

E.E. Smith's THE GALAXY PRIMES

Part 2

# AMAZING

SCIENCE FICTION STORIES

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35¢

WARNING  
FROM  
THE STARS



TEST ROCKET!





# **Warning from the Stars**

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It was a beautifully machined container, shaped like a two pound chocolate candy box, the color and texture of lead. The cover fitted so accurately that it was difficult to see where it met the lip on the base.

Yet when Forster lifted the container from the desk in the security guards' office, he almost hit himself in the face with it, so light was it.

He read the words clumsily etched by hand into the top surface with some sharp instrument:

TO BE OPENED ONLY BY: Dr. Richard Forster, Assistant  
Director, Air Force Special Research Center, Petersport, Md.  
CAUTION: Open not later than 24 hours after receipt.  
DO NOT OPEN in atmosphere less than equivalent of 65,000  
feet above M.S.L.

He turned the container over and over. It bore no other markings—no express label or stamps, no file or reference number, no return address.

It was superbly machined, he saw.

Tentatively he pulled at the container cover, it was as firm as if it had been welded on. But then, if the cover had been closed in the thin atmosphere of 65,000 feet, it would be held on by the terrific pressure of a column of air twelve miles high.

Forster looked up at the burly guard.

"Who left this here?"

"Your guess is as good as mine, sir." The man's voice was as close to insolence as the difference in status would allow, and Forster bristled.

"I just clocked in an hour ago. There was a thick fog came on all of a sudden, and there was a bit of confusion when we were changing over. They didn't say anything about the box when I relieved."

"Fog?" Forster queried. "How could fog form on a warm morning like this?"

"You're the scientist, sir. You tell me. Went as fast as it came."

"Well—it looks like very sloppy security. The contents of this thing must almost certainly be classified. Give me the book and I'll sign for it. I'll phone you the file number when I find the covering instructions."

Forster was a nervous, over-conscientious little man, and his day was already ruined, because any departure from strict administrative routine worried and upset him. Only in his field of aviation medicine did he feel competent, secure.

He knew that around the center they contemptuously called him "Lilliput." The younger researchers were constantly trying to think up new ways to play jokes on him, and annoy him.

Crawley Preston, the research center's director and his chief, had been summoned to Washington the night before. Forster wished fervently that he was around to deal with this matter. Now that relations between East and West had reached the snapping point, the slightest deviation from security regulations usually meant a full-scale inquiry.

He signed for the container, and carried it out to the car, still seething impotently over the guard's insolence.

He placed it beside him on the front seat of his car and drove up to the building which housed part of the labs and also his office.

He climbed out, then as he slammed the door he happened to glance into the car again.

The seat covers were made of plastic in a maroon and blue plaid pattern. But where the box had rested there was a dirty grey rectangular patch that hadn't been there before.

Forster stared, then opened the door again. He rubbed his fingers over the discolored spot; it felt no different than the rest of the fabric. Then he placed the box over the area—it fitted perfectly.

He flopped down on the seat, his legs dangling out of the car, fighting down a sudden irrational wave of panic. He pushed the container to the other end of the seat.

*After all, he rationalized, plastics are notoriously unstable under*

*certain conditions. This is probably a new alloy Washington wants tested for behavior under extreme conditions of temperature and pressure. What's gotten into you?*

He took a deep breath, picked up the box again. Where it had rested there was another discolored patch on the car seat covers.

Holding it away from him, Forster hurried into the office, then dumped the box into a metal wastebasket. Then he went to a cabinet and pulled out a Geiger counter, carried it over to the wastebasket. As he pointed the probe at the box the familiar slow clicking reassured him, and feeling a little foolish he put the instrument back on its shelf.

Hurriedly, he went through his mail; there was nothing in it referring to the package. Then he called the classified filing section; nobody there knew anything about it either.

For some reason he couldn't explain to himself, he wasn't even surprised.

He stared into the wastebasket. The clumsily etched instructions glinted up at him: "*To be opened as soon as possible....*"

He picked up the phone and called the decompression chamber building.

There was no valid reason why he should have been self-conscious as he talked to the lab attendant in charge of the decompression tank. He used it a dozen times a month for tests and experiments, yet when he gave his instructions his voice was labored and strained.

"Some genius in Washington sent this thing down without any covering instructions, but it has to be opened in a hurry in a thin atmosphere. Er—I'd like you to stay on the intercom for a while in case it blows up in my face or something." He tried to laugh, but all that came out was a croak.

The attendant nodded indifferently, then helped Forster into the helmet of his pressure suit. He climbed up the steps into the

chamber, pulling the airtight door shut behind him. He placed the box on the desk in front of the instrument panel, then turned back to push the door clamps into place.

For the first time in the hundreds of hours he'd spent in the tank, he knew the meaning of claustrophobia.

Mechanically, he plugged in his intercom and air lines, went through the other routine checks before ascent, tested communications with the lab attendant, then flicked the exhaust motor switch.

Now there was little to do except wait. He stared at the box; in the artificial light it seemed full of hidden menace, a knowing aliveness of its own... .

Forster shrugged his shoulders impatiently, as though to throw off the vague blanket of uneasiness that was settling around him. So somebody had forgotten to send a covering message with the container, or else it had been mislaid—that could happen, although with security routine as strict as it was, the possibility was remote. All the same, it could happen. After all, what other explanation was there? What was it he was afraid of? There was something about it—

He glanced at the altimeter. The needle showed only 10,000 feet, and seemed to be crawling around the dial. He resolved not to look at it for three minutes by the clock on the panel.

When he checked the altimeter again, it registered just over 30,000 feet. Not even half way yet.

As the pressure in the tank decreased, he began to be conscious of the need for "reverse breathing"—and he concentrated on using his tongue to check the flow of air into his lungs, then using the thoracic muscles to exhale against the higher pressure inside the suit.

Time seemed to be passing in micro-seconds ... 25,000 feet ... 30,000 ... 40,000 ... 50,000.

At 62,500 feet he gently tested the cover of the container again; it lifted.

As the altimeter needle flickered on the 65,000-foot mark, he cut the exhaust motor and picked up the box. The cover slipped off easily.

His feeling of anticlimax was almost ludicrous. As he looked in, all the box contained was a flattened roll of some greyish material.

He took it out; despite its comparative bulk, it was feather-light. It had the appearance of metal, but was as porous and pliable as a good grade of bond paper. He could not feel its texture through his heavy gloves. He took a good look.

It was new all right—no doubt Washington wanted some tests run on it, although without covering instructions and data this trip was wasted. But some heads would roll when he reported back on the way the container had been shipped in.

He started to unroll the material to get a better look at it, then he saw that it was covered with cramped, closely spaced handwriting in a purplish ink—handwriting that was elusively familiar.

Then he read the words written in neat capitals at the top, the name of the man with the familiar handwriting, and fear came back, clamped cold fingers around his throat:

*James Rawdon Bentley*

Dear Dick, the writing went on, Take a large economy-size grip on yourself. I know this is going to sound like a voice from the dead, but I'm very much alive and kicking—in the best of health in fact... .

The writing blurred, and instinctively Forster put his fist up to rub his eyes, only to meet the hard plastic of his helmet visor. James Rawdon Bentley... .

It was January 18, 1951, three years ago, and the jagged line of the Australian coast stretched like a small-scale map to the black curve of the horizon.

From the converted bomber that was his flying lab, Forster could see the other American observation plane cruising on a parallel course, about half a mile away, and beyond it downwind the fringe of



the billowing cloud dome of the super-secret British thermonuclear shot.

Then suddenly Bentley's voice from the other plane was crackling over the earphones, sharp and urgent:

"Our Geigers and scintillometers are going crazy! We're getting out of here! There's something coming inside ... a light... ."

Silence. Forster had watched in helpless horror as the other ship dipped a silver wing, then nosed down ever so slowly, it seemed ... down ... down ... in a dive that seemed to take hours as Forster's plane tracked it, ending in a tiny splash like a pebble being thrown into a pond; then the grimly beautiful iridescence of oil and gasoline spreading across the glassy waters of the Timor Sea.

No parachutes had opened on the long journey down. An Australian air sea rescue launch and helicopter were at the scene of the crash in minutes, but neither bodies nor survivors had been found, then or later... .

"Everything okay, Doctor Forster?"

"Yes," he said hoarsely. "Yes ... everything's okay ... just routine."

Forster focussed his eyes on the writing again. There was no doubt at all that it was Bentley's. They had roomed and studied together for four years at MIT, and then there had been a couple of years' post-graduate work after that. During all that time they had used each other's notes constantly.

But Bentley was dead.

Forster read on, stunned:

First, you'll want to know what happened over the Timor Sea after the shot. Put very simply, I, the rest of the technicians, and the crew of the B-29 were transhipped to another vehicle—without any damage to ourselves. How, I'm not allowed to explain at this stage. Actually, they only wanted me, but it wasn't feasible to collect me and leave the rest behind, so they're all here, safe and well.

Who are "they," and where am I? The second question I can't

answer—not allowed to. "They," roughly translated, are "The Shining Ones," which doesn't tell you anything, of course. Briefly, they're a couple of light-years ahead of Earth in evolution—mentally, morally, and physically, although I use the last word loosely. Too bad that English is a commercial language, it's so hard to discuss really abstract ideas.

Why am I here? The whole reason for this message is wrapped up in the answer to that.

As you probably know, Project Longfall, which I was heading up was delayed about a year due to my removal. That was the sole purpose, although I and the rest of us are getting special instruction to keep us occupied.

About the same time, they also took several other key people from Britain, Russia, and the United States. Others were already here.

The idea then was *delay*—to delay more test shots of atomic weapons, in the hope that East and West would come to some agreement. Now, because of the growing volume of tests, and the critical tension which prevails, delay will no longer suffice, and far more drastic steps are to be taken.

I wish you could be here for only a few minutes to see what happens after a multi-megaton thermonuclear test shot is set off on Earth.

I can't describe it in terms which would have any relation to your present knowledge of physics. All I can say is that life here is intimately bound up with the higher laws of electro-magnetism which at present are only being guessed at on your level. It's not the radioactivity which you know as such which causes the trouble—there are neutralizing devices throughout the planetary system to take care of that. The damage is caused by an ultra-ultra-short wave radiation which not even the most sensitive scintillometer you have can pick up, a very subtle by-product of every chain reaction.

It doesn't have too much immediate effect on the lower forms of life

—including human beings, if you'll pardon the expression. But here, it causes a ghastly carnage, so ghastly it sickens me even to think about it for a second.

The incredible thing is that the people here could stop Earth from firing another shot if they wished to, and at 24 hours' notice, but their philosophy is totally opposed to force, even when it means their own destruction. That will give you an idea of the kind of people they are.

(Here they say that Einstein was on the fringe of discovering the theory involved when he died, but was having trouble with the mathematics. Remember how Einstein always complained that he was really a poor mathematician?)

But with atomic warfare threatening to break out on Earth at any minute, they have got to do something.

This is what they plan to do—this is what they *are going to do*.

Starting within a few hours after you receive this message, a mass removal of key scientists will begin. They will take 20, 30, or 40—roughly equal numbers from both sides—every few hours as technical conditions allow. That will go on until East and West agree to drop this whole mad weapons race. It will be done quietly, peacefully. Nobody will be hurt except by a fluke. But if needs be, they will lift every major scientific brain off the face of Earth to stop the present drift to disaster for everybody. There are no weapons, no devices that you have at present, which can stop this plan going into effect. There it is—it's as simple as that.

If you knew what you were really headed for, it would need no steps from here to make both sides on Earth stop this horrible foolishness in a moment.

The lesson of Mars is part of the orientation course here. (I'm *not* on Mars). I'm using up space, so I'll go into note form for a bit. Martians had an atomic war—forgot they had to breathe ... destroyed 60 per cent of their atmosphere ... canals on Mars aren't ... they're closely-spaced line of shafts leading to underground

cities ... view from Earth telescopes, shaft mouths appear as dots which run together into lines due to eye-fatigue ... British Royal Astronomical Society figured that out 30 years ago at least ... see papers on their proceedings ... photographs here show monsters created by wholesale mutations ... lasted about four generations before reproduction failed ... now only vegetation on Mars ... saw pictures of last survivors ... horrible ... I was ill for days after ... imagine having to take 40 separate breaths after making a single step!

Getting back to the others here ... a regular U. N. Remember O'Connor and Walters in our class? They're here. Check, you'll find that O'Connor is "detached" from Oak Ridge and Walters from Aiken for "special duty." That's Central Intelligence's story for their disappearance.

Remember those top German boys the Russians were supposed to have gotten to before the Allies could reach them after the Nazi collapse? *They're here too!* And Kamalnikov, and Pretchkin of the Russian Academy.

Believe me (the style and the writing was a little less urgent again now), I've had all the intellectual stuffing knocked out of me here.

We all have had, for that matter. We're supposed to be the cream of the crop, but imagine sitting down to instruction from people whose I.Q.s start where yours leaves off!

But what has really made most of us here feel pretty humble is the way they have demolished Earth's so-called "scientific method"—and used the method itself to prove that it doesn't stand up!

You know how we've always been taught to observe, collect data, then erect a theory to fit the data, a theory which has to be modified when other data came along which don't fit into it.

Here they work the opposite way—they say: "Know the fundamental principles governing the operation of the universe and then all the pieces fit together inside this final Truth."

I understand now why so many of the Oak Ridge boys turned to

religion after they had been exposed to the electron microscope for a while—they realized they had gone as far as their "scientific" training would ever take them.

Time and space are running out. I know all this must sound confused and incredible, Dick; I'm still confused myself. But I want you to think about what I've written, then take the action you think best. I know it won't be easy for you.

If you think this is some maniac's idea of a joke, you'll have proof very soon that it isn't, because *one of the people at your Center is due to leave for here any time now.*

You're wondering why I used this weird and wonderful means of communication. The problem was to find a writing material which would stand up in Earth's atmosphere—oddly enough, it's not the oxygen which causes the trouble, but the so-called "inert" nitrogen. The container will probably not disintegrate for a couple of days at sea level atmospheric pressure, but this material I'm writing on would not last more than a few seconds. That's one reason they picked you—most people just don't have a spare decompression chamber up in the attic! The other reason was that with your photographic memory, you'll know this is my handwriting, beyond the shadow of a doubt, I hope.

I'm sure you've sat in that pressure suit long enough. But remember, if you want to take another look at this, you'll have to put it back in the container before you go "down."

Wishing you all you would wish for yourself,  
Jim.

Forster examined the signature. That was the way Bentley made the capital J—it looked almost like a T, with just a faint hook on the bottom of the down-stroke. Then the way it joined the—

"Hey, Doc—are you going to tie up the tank all day? I've got work to do."

Forster recognized the voice on the intercom as Tom

Summerford's. Summerford was one of the crop of recent graduates to join the Center—brash, noisy, irresponsible like the rest of them. He knew Forster hated being called "Doc," so he never lost an opportunity to use the word. True, he was gifted and well-trained, but he was a ringleader in playing the practical jokes on Forster which might have been funny in college, but which only wasted a research team's time in these critical days.

Practical joke.

Anger flooded over him.

Yes, this was all a macabre game cooked up by Summerford, with the help of some of his pals. Probably they were all out there now, snickering among themselves, waiting to see his face when he came out of the decompression chamber ... waiting to gloat... .

"Hey Doc! You still with us?"

"I'll be out very shortly," Forster said grimly. "Just wait right there."

He spun the air inlet controls; impatiently, he watched as the altimeter needle began its anti-clockwise movement.

He'd call a staff meeting right away, find the culprits and suspend them from duty. Preston would have to back him up. If Summerford proved to be the ringleader, he would insist on his dismissal, Forster decided. And he would see to it that the young punk had trouble getting another post.

The fantastic waste of time involved in such an elaborate forgery ... Forster trembled with indignation. And using the name of a dead man, above all a scientist who had died in the interests of research, leaving behind him a mystery which still troubled the Atomic Energy Commission, because nobody had ever been able to explain that sudden dive in a plane which was apparently functioning perfectly, and flown by a veteran crew... .

He glanced down at the roll.

Was it his imagination, or had the purplish ink begun to fade? He ran a length of it through his fingers, and then he saw that in places there were gaps where the writing had disappeared altogether. He

glanced up at the altimeter needle, which was sliding by the 24,000-foot mark.

He looked back at his hands again, just in time to see the roll part in two places, leaving only the narrow strip he held between his gloved fingers.

He put the strip on the desk, and bent clumsily in his suit to retrieve the other pieces from the floor. But wherever he grabbed it, it fell apart. Now it seemed to be melting before his eyes. In a few seconds there was nothing.

He straightened up. The strip he had left on the desk had disappeared, too. No ash, no residue. Nothing.

His thought processes seemed to freeze. He glanced mechanically at the altimeter. It read 2,500 feet.

He grabbed at the two pieces of the container. They still felt as rigid as ever. He fitted them together carefully, gaining a crumb of security from the act.

He realized vaguely that the altimeter needle was resting on zero, but he had no idea how long he had been sitting there, trying to find a thread of logic in the confused welter of thoughts, when he heard the scrape of metal on metal as somebody wrestled with the door clamps from the outside.

He was certain of only one thing. His memory told him that the signature that was no longer a signature had been written by Jim Rawdon, who couldn't possibly have survived that crash into the Timor Sea... .

From behind, somebody was fumbling with his helmet connections, then fresh air and familiar sounds rushed in on him as the helmet was taken away.

Summerford's thin, intelligent face was opposite his.

"Doc! Are you all right?" he was asking sharply. For once, there was no superciliousness in his voice.

"I'm fine," Forster said heavily. "I—I've got a headache. Stayed in

here too long, I suppose."

"What's in the box?" Summerford asked.

The way he asked told Forster at once that the youngster knew nothing about it.

"Er—just some half-baked idea out of the Pentagon. Some colonel trying to justify his existence." He clutched the box to him as though Summerford might try to take it away. "The tank's all yours."

He turned and clambered out of the chamber. He put the box down on the concrete floor, and climbed out of the pressure suit, watching the box all the time. It seemed to gleam up at him, as though it had eyes, full of silent menace.

He realized vaguely that Summerford was standing in front of him again, looking anxious.

"Are you quite sure you're okay?"

"I'm fine," Forster said, hardly recognizing his own voice.

He picked up the box and stumbled out, heading for his office.

When he walked in, his secretary was answering the line fitted with a scrambler, which connected directly with the Pentagon.

"General Morganson," she said, handing him the receiver.

Forster took the receiver, sat down at his desk and took a deep breath, fighting hard to regain his self control.

"Forster," he said into the mouthpiece when the office door closed behind the girl.

"Forster! What the dickens has happened to Preston? My driver met the train here this morning, but there was no sign of him. But the Pullman porter checked him in last night, and we found all his gear and papers in his compartment!"

"He left here in plenty of time to catch the train, General," Forster heard himself say. "He took the train to get a night's rest." He realized how irrelevant the last statement was only after he had made it.

The General was talking again ... important meeting with the Joint Chiefs ... whole briefing team was being held up ... he'd reported it to the C.I.A. as a precautionary measure...



Forster could see the words on the roll, the roll that wasn't, as though they were engraved on his eye-retinas: *As a beginning, and to prove this isn't just a bit of hocus-pocus, one of the people at your Center is due to leave for here any time now.*

"General," Forster broke in hoarsely. "I've got some very important information which you must have. I'll leave by heliplane right away."

He replaced the phone receiver in its cradle, wondering how convincing he would be able to make his story. At least, even if he didn't have Bentley's letter, he had the container. That should help.

But when he looked across the desk, he saw that it too had disappeared, without a trace.

General Morganson was the newest product of the Atomic Age, half soldier, half scientist—shrewd and perceptive, an intellectual giant.

He listened carefully, without comment or change of expression, as Forster doggedly went through his story in chronological order.

Half way through, he held up his hand and started pushing buttons on the console built into his desk. Within a few moments men began filing into the room, and sat down around Forster.

Then the general motioned to the clerk seated in the corner by a tape recorder.

"Gentlemen, listen to this playback and then I'll have Dr. Forster here go on from there."

What was left of Forster's confidence leaked away as he heard his own diffident voice filling the room again. It was like being awake in the middle of a weird dream.

But when the tape recorder hissed into silence, he went on, staring straight ahead of him in quiet desperation.

When he ended his story, there was silence for a moment. Everyone sat motionless.

Then Morganson looked up and around.

"Well gentlemen? Mr. Bates, C.I.A. first."

This was no longer a story told by one man; it had become a problem, a situation to be evaluated objectively.

"Well, sir ... the only part of the thing I can comment on at this point is the stuff about O'Connor and Walters. That checks. They both disappeared without a trace. It was treated as a maximum security situation, and we did give out the story they had been assigned to special duty." He glanced briefly at Forster. "Up until now, we assumed that only the directors at Aiken and Oak Ridge knew the real situation—outside of the Atomic Energy Commission and C.I.A., of course. This represents a very serious leak—or... ." His voice trailed away.

"Colonel Barfield, Intelligence?"

The young colonel tried to sound flippant, unsuccessfully.

"General, acting on the assumption the story is true, it would answer about two hundred question marks in our files. Maybe more, with further study."

The C.I.A. man cleared his throat and raised a finger.

"For everybody's information," he said, "a preliminary field check shows that Dr. Preston's train was stopped for ten minutes by fog last night. The train's radar installation failed simultaneously. There wouldn't be anything odd about that except the temperature at the time was about 65 degrees, and the humidity was only 55 per cent. Consider that, gentlemen.

"Theoretically, fog can't form under such conditions. Similar local fog occurred on the occasions when O'Connor and Walters were reported missing. The Met. people couldn't explain that, either. That's all."

Morganson sat up straight, as though he had suddenly made a decision.

"I don't think there's any value in further discussion at this point. You will all have transcripts of Dr. Forster's statement within a few minutes. According to that statement, we are due to lose a number of

key men in the next few hours. I'll have Code One emergency precautions instituted at all research establishments, and I think the chairman of the Joint Chiefs should hear from me right away. Colonel Barfield, I'd like you to ask Colonel Malinowski, the Russian military attaché to see me here not later than an hour from now. We'll have a full dress conference here at 8 o'clock tomorrow morning, with written evaluation reports in detail from all branches. Dr. Forster, consider yourself assigned to Pentagon duty as of now, and until further notice."

Forster sat, dazed, until he realized that the others had left, and the general was standing in front of him.

"Go get some rest, Forster," the other man said with surprising gentleness. "You've had a tough day."

As Forster slept that early summer night, weathermen across the world were marking their weather maps with thousands of observations—feathery wind arrows, temperatures, barometric pressures and relative humidities.

Then, as they drew their isobars, the pattern for the northern hemisphere emerged. A giant high pressure system with its center in northern Oklahoma promised warm fair weather across America. Another, centered east of the Ural Mountains, forecast clear weather for most of Europe and northern Asia.

A low pressure trough between was dropping light warm rain on the green fields of England, but from Seattle to Washington, D. C., from Stettin to Vladivostock the sun was rising or setting in clear skies.

Then about 9 P.M. Eastern Standard Time, a thickening mist descended over warm and drowsy southwest South Carolina. It was a fog that was not a fog, observers said afterwards, because there was no damp, no coldness—just a steady loss of visibility until a man couldn't see his hand held up in front of his face, even though a bright moon was shining. Most of the reporting night shift at the Aiken

hydrogen bomb plant never reached the tightly-guarded gates. Those who did were not allowed in.

At the same hour, across the world at the newly-built underground heavy water factory of Rossilovskigorsk, west of the southern tip of Lake Baikal, the late morning sun cast deep shadows into the gaping holes in the hillside which marked the plant entrances and exits. Deep below, miles of filtration chambers hissed quietly as they prepared their deadly concentrate.

Then, without warning, the sun grew watery and paled, and within a few minutes a haze began to form at ground level. It grew thicker and thicker; the sun became a dim orange sphere, then was blotted out. Total darkness enveloped the area.

And at the same hour, the watchers manning the lonely circle of probing radar domes, facing each other across the frozen wastes of the Arctic, cursed softly in Russian and English as their scopes sweeping the upper air first went blank and then dark.

They were shaken men at the meeting in General Morganson's office the next morning.

"Over 30 key men gone from Aiken," Morganson was saying. "In terms of goals, it means that our 1960 program now cannot possibly be fulfilled until 1965. If the situation develops as forecast in Dr. Forster's statement, our entire nuclear weapons program will grind to a halt within two weeks. If we drain men from civilian research, it will cause a total breakdown in the civilian atomic power production program. As you all know, the nation's entire economic expansion program is based on the availability of that power. Without it, industry will be forced into a deep freeze. That in turn means we might as well run up a white flag on the White House lawn."

He smiled thinly. "I would be a lot more worried than I am except we have the first indications that the other side is in the same boat. I broke every regulation in the book last night when I talked to Malinowski. I took the liberty of warning him, on the basis that there

was nothing to lose. His reaction then was that it was all a Wall Street-capitalist plot—'psychological warfare,' he called it.

"He phoned me an hour ago. Sounded as though he'd just seen a ghost. He said the Russian ambassador had asked for an appointment with the Secretary of State this morning... ."

Forster, bewildered and out of his depth in these global problems let the flood of words pour over him.

Then he realized that Morganson was staring at him over the telephone receiver at his ear, and that the room was very quiet.

Then Morganson said respectfully: "Very well, Mr. President. We'll have Doctor Forster there."

Forster was relegated to the sidelines after his interview with the grave-faced man in the White House. Events were moving swiftly—events which Forster could read behind the blurred black headlines of the newspapers.

The Russian ambassador was closeted with the Secretary of State for a record six-hour talk. Then the Soviet Foreign Minister took off for Washington at 30 minutes' notice, and another record was made when he spent all day with the President. The Washington columnists began to hint of lessening tension in the cold war, and the wire services carried reports of Russian radio broadcasts talking of a new era of cooperation between East and West.

Only fragments of the broadcasts could be monitored, because radio reception had suddenly deteriorated right across the world. The reports could not be confirmed because Russia had cut all phone communication with the outside world. There was no possible mode of contact.

Meanwhile, in the United States, television reception was blacking out for hours at a time, with no explanation available. The Civil Aeronautics Administration and the Air Force banned all plane movements under instrument flight conditions, because radar navigational equipment had become so unreliable as to be useless.

Newspapers across the nation were reporting sudden fogs of short duration which baffled local weathermen. The U. S. Weather Bureau in Washington refused to comment.

For the first time in the history of an East-West conference, there was no haggling, no propaganda speeches. Hour after hour, even as the talks went on, the cream of the world's scientific brains quietly continued to disappear, it was revealed later.

In three days, the major powers accomplished what they had failed to do in the previous 15 years. Just 4 days and 21 hours after Forster had first talked to General Morganson at the Pentagon, a treaty was signed ending the world atomic weapons race.

And it had all happened, was over and done, before the people of the globe could realize what was happening, before they could rise in mass panic in the face of the incredible unknown.

Almost immediately after the announcement, radio and radar communications suddenly returned to normal, and reports of the mysterious fogs ceased.

Back at the Center, as he walked down the floodlit ramp of the heliport towards his car, Forster found himself thinking of the experimental work on the dream state which he had performed as a graduate student. He knew that a dream which might take half an hour to recount took only a fraction of a second to occur in the sub-conscious of the sleeper as he awoke.

It was the same way with the events of the last five days; already details were becoming fuzzy and blurred as though they had happened five years ago.

He opened the car door, and the soft glow of the dome light filled the interior.

Then he saw again the neat rectangular discoloration on the seat covers, and the jolt back to reality was almost a physical thing. Relief, overwhelming, flooded over him.

He looked up into the indigo-velvet sky. Above him was the enormous triangle formed by Deneb, Vega, and Altair. Framed within

it were a thousand other dimmer stars, but all, he knew, far, far bigger than the speck of solidified gases called Earth.

Somewhere out there, living, thinking, breathing was Bentley.

"Good night," Forster said out loud.

And somehow, he was sure he wasn't talking into thin air.

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