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*** START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK PROGRESS REPORT ***



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Progress is relative; Senator O'Noonan's idea of it was not particularly scientific. Which would be too bad, if he had the last word!

Progress Report

By Mark Clifton and Alex Apostolides

Illustrated by PAUL ORBAN

IT SEEMED to Colonel Jennings that the air conditioning unit merely washed the hot air around him without lowering the temperature from that outside. He knew it was partly psychosomatic, compounded of the view of the silvery spire of the test ship through the heatwaves of the Nevada landscape and the knowledge that this was the day, the hour, and the minutes.

The final test was at hand. The instrument ship was to be sent out into space, controlled from this sunken concrete bunker, to find out if the flimsy bodies of men could endure there.

Jennings visualized other bunkers scattered through the area, observation posts, and farther away the field headquarters with open telephone lines to the Pentagon, and beyond that a world waiting for news of the test—and not everyone wishing it well.

The monotonous buzz of the field phone pulled him away from his fascinated gaze at the periscope slit. He glanced at his two assistants, Professor Stein and Major Eddy. They were seated in front of their control boards, staring at the blank eyes of their radar screens, patiently enduring the beads of sweat on their faces and necks and hands, the odor of it arising from their bodies. They too were feeling the moment. He picked up the phone.

"Jennings," he said crisply.

"Zero minus one half hour, Colonel. We start alert count in fifteen minutes."

"Right," Colonel Jennings spoke softly, showing none of the excitement he felt. He replaced the field phone on its hook and spoke to the two men in front of him.

"This is it. Apparently this time we'll go through with it."

Major Eddy's shoulders hunched a trifle, as if he were getting set to have a load placed upon them. [103]



Professor Stein gave no indication that he had heard. His thin body was stooped over his [104]

instrument bank, intense, alert, as if he were a runner crouched at the starting mark, as if he were young again.

Colonel Jennings walked over to the periscope slit again and peered through the shimmer of heat to where the silvery ship lay arrowed in her cradle. The last few moments of waiting, with a brassy taste in his mouth, with the vision of the test ship before him; these were the worst.

Everything had been done, checked and rechecked hours and days ago. He found himself wishing there were some little thing, some desperate little error which must be corrected hurriedly, just something to break the tension of waiting.

"You're all right, Sam, Prof?" he asked the major and professor unnecessarily.

"A little nervous," Major Eddy answered without moving.

"Of course," Professor Stein said. There was a too heavy stress on the sibilant sound, as if the last traces of accent had not yet been removed.

"I expect everyone is nervous, not just the hundreds involved in this, but everywhere," Jennings commented. And then ruefully, "Except Professor Stein there. I thought surely I'd see some nerves at this point, Prof." He was attempting to make light conversation, something to break the strain of mounting buck fever.

"If I let even one nerve tendril slack, Colonel, I would go to pieces entirely," Stein said precisely, in the way a man speaks who has learned the language from text books. "So I do not think of our ship at all. I think of mankind. I wonder if mankind is as ready as our ship. I wonder if man will do any better on the planets than he has done here."

"Well, of course," Colonel Jennings answered with sympathy in his voice, "under Hitler and all the things you went through, I don't blame you for being a little bitter. But not all mankind is like that, you know. As long as you've been in our country, Professor, you've never looked around you. You've been working on this, never lifting your head...."

HE JERKED in annoyance as a red light blinked over the emergency circuit, and a buzzing, sharp and repeated, broke into this moment when he felt he was actually reaching, touching Stein, as no one had before.

He dragged the phone toward him and began speaking angrily into its mouthpiece before he had brought it to his lips.

"What the hell's the matter now? They're not going to call it off again! Three times now, and...."

He broke off and frowned as the crackling voice came through the receiver, the vein on his temple pulsing in his stress.

"I beg your pardon, General," he said, much more quietly.

The two men turned from their radar scopes and watched him questioningly. He shrugged his shoulders, an indication to them of his helplessness.

"You're not going to like this, Jim," the general was saying. "But it's orders from Pentagon. Are you familiar with Senator O'Noonan?" [105]

"Vaguely," Jennings answered.

"You'll be more familiar with him, Jim. He's been newly appointed chairman of the appropriations committee covering our work. And he's fought it bitterly from the beginning. He's tried every way he could to scrap the entire project. When we've finished this test, Jim, we'll have used up our appropriations to date. Whether we get any more depends on him."

"Yes, sir?" Jennings spoke questioningly. Political maneuvering was not his problem, that was between Pentagon and Congress.

"We must have his support, Jim," the general explained. "Pentagon hasn't been able to win him over. He's stubborn and violent in his reactions. The fact it keeps him in the headlines—well, of course that wouldn't have any bearing. So Pentagon invited him to come to the field here to watch the test, hoping that would win him over." The general hesitated, then continued.

"I've gone a step farther. I felt if he was actually at the center of control, your operation, he might be won over. If he could actually participate, press the activating key or something, if the headlines could show he was working with us, actually sent the test ship on its flight...."

"General, you can't," Jennings moaned. He forgot rank, everything.

"I've already done it, Jim," the general chose to ignore the outburst. "He's due there now. I'll look to you to handle it. He's got to be won over, Colonel. It's your project." Considering the years that he and the general had worked together, the warm accord and informality between them, the use of Jennings' title made it an order.

"Yes, sir," he said.

"Over," said the general formally.

"Out," whispered Jennings.

The two men looked at him questioningly.

"It seems," he answered their look, "we are to have an observer. Senator O'Noonan."

"Even in Germany," Professor Stein said quietly, "they knew enough to leave us alone at a critical moment."

"He can't do it, Jim," Major Eddy looked at Jennings with pleading eyes.

"Oh, but he can," Jennings answered bitterly. "Orders. And you know what orders are, don't you, Major?"

"Yes, sir," Major Eddy said stiffly.

Professor Stein smiled ruefully.

Both of them turned back to their instrument boards, their radar screens, to the protective obscurity of subordinates carrying out an assignment. They were no longer three men coming close together, almost understanding one another in this moment of waiting, when the world and all in it had been shut away, and nothing real existed except the silvery spire out there on the desert and the life of it in the controls at their fingertips.

"Beep, minus fifteen minutes!" the first time signal sounded.

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"COLONEL JENNINGS, sir!"

The senator appeared in the low doorway and extended a fleshy hand. His voice was hearty, but there was no warmth behind his tones. He paused on the threshold, bulky, impressive, as if he were about to deliver an address. But Jennings, while shaking hands, drew him into the bunker, pointedly, causing the senator to raise bushy eyebrows and stare at him speculatively.

"At this point everything runs on a split second basis, Senator," he said crisply. "Ceremony comes after the test." His implication was that when the work was done, the senator could have his turn in the limelight, take all the credit, turn it into political fodder to be thrown to the people. But because the man was chairman of the appropriations committee, he softened his abruptness. "If the timing is off even a small fraction, Senator, we would have to scrap the flight and start all over."

"At additional expense, no doubt." The senator could also be crisp. "Surprises me that the military should think of that, however."

The closing of the heavy doors behind him punctuated his remark and caused him to step to the center of the bunker. Where there had seemed adequate room before, now the feeling was one of oppressive overcrowding.

Unconsciously, Major Eddy squared his elbows as if to clear the space around him for the manipulation of his controls. Professor Stein sat at his radar screen, quiet, immobile, a part of the mechanisms. He was accustomed to overbearing authority whatever political tag it might wear at the moment.

"Beep. Eleven minutes," the signal sounded.

"Perhaps you'll be good enough to brief me on just what you're doing here?" the senator asked, and implied by the tone of his voice that it couldn't be very much. "In layman's language, Colonel. Don't try to make it impressive with technical obscurities. I want my progress report on this project to be understandable to everyone."

Jennings looked at him in dismay. Was the man kidding him? Explain the zenith of science, the culmination of the dreams of man in twenty simple words or less! And about ten minutes to win over a man which the Pentagon had failed to win.

"Perhaps you'd like to sit here, Senator," he said courteously. "When we learned you were coming, we felt yours should be the honor. At zero time, you press this key—here. It will be your hand which sends the test ship out into space."

Apparently they were safe. The senator knew so little, he did not realize the automatic switch would close with the zero time signal, that no hand could be trusted to press the key at precisely the right time, that the senator's key was a dummy.

"Beep, ten," the signal came through.

Jennings went back over to the periscope and peered through the slit. He felt strangely surprised to see the silver column of the ship still there. The calm, the scientific detachment, the warm thrill of co-ordinated effort, all were gone. He felt as if the test flight itself was secondary to what the senator thought about it, what he would say in his progress report.

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He wondered if the senator's progress report would compare in any particular with the one on the ship. That was a chart, representing as far as they could tell, the minimum and maximum tolerances of human life. If the multiple needles, tracing their continuous lines, went over the black boundaries of tolerances, human beings would die at that point. Such a progress report, showing the life-sustaining conditions at each point throughout the ship's flight, would have some meaning. He wondered what meaning the senator's progress report would have.

He felt himself being pushed aside from the periscope. There was no ungentleness in the push, simply the determined pressure of an arrogant man who was accustomed to being in the center of things, and thinking nothing of shoving to get there. The senator gave him the briefest of explanatory looks, and placed his own eye at the periscope slit.

"Beep, nine," the signal sounded.

"So that's what represents two billion dollars," the senator said contemptuously. "That little sliver of metal."

"The two billion dollar atomic bomb was even smaller," Jennings said quietly.

THE SENATOR took his eye away from the periscope briefly and looked at Jennings speculatively.

"The story of where all that money went still hasn't been told," he said pointedly. "But the story of who got away with this two billion will be different."

Colonel Jennings said nothing. The white hot rage mounting within him made it impossible for him to speak.

The senator straightened up and walked back over to his chair. He waved a hand in the direction of Major Eddy.

"What does that man do?" he asked, as if the major were not present, or was unable to comprehend.

"Major Eddy," Jennings found control of his voice, "operates remote control." He was trying to reduce the vast complexity of the operation to the simplest possible language.

"Beep, eight," the signal interrupted him.

"He will guide the ship throughout its entire flight, just as if he were sitting in it."

"Why isn't he sitting in it?" the senator asked.

"That's what the test is for, Senator." Jennings felt his voice becoming icy. "We don't know if space will permit human life. We don't know what's out there."

"Best way to find out is for a man to go out there and see," the senator commented shortly. "I want to find out something, I go look at it myself. I don't depend on charts and graphs, and folderol."

The major did not even hunch his broad shoulders, a characteristic gesture, to show that he had heard, to show that he wished the senator was out there in untested space.

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"What about him? He's not even in uniform!"

"Professor Stein maintains sight contact on the scope and transmits the IFF pulse."

The senator's eyes flashed again beneath heavy brows. His lips indicated what he thought of professors and projects who used them.

"What's IFF?" he asked.

The colonel looked at him incredulously. It was on the tip of his tongue to ask where the man had been during the war. He decided he'd better not ask it. He might learn.

"It stands for Identification—Friend or Foe, Senator. It's army jargon."

"Beep, seven."

Seven minutes, Jennings thought, *and here I am trying to explain the culmination of the entire science of all mankind to a lardbrain in simple kindergarten words.* Well, he'd wished there was something to break the tension of the last half hour, keep him occupied. He had it.

"You mean the army wouldn't know, after the ship got up, whether it was ours or the enemy's?" the senator asked incredulously.

"There are meteors in space, Senator," Jennings said carefully. "Radar contact is all we'll have out there. The IFF mechanism reconverts our beam to a predetermined pulse, and it bounces back to us in a different pattern. That's the only way we'd know if we were still on the ship, or have by chance fastened on to a meteor."

"What has that got to do with the enemy?" O'Noonan asked uncomprehendingly.

Jennings sighed, almost audibly.

"The mechanism was developed during the war, when we didn't know which planes were ours and which the enemy's. We've simply adapted it to this use—to save money, Senator."

"Humph!" the senator expressed his disbelief. "Too complicated. The world has grown too complicated."

"Beep, six."

The senator glanced irritably at the time speaker. It had interrupted his speech. But he chose to ignore the interruption, that was the way to handle heckling.

"I am a simple man. I come from simple parentage. I represent the simple people, the common people, the people with their feet on the ground. And the whole world needs to get back to the simple truths and honesties...."

Jennings headed off the campaign speech which might appeal to the mountaineers of the senator's home state, where a man's accomplishments were judged by how far he could spit tobacco juice; it had little application in this bunker where the final test before the flight of man to the stars was being tried.

"To us, Senator," he said gently, "this ship represents simple truths and honesties. We are, at this moment, testing the truths of all that mankind has ever thought of, theorized about, believed of the space which surrounds the Earth. A farmer may hear about new methods of growing crops, but the only way he knows whether they're practical or not is to try them on his own land."

The senator looked at him impassively. Jennings didn't know whether he was going over or not. [109]
But he was trying.

"All that ship, and all the instruments it contains; those represent the utmost honesties of the men who worked on them. Nobody tried to bluff, to get by with shoddy workmanship, cover up ignorance. A farmer does not try to bluff his land, for the crops he gets tells the final story. Scientists, too, have simple honesty. They have to have, Senator, for the results will show them up if they don't."

THe SENATOR looked at him speculatively, and with a growing respect. Not a bad speech, that. Not a bad speech at all. If this tomfoolery actually worked, and it might, that could be the approach in selling it to his constituents. By implication, he could take full credit, put over the impression that it was he who had stood over the scientists making sure they were as honest and simple as the mountain farmers. Many a man has gone into the White House with less.

"Beep, five."

Five more minutes. The sudden thought occurred to O'Noonan: what if he refused to press the dummy key? Refused to take part in this project he called tomfoolery? Perhaps they thought they were being clever in having him take part in the ship's launching, and were by that act committing him to something....

"This is the final test, Senator. After this one, if it is right, man leaps to the stars!" It was Jennings' plea, his final attempt to catch the senator up in the fire and the dream.

"And then more yapping colonists wanting statehood," the senator said dryly. "Upsetting the balance of power. Changing things."

Jennings was silent.

"Beep, four."

"More imports trying to get into our country duty-free," O'Noonan went on. "Upsetting our economy."

His vision was of lobbyists threatening to cut off contributions if their own industries were not kept in a favorable position. Of grim-jawed industrialists who could easily put a more tractable candidate up in his place to be elected by the free and thinking people of his state. All the best catch phrases, the semantically-loaded promises, the advertising appropriations being used by his opponent.

It was a dilemma. Should he jump on the bandwagon of advancement to the stars, hoping to catch the imagination of the voters by it? Were the voters really in favor of progress? What could this space flight put in the dinner pails of the Smiths, the Browns, the Johnsons? It was all very well to talk about the progress of mankind, but that was the only measure to be considered. Any politician knew that. And apparently no scientist knew it. Man advances only when he sees how it will help him stuff his gut.

"Beep, three." For a full minute, the senator had sat lost in speculation.

And what could he personally gain? A plan, full-formed, sprang into his mind. This whole deal could be taken out of the hands of the military on charges of waste and corruption. It could be [110]

brought back into the control of private industry, where it belonged. He thought of vast tracts of land in his own state, tracts he could buy cheap, through dummy companies, places which could be made very suitable for the giant factories necessary to manufacture spaceships.

As chairman of the appropriations committee, it wouldn't be difficult to sway the choice of site. And all that extra employment for the people of his own state. The voters couldn't forget plain, simple, honest O'Noonan after that!

"Beep, two."

JENNINGS FELT the sweat beads increase on his forehead. His collar was already soaking wet. He had been watching the senator through two long minutes, terrible eon-consuming minutes, the impassive face showing only what the senator wanted it to show. He saw the face now soften into something approaching benignity, nobility. The head came up, the silvery hair tossed back.

"Son," he said with a ringing thrill in his voice. "Mankind must reach the stars! We must allow nothing to stop that! No personal consideration, no personal belief, nothing must stand in the way of mankind's greatest dream!"

His eyes were shrewdly watching the effect upon Jennings' face, measuring through him the effect such a speech would have upon the voters. He saw the relief spread over Jennings' face, the glow. Yes, it might work.

"Now, son," he said with kindly tolerance, "tell me what you want me to do about pressing this key when the time comes."

"Beep, one."

And then the continuous drone while the seconds were being counted off aloud.

"Fifty-nine, fifty-eight, fifty-seven—"

The droning went on while Jennings showed the senator just how to press the dummy key down, explaining it in careful detail, and just when.

"Thirty-seven, thirty-six, thirty-five—"

"Major!" Jennings called questioningly.

"Ready, sir."

"Professor!"

"Ready, sir."

"Three, two, one, ZERO!"

"Press it, Senator!" Jennings called frantically.

Already the automatic firing stud had taken over. The bellowing, roaring flames reached down with giant strength, nudging the ship upward, seeming to hang suspended, waiting.

"Press it!"

The senator's hand pressed the dummy key. He was committed.

As if the ship had really been waiting, it lifted, faster and faster.

"Major?"

"I have it, sir." The major's hands were flying over his bank of controls, correcting the slight unbalance of thrusts, holding the ship as steady as if he were in it.

Already the ship was beyond visual sight, picking up speed. But the pip on the radar screens was strong and clear. The drone of the IFF returning signal was equally strong. [111]

The senator sat and waited. He had done his job. He felt it perhaps would have been better to have had the photographers on the spot, but realized the carefully directed and rehearsed pictures to be taken later would make better vote fodder.

"It's already out in space now, Senator," Jennings found a second of time to call it to the senator.

The pips and the signals were bright and clear, coming through the ionosphere, the Heaviside layer as they had been designed to do. Jennings wondered if the senator could ever be made to understand the simple honesty of scientists who had worked that out so well and true. Bright and strong and clear.

And then there was nothing! The screens were blank. The sounds were gone.

JENNINGS STOOD in stupefied silence.

"It shut! It shut off!" Major Eddy's voice was shrill in amazement.

"It cut right out, Colonel. No fade, no dying signal, just out!" It was the first time Jennings had ever heard a note of excitement in Professor Stein's voice.

The phone began to ring, loud and shrill. That would be from the General's observation post, where he, too, must have lost the signal.

The excitement penetrated the senator's rosy dream of vast acreages being sold at a huge profit, giant walls of factories going up under his remote-control ownership. "What's wrong?" he asked.

Jennings did not answer him. "What was the altitude?" he asked. The phone continued to ring, but he was not yet ready to answer it.

"Hundred fifty miles, maybe a little more," Major Eddy answered in a dull voice. "And then, nothing," he repeated incredulously. "Nothing."

The phone was one long ring now, taken off of automatic signal and rung with a hand key pressed down and held there. In a daze, Jennings picked up the phone.

"Yes, General," he answered as though he were no more than a robot. He hardly listened to the general's questions, did not need the report that every radarscope throughout the area had lost contact at the same instant. Somehow he had known that would be true, that it wasn't just his own mechanisms failing. One question did penetrate his stunned mind.

"How is the senator taking it?" the general asked finally.

"Uncomprehending, as yet," Jennings answered cryptically. "But even there it will penetrate sooner or later. We'll have to face it then."

"Yes," the general sighed. "What about safety? What if it fell on a big city, for example?"

"It had escape velocity," Jennings answered. "It would simply follow its trajectory indefinitely—which was away from Earth."

"What's happening now?" the senator asked arrogantly. He had been out of the limelight long enough, longer than was usual or necessary. He didn't like it when people went about their business as if he were not present.

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"Quiet during the test, Senator," Jennings took his mouth from the phone long enough to reprove the man gently. Apparently he got away with it, for the senator put his finger to his lips knowingly and sat back again.

"The senator's starting to ask questions?" the general asked into the phone.

"Yes, sir. It won't be long now."

"I hate to contemplate it, Jim," the general said in apprehension. "There's only one way he'll translate it. Two billion dollars shot up into the air and lost." Then sharply. "There must be something you've done, Colonel. Some mistake you've made."

THE IMPLIED accusation struck at Jennings' stomach, a heavy blow.

"That's the way it's going to be?" he stated the question, knowing its answer.

"For the good of the service," the general answered with a stock phrase. "If it is the fault of one officer and his men, we may be given another chance. If it is the failure of science itself, we won't."

"I see," the colonel answered.

"You won't be the first soldier, Colonel, to be unjustly punished to maintain public faith in the service."

"Yes, sir," Jennings answered as formally as if he were already facing court martial.

"It's back!" Major Eddy shouted in his excitement. "It's back, Colonel!"

The pip, truly, showed startlingly clear and sharp on the radarscope, the correct signals were coming in sure and strong. As suddenly as the ship had cut out, it was back.

"It's back, General," Colonel Jennings shouted into the phone, his eyes fixed upon his own radarscope. He dropped the phone without waiting for the general's answer.

"Good," exclaimed the senator. "I was getting a little bored with nothing happening."

"Have you got control?" Jennings called to the major.

"Can't tell yet. It's coming in too fast. I'm trying to slow it. We'll know in a minute."

"You have it now," Professor Stein spoke up quietly. "It's slowing. It will be in the atmosphere soon. Slow it as much as you can."

As surely as if he were sitting in its control room, Eddy slowed the ship, easing it down into the atmosphere. The instruments recorded the results of his playing upon the bank of controls, as sound pouring from a musical instrument.

"At the take-off point?" Jennings asked. "Can you land it there?"

"Close to it," Major Eddy answered. "As close as I can."

Now the ship was in visual sight again, and they watched its nose turn in the air, turn from a bullet hurtling earthward to a ship settling to the ground on its belly. Major Eddy was playing his instrument bank as if he were the soloist in a vast orchestra at the height of a crescendo forte.

Jennings grabbed up the phone again.

"Transportation!" he shouted.

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"Already dispatched, sir," the operator at the other end responded.

Through the periscope slit, Jennings watched the ship settle lightly downward to the ground, as though it were a breezeborne feather instead of its tons of metal. It seemed to settle itself, still, and become inanimate again. Major Eddy dropped his hands away from his instrument bank, an exhausted virtuoso.

"My congratulations!" the senator included all three men in his sweeping glance. "It was remarkable how you all had control at every instance. My progress report will certainly bear that notation."

The three men looked at him, and realized there was no irony in his words, no sarcasm, no realization at all of what had truly happened.

"I can see a va-a-ast fleet of no-o-ble ships...." the senator began to orate.

But the roar of the arriving jeep outside took his audience away from him. They made a dash for the bunker door, no longer interested in the senator and his progress report. It was the progress report as revealed by the instruments on the ship which interested them more.

The senator was close behind them as they piled out of the bunker door, and into the jeep, with Jennings unceremoniously pulling the driver from the wheel and taking his place.

Over the rough dirt road toward the launching site where the ship had come to rest, their minds were bemused and feverish, as they projected ahead, trying to read in advance what the instruments would reveal of that blank period.

The senator's mind projected even farther ahead to the fleet of space ships he would own and control. And he had been worried about some ignorant stupid voters! Stupid animals! How he despised them! What would he care about voters when he could be master of the spaceways to the stars?

Jennings swerved the jeep off the dirt road and took out across the hummocks of sagebrush to the ship a few rods away. He hardly slacked speed, and in a swirl of dust pulled up to the side of the ship. Before it had even stopped, the men were piling out of the jeep, running toward the side of the ship.

And stopped short.

UNABLE TO BELIEVE their eyes, to absorb the incredible, they stared at the swinging open door in the side of the ship. Slowly they realized the iridescent purple glow around the doorframe, the rotted metal, disintegrating and falling to the dirt below. The implications of the tampering with the door held them unmoving. Only the senator had not caught it yet. Slower than they, now he was chugging up to where they had stopped, an elephantine amble.

"Well, well, what's holding us up?" he panted irritably.

Cautiously then, Jennings moved toward the open door. And as cautiously, Major Eddy and Professor Stein followed him. O'Noonan hung behind, sensing the caution, but not knowing the reason behind it.

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They entered the ship, wary of what might be lurking inside, what had burned open the door out there in space, what had been able to capture the ship, cut it off from its contact with controls, stop it in its headlong flight out into space, turn it, return it to their controls at precisely the same point and altitude. Wary, but they entered.

At first glance, nothing seemed disturbed. The bulkhead leading to the power plant was still whole. But farther down the passage, the door leading to the control room where the instruments were housed also swung open. It, too, showed the iridescent purple disintegration of its metal frame.

They hardly recognized the control room. They had known it intimately, had helped to build and fit it. They knew each weld, each nut and bolt.

"The instruments are gone," the professor gasped in awe.

It was true. As they crowded there in the doorway, they saw the gaping holes along the walls where the instruments had been inserted, one by one, each to tell its own story of conditions in space.

The senator pushed himself into the room and looked about him. Even he could tell the room had been dismantled.

"What kind of sabotage is this?" he exclaimed, and turned in anger toward Jennings. No one answered him. Jennings did not even bother to meet the accusing eyes.

They walked down the narrow passage between the twisted frames where the instruments should have been. They came to the spot where the master integrator should have stood, the one which should have co-ordinated all the results of life-sustenance measurements, the one which was to give them their progress report.

There, too, was a gaping hole—but not without its message. Etched in the metal frame, in the same iridescent purple glow, were two words. Two enigmatic words to reverberate throughout the world, burned in by some watcher—some keeper—some warden.

"*Not yet.*"

THE END



Transcriber Notes:

This text was produced from *If Worlds of Science Fiction* July 1953. Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed.

Typo was corrected on page 110

Original text: "Son," he said with a ringing thrill in his voice. "Mankind *much* reach the stars! We must allow ...

Changed text: "Son," he said with a ringing thrill in his voice. "Mankind *must* reach the stars! We must allow ...

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