of-fact tone saying that plans for the defense system had been given to all the allies of the United States, that London was already protected and Paris would be within hours, and that within days the nations which were not allies would be assisted to establish defenses, so that atomic war need not be feared in the future.

Soames listened with an odd expression on his face. "That," he said, "started out as a gadget for a castaway to stop arrows that savages were sniping at him with. I'm pleased."

There was no more for him to say. The pleasure he felt, of course, would be the only reward he was likely to get. At the moment he was bent upon an enterprise his fellow-Americans would have regarded with horror.

Far, far below and surrounded by the blackness of tree-covered ground in starlight, there was an irregular shape of brightness. It was miles long. It reflected the stars. It was the flood-control reservoir behind the Polder Dam. There was no power-plant here. This reservoir merely took -the place of some hundreds of thousands of acres of timbered-off forest which once had controlled floods more effectively.

Without a word, Soames slanted the 'copter down. Presently it hovered delicately over the dam's crest and at its very center. It touched. The motor ceased to whirl. The motor stopped. There was a great silence.

Fran scrambled down. Soames swung after him. Together, they set up the device which was a timne-transposition unit, with its complicated small antenna aimed out at the waters of the reservoir. "I've gambled," said Soames, "that we understand each other. Now you pull the string."

There was a cord which would discharge the strobe-packs through the apparatus itself. The discharge would cease with absolute abruptness. The packs would then recharge themselves from the special batteries included in the device.

Fran pulled the cord.

There was no noise except a small and inadequate "snap." It seemed that nothing happened. But there was suddenly a great dark hole in the surface of the reservoir.

Something came up out of it. It glittered in ghostly fashion in- the starlight. It rose up and up and up. It was a cylinder with a rounded top and a diameter of fifty feet or so. It rose and rose, very deliberately. Then a rounded lower end appeared. It floated in the air.

Fran jerked the cord again. Another hole in the lake. Another round metal thing rising slowly, one - would even say peacefully, into the starlight. Fran, grinning happily, jerked the cord again and yet again.

There were eight gigantic shining cylinders in the air when he stopped and stood back, his eyes shining. A vast metal thing floated ponderously near. A port opened and a voice called down in the language the children used among themselves. Fran spoke back, remembering to turn on his sensory communicator.

Fran talked briskly as if to himself. But it was standard sensory-communication practice. After a long time he turned to Soames. -

"My people say-" a pause, "thank you-" another pause, "and ask for-Zani and Mal and Hod,"
"Tell them to make a column of themselves and float right here, going up to ten thousand feet or
so. Radars will-pick them out. Planes will come in the night to see what they are. They'll guess.
I doubt very much that they'll attack. Tell your people simply to keep them worried until we come
back."

Fran zestfully swarmed back into the helicopter. Soaines told him, "Turn off your communicator. You'll be listened in on. But maybe the monitoring men are having their hair stand on end from the welter of communications from the ships!"

Fran wriggled with excitement as the 'copter-motors caught and roared and the ungainly machine swung and swayed away beneath the level of the hillcrests, while

- the great bright metal ships floated tranquilly in the starlight above the place from which they'd emerged.

Soames had an odd feeling that all this could not be true. But it was, down to the last least detail which had made it possible for him to defy all his fellow men to keep faith with four children whose lives and errand he'd interfered with. The matter had been a very natural oversight, at first.

Of course Soames had assumed that the children's civilization had been one of millions of people. A small city cannot establish or maintain a great technological civilization. He had been right. He'd assumed, even,

that Fran's people were able to travel between planets. Again he'd been right. But the thing he hadn't thought of was that the development of transposition in time wouldn't occur to anybody unless there was absolutely no other possible- solution to the problem the Old Race faced. They wouldn't have tried to solve it until the Fifth Planet burst and the doom of the world they lived on was self-evident. They wouldn't have worked at it until they realized that Venus and Mercury were due to be shattered after Earth, just as Mars was bombarded before it. Interplanetary travel would have been no help to them.

So the struggle to transplant Earth's past civilization into the future was begun in the fiftyninth minute of the last hour. Cities struggled to build time-ships and get a pioneer vessel
through to future time. Asteroids plunged down upon them, wiping them out. Cities struggled on,
passing to each other-to the thinning number of those who remained-solutions to problems as they
developed. But there were fewer and fewer. The city from which the children caine had fallen in
ruins from earth-shocks, and only a fraction of its population continued frantically ~to labor on.
But Soaines hadn't thought of this. It was Gail who found it out from the children with her. And
she'd told Soames that he must help Fran at any cost, and told the reason in two words and a
number. Speaking of Fran's people, she'd told Soames, "Only 2000 left."

- It was true. It checked with the number of ships that came through. Only two thousand people remained of Fran's race. They could not conquer two billions of mankind. They could not rule them. They could only take refuge among them, and share what knowledge

they could with them.

"Fran," said Soamnes vexedily, "that idea I had-that there must have been survivors left behind, to be my ancestors-couldn't your people collect them all?"

But the question answered itself. With mountain ranges falling out of the sky, with cities shattered by earthquakes before they were obliterated by monstrous things from heaven, there could not possibly be a clean

collection of all survivors. There would be none if it were attempted.

Fran leaned happily against Soames' shoulder. The 'copter swung away from a broad wide valley. Fran turned on the pocket radio again. A voice barked hoarsely, "This is not an advertisement! A column of spaceships has appeared near the Polder Reservoir! Detected by radar, night-fighters report that they are definitely ships of an alien race, arrived on Earth without detection by sateffite-watching units. They

Fresh bulletin! Creatures in the extra-terrestrial ships have made signals with colored lights to the planes which fly observation-patterns about them . . ."

Fran pointed. Two valleys came together here. He, -who had come away from the missile base on foot, was an authority on how to get back to it in a helicopter.

The 'copter flew on. From time to time an agitated voice came out of the pocket-radio, giving fresh news of the ships out of Fran's time. The cylindrical ships showed no uneasiness about the presence of the planes. They offered no hostility. -

The 'copter was a throbbing thunder, sweeping up the deep valleys, booming under sheer cliffs, with echoes thrown back from outside and a voice talking strainedly through a portable radio in its cabin.

Fran said, "There!"

And there were small lights, the color of kerosene lamps. But they were not lamps, but electric lights. Soames sent the 'copter sweeping toward the remarkably convincing Rocky Mountain village. The ship barely cleared an electrified fence. But if there were sentries who might have fired on it, they knew of the arrival of a fleet of alien spaceships. Nothing so human as a helicopter could be an enemy when an invading fleet from who-knows-where was just reported.

The 'copter settled to ground with a whistling noise. Soames cut off the motors. Then Fran was calling joyously, and Zani squealed from a window, and Hod caine tumbling out of another window and Mal popped out of nowhere and came running. There were shouts in the village. Then Gail was coming, also.

"Pile aboard!" commanded Soames. "Your families are here, kids, and they're waiting for you. And Gail, there's going to be the most thoroughly scared gang at the UN and elsewhere that you ever saw, now that what they think's a space-fleet is actually here! ~We've been decent to the kids, and they think they haven't, so we'll hold out for authority to argue."

A door slammed. Fran said happily, "Let's go!"

Motors boomed. The helicopter lifted. It rushed over the village, bellowing. Tree branches thrashed violently in the downdraught. It swept splendidly away down a valley leading to another valley and under a precipitous cliff and down more valleys. There was a place where eight silvery space-craft floated composedly above the Earth, with the few survivors of a great civilization peering out, waiting for dawn so they could see a new world, a fresh world healed of all scars,

waiting.

Gail said shakily, "B-Brad! Is it-is it safe to drive with only one arm? And there are the children "

Soames said happily, "Kids, look the other way." A moment later he said firmly, "The girls will be bridesmaids and Fran will be my best man and-I've got to make friends with these people, Gail! You see? They've got a wonderful science, but we've got to get to work on it! They need a modern viewpoint! That time transposing system they've used to save their lives-it's bound to work as a space-transposer too. I've got to work it out with their engineers! We've got to get enough power together to sehd some sort of miniature transposer out to Centaurus and Aldebaran, and then have regular interstellar transposition routes. Taking what these people have, and adding our stuff to it, we'll really go places!"

They swept over the reflecting waters behind the Polder Dam. Fran spoke aloud for someone somewhere else to hear. He spoke again. He was using his own, homemade sensory communicator. Presently he touched Soames' arm. -

"My people say," pause, "you talk for them." He grinned. "Let's go!"

And the 'copter touched ground and a great silvery

cylinder touched very delicately close by, and the children ran, squealing, to be with people they'd feared they would never see again. And Soames and Gail walked a little bit diffidently toward the same opened, lowered door. There were some rather nice people waiting for them. They'd raised the children, who were very nce children indeed. They needed Soames and Gail to help them make friends.

Somehow it did not occur to Soames that he was the reason why on this one day and within hours, the danger of atomic war on Earth was ended, and the human race was headed for the stars instead of annihilation. But~ it was true. The people of the Old Race, of course, would not try to rule Earth. They were too few. They wouldn't want to go to another planet and be alone. Again they were too few. They were the last survivors of a very magnificent civilization, but they could not maintain it unless they shared it with the people of Earth of now. They could only join the sprawling younger branch of the human race as citizens.

But humans, now, had a new destiny. With Gail close beside him, Soames waited for the greetings of the childr'~n and their parents to end. He looked at Gail. Her eyes were shiping.

Soames felt very good. It was a perfect solution to the troubles of Earth, both past and future. - He and Gail stood, holding hands like children.

The stars were waiting.

THE END