

## SECOND GOING

By James Tiptree, Jr.

James Tiptree, Jr. is now known to be the pen name of Alice Sheldon, a woman of many talents who was connected with the CIA's photographic identification section. She took her own life early in 1987, having pondered the tragedy of her invalid husband. This story, dealing with the whole question of God and the gods of antiquity, was one of her last. It was written surely during the long period when she was contemplating her own death and what came after something that is noticeable in other short stories of hers in that time. In some ways there is a curiously light touch to her thoughts as shown in this tale even though it deals with a basic problem which has disturbed people since earliest days of human existence.

I didn't mean to start like this, I wanted to make it a nice formal Appendix, or Addendum, to the official Archives. The account of man's first contact with aliens: what really happened.

But I can't find any bound copies of the White Book, not even in the President's office. Except one somebody got mustard all over and another piece the rats got at. What I suspect, what I think is, they never finished it. All I can find is some empty cover boxes, so I'm going to put these discs in one of those so people will know it's important.

After all, I am the official Archivist- I typed the promotion myself when Hattie went. I'm Theodora Tanton, Chief NASA Archivist. And I'm seventy six years old, as of this morning. So is everybody,

old everybody who can remember, that is. So who's going to hear it, anyway? You with your six fingers or two heads or whatever?

You'll be around, though. They promised us that, that we wouldn't blow ourselves up. They said they fixed it. And I believe them. Not because I believe them exactly, but because I think they just might want to come back someday and find more than ashes.

They didn't command us not to fire atomic weapons, by the way. I guess they knew by that time that when a god commands Don't Eat Those Apples, or Don't Open This Box- it's the first thing men'll do. (And manage to blame it on a woman, too, if you'll notice. But I digress.)

Nope, they just said, "We fixed that." Maybe the Russians have found out what they did by this time. Or the Israelis. What's left of the Pentagon is too scared to try. So, Hello, Posterity.

This is about what really happened, to add to the White Book, if you ever find one oops, that was a rat. I have a Coleman lantern, and a hockey stick for the rats.

Start with First Contact.

First Contact took place on Mars, with the men of the First Mars Mission. The two who had landed, that is. The command module pilot, Reverend Perry Danforth, was just flying orbits, looking down and seeing peculiar things. Meeting them on Mars confused everybody for a while. They were not Martians.

The best account of the meeting is from Mission Control. I found a man who had been a boy there, sort of a gofer. In that big room with all the terminals -you've seen it a million times on TV if you watched space stuff. So

this first bit is dictated live by Kevin (Red) Blake, now aged 99.5 years.

But before him I want to say a word about how everything was. So normal. Nothing sinister or dramatic going on. Like in a ship that's slowly, very slowly, listing to one side, only nobody's mentioning it. That's all underneath. But little things give it away, like this one Kevin told me before they landed.

It was a long trip, see, two years plus. They were all in the command module, called Mars Eagle. James Aruppa, commanding, and Todd Fiske, and the Reverend Perry, who wasn't going to get to land. (Personally, I'd have broken Todd's arm or something, if I'd been Perry, so I could get to land. Imagine getting so close and then flying circles for a week while the others are on Mars! But he acted perfectly happy about it. He even made a joke about being "the most expensive valet parking service ever." Very cooperative and one for all, the Reverend. I never did find out exactly what he was the Reverend of; maybe it was only a nickname.)

Anyway about five or six months out, at a time when they were supposed to be fast asleep, they called Mission Control. "Are you all right back there?"

"Sure, everything's nominal here. What's with you?"

Well, it turned out that they'd seen this flash, some trick rock reflection or something that made a burst of light right where Earth was. And they thought it was missiles, see, World War III starting . . . anybody would've, in those days. That's what I mean by the feelings just underneath. But nobody ever said a gloomy word, on top.

There were other things underneath, of course, different for different people, all adding up to The End. But this is no place to talk about the old days; it's all changed now. So that's that, and now here comes Kevin:

"I can remember it like it was yesterday. All morning had been occupied with the Lander carrying Todd and Jim Aruppa coming down and finding a flat place. I nearly got thrown out of the control room for sticking my head in people's way to catch a glimpse of a screen while I was bringing stuff. The amount of coffee those NASA boys put away! And some of them ate -one man ate seven egg sandwiches -they were all keyed up like crazy. All right, I'll stick to the point. I know what you want to hear.

"So by then it was coming pitch dark on Mars, only the Lander's lights glaring on a pebbly plain with cracks in it. The computer colored it red, I guess it was. Mission Control wouldn't let them get out then. They were ordered to sleep until it got full light again. Ten hours ... Imagine, sleeping your first night on Mars!

"The last thing was, Perry up in the command module reported a glow of light on the eastern horizon. It wasn't a moon rising we'd already seen one of those. A little greenish crescent, going like crazy.

"So during the night Perry was supposed to check on what might be glowing toward the east a volcano, maybe? But by the time he came around to where he could see the place again, the glow had faded to nearly nothing, and next trip there was nothing at all to see.

"At this time a relief crew was on the CRTs in Mission Control, but every so often one of the men who were supposed to be sleeping in their quarters next door would come in and just stare at the screens for a few minutes. All you could see was a faint, jagged horizon line, and then the stars began.

"First light was supposed to be at 5:50 A.M. our time (see, I even remember numbers!) and by that time the whole day crew was back in the room, everybody all mixed together, and all wanting coffee and Danishes.

"On the screens the sky was getting just a little lighter, so the horizon looked sharper and darker until suddenly a faint lightness came on the ground plain in front of the mountains. And then came a minute I'll never forget. Like the whole room was holding its breath, only whispering or rustling a little around their dark screens. And then Eggy Stone yelled out loud and clear:

"'There's something there! It's big! Oh, man!'

"That made it official, what the sharp eyed ones thought they'd been picking up but couldn't believe, and everybody was jabbering at once. And the voices of the astronauts cutting through everything, with that four and a half minute lag, about how this Thing was sitting in front of them unlit, unmoving, no indication of how it had come there, whether it crawled or flew in or bored up out of the ground. Of course, they thought it was Martians.

"What it was was a great big, say fifty meter long, dumbbell shape lying there about a hundred meters in front of their main window. It was two huge spheroids, or hexasomethings, connected by one big fat center bar really like a dumbbell. Only in the middle of the connection was a chamber, say three meters each way. We could see right in because its whole front side was folded back like a big gullwing door. It appeared to be padded inside. The computer called it light blue, with two rust colored lumps like cushion seats back on the floor inside.

"And both of the big dumbbell chambers at the ends had like windows spaced all around them.

"And filling the window of the end nearest us, the window we could see into, was something moving or flickering slightly, something shiny and lighter blue. It took a second or two to recognize it, because of its size- it was over a meter long, almost round.

"It was an eye. A great, humongous, living eye, blue with a white rim. And looking at us.

"Like the creature it belonged to was so big it was all curled up inside its compartment, with its eye pressed to the glass. For some reason, right from the start we knew that the creature, or being, or whatever, had only one central eye.

"In addition to looking at us- that is, at the camera most of the time, the eye was also swiveling to examine the Lander and every thing around.

"Now all through the excitement Todd and Jim in the Lander were trying to tell us something. I wasn't in on this, but whenever I could get near Voice Contact I heard things like, 'We are not crazy! I tell you we are not crazy; it's talking in our heads. Yes, in English. We get two words very distinctly: peace and welcome. Over and over. And we are not out of our minds; if I could figure a way to get this on the caller you'd hear -'

"They sounded madder and madder. I guess Mission Control was giving them a hard time, especially General Streiter, who was sure it was a Soviet Commie trick of some kind. And of course there was no way for them to get a mental voice on the antennae. But then the aliens apparently solved that for

themselves. Just as Jim was saying for the tenth time that he wasn't crazy or hadn't drunk too much coffee, all our communications went blooie for a minute and then this great big quiet voice drowned everything.

" 'PEACE . . .' it said. And then, 'WELL COME!'

"Something about the voice, its tone, made Mission Control sound for a minute like a well, like a cathedral. 'PEACE! . . . WELCOME! . . . PEACE . . . FRIENDS . . .'

"And then it added, very gentle and majestic, 'COME . . . COME . . .'

"And Mission Control became aware that Todd and Jim were preparing to go out of the Lander.

"Pandemonium!

"Well, I'll skip all this bit where Mission Control was ordering them to stay inside, on no account to even put a hand out, to unsuit--Jim and Todd were calmly suiting up- and anything else they could think of and General Streiter ordering court martials for everybody in sight, on Mars or Earth- it even went so far as getting the President out of bed to come and countermand them in person. I found out afterward that the poor man got so mixed up he thought they were refusing to go out onto Mars, and he was supposed to tell them to! And all with this four and a half minute lag, and this great hushy voice blanking everything out with 'PEACE . . . WELCOME...'

"Until finally it was obvious even to the general that nothing could be done, that forty four million miles away two Earthmen were about to walk out onto Mars and confront The Alien."

(This is Theodora putting in a word here. See, everyone had been so convinced that there was no life on Mars above something like lichen that absolutely no instructions had been thought up for meeting large scale sentient life, let alone with telepathic communications.)

"Well, they evacuated the air, and as they went to go down the ladder, Jim Aruppa grabbed Todd, and we could hear him saying in his helmet, 'Remember, you bastard) Count cadence now!'

"And nobody knew what that was until we found out there'd been this private arrangement between the two men. After all those months together, see, Jim wasn't going to take all the glory for being the First Man on Mars. As he put it to Todd, 'Who was the second man to step onto the moon?' And Todd had to guess twice, and nobody else knew either. And Jim wasn't going to let that happen again. So he ordered Todd to descend in sync with him and make an absolutely simultaneous first foot down. That was one of the little squabbles that kept Mission Control lively all those two years. Some kind of guy, Jim.

"So there they were counting cadence down the ladder to Mars--to Mars, man!- with this alien Thing a hundred yards away staring at them.

"And they walked over to it slowly and carefully, looking at everything, the eye following them. And there were no sign of how it had possibly moved there except by some kind of very gentle flight. But no machinery, nothing at all but these two big hexagonal spheroids with windows. And the compartment between. The first word Jim sent back was, 'It seems to be entirely nonmetallic. Not plastic, either. More like a- like a smooth shiny dry pod, with windows set in. The frames are non metallic too.'

"And then they got to where they could see the windows on the farther off spheroid -and there was another eye looking out at them from it!

"It seemed exactly like the first eye, only slightly larger and paler. The flesh around the eyes registered blue too, by the way -and there was no sign of eyelashes.

"And then both Jim and Todd claimed that this eye winked at them and Mission Control went back to calling them crazy.

"When they got back in front, by the open compartment, they made signals as though they were hearing something. And then the voice we could hear via radio changed too. 'Come,' it said in sort of grand friendly tones. 'Come . . . Please come in. Come with, say hello friends.'

"Well, that sent Mission Control into a new spasm of countercommands, in the midst of which the two men set the camera on its tripod outside, and walked into the open alien compartment, bouncing a little on the padded floor. Then they turned around to face us, and sat down on the seat cushion looking things. And at that the big overhead door slid smoothly forward and down and closed them in. It had a window in it- in fact it was mostly window. But before anybody could think of any reaction to that, it opened up again halfway, and Todd and Jim stepped out. Four and a half minutes later we heard, 'They say to bring food for one day.'

"And the men went back up into the Lander to collect supplies.

"Somehow the ordinariness, or what you might call considerateness of this just took the wind out of a lot of angry lungs.

" 'No water necessary, they say,' Jim Aruppa told us as they climbed back out of the Under. 'But we brought some just in case. I never thought I'd be glad to see a can of Tab.' He grinned, holding up his little camp basin. 'But we can at least wash our hands in it.'

" 'Jeez, it's getting like a god forsaken picnic!' Eggy Stone shouted over the general uproar.

"Well, the door snapped open and shut down again. We could see them through the window, waving. And then the thing simply lifted up quietly and flew like magic toward and over the camera, and over the Lander, and we couldn't pick it up again. And that was absolutely all for thirty six long hours, until--

"- Say, Miz Tanton, haven't you got the tape of what they said when they came back? I just can't talk one word more."

So here's a break. All this next part I put together from Jim and Todd's report tapes of their trip, plus the officially cleaned up version of it that was in the Times. I found a stack of archive tape dupes in the janitor's cubby.

But before that, I should say that the Reverend Perry had been busy, up in the Martian sky. Mission Control at least had one astronaut who would take orders, and they'd told him to try to check out where the Thing had come from during the night. So he got busy with his 'scopes and sensors, and about the time Jim and Todd were going back for their chow, he had a report. A Martian building, or structure, "like a big mound of bubbles," was located in the foothills of Mount Eleuthera to the east. But as a city it was strange -it had no suburbs, no streets, not much internal differentiation, and no roads leading to or away. (Of course not; we know now it was a ship.)

So when the flying dumbbell bearing the two humans went off NASA's cameras, Perry knew where to try to pick them up. And by the way, although Perry was obedient to orders, he too was acting strange. He didn't volunteer anything, but on direct questioning he admitted that he was hearing voices in his head -at first he said something about a "ringing in his ears" - and when the aliens' voices cut in on the radio wavelength, Perry pulled himself down to his knees and NASA could see enough to realize he was both trying to pray and weep. This didn't disturb them overmuch- considering what else was going on- because the Reverend was known to indulge in short prayers whenever some special marvel of space came up, and he was addicted to brief thanksgivings at any lucky break. He was quite unselfconscious about this, and it never interfered with his efficiency, so maybe NASA figured they were covering all bets by having him along. General Streiter asked him if he was all right.

"I shall say no more about this now, General," Perry replied. "I recognized it is inappropriate to this phase of our mission. But I sincerely believe we have contacted a . . . a Higher Power, and that some very great good may come of this if we prove worthy."

Streiter took this in silence; he knew Perry as a congenial fellow Commie hater, and he had expected him to see Red skulduggery in the sudden materialization of the Thing. But Perry seemed to be taking another tack; the general respected him enough to let him be.

So back to Todd and Jim, who were being flown silently, magically, over the Martian landscape. They were at the big door window. The lift off was so gentle that Jim said he wouldn't have known they were moving if he hadn't been looking out. This reassured them about the absence of any straps or body holds in the padded compartment they had entered.

They were of course looking for a city or town, or at least the openings of tunnels, and the "mound of bubbles" Perry was reporting took them by surprise. Near the top of the mound was an opening where a sphere or two seemed to be missing; as they came over it, they saw that their craft exactly fitted in. Forward motion ceased quietly, and with a soft, non metallic brushing sound the modules that carried them dropped into the empty slots. Todd was inspired. "Hey, that's all one huge ship and this is a dinghy!"

His mind had broadcast the right picture. "Yess!" the aliens chorused, "our ship!"

Before they could see anything of the interior, a side window in their compartment opened, and a light blue, leathery looking trunk or tentacle about the size of a fire hose appeared. "Hello!" said the voice in their heads clearly.

"Hello," they said aloud.

The tentacle extended itself towards Jim's hand. Involuntarily he drew back. "Hello? Hello? Friends!" said the soundless voice. "Touch?"

Gingerly Jim extended his hand, and to his surprise, after a little confusion, the contact the alien wanted was achieved.

"It wants to shake hands!" Jim exclaimed to Todd.

"Yes! Friends! Shake!" And a similar window in the opposite wall opened, revealing the other alien. Its tentacle was larger, more wrinkled, and lighter blue. "Friends?"

A round of enthusiastic handshaking ensued. Then the second alien wanted something more. Its tentacle's tip pulled clumsily but gently at Todd's glove, and he got a confused message about taking it off and speaking.

When Todd got his glove off and took the alien's flesh barehanded, he gasped and seemed to stagger.

"What's wrong? Todd?"

"Okay- it's okay, very -. Try it."

Jim ungloved and grasped the tip of the alien limb. Then he too gasped -as contact occurred, there came with it a rush of communication, both verbal and pictorial, in which he could pick out bits or sequences of past events, present communication, speculations, images including a vision of himself plans, questions- he was all but inside an alien mindl

They were both laughing, delighted at this immense novelty to explore- and from the other sides of their padded walls came echoing chuckles. A pleasant fragrance like cinnamon was coming through their air filters, too. They were the first humans to smell the spicy odor emitted by these aliens when excited and interested.

"This is going to take practice," Jim gasped. He tried to convey the idea to the alien whose blue tentacle he was clasping, and received a strong feeling of assent. Delicately, it moved its tentacle within his grip, so that only certain surfaces were apposed, and the rush of mindflow quieted down.

Then it tapped his palm in a way that they soon came to recognize as meaning "I have something to tell/show you." And he found himself seeing a connected, coherent "movie" of the alien's bubblecraft approaching Earth sometime earlier, sampling the airborne communications- both radio and video and selecting the large land mass of North America to linger near. "All same language," said the voice in his head. "Many pictures- teach much." And then a sample of what they had set themselves to learn recognizable segments of "Dallas," "All My Children," "Sesame Street," newscasts- and ads, ads, ads, unceasing. "Much do not understand."

Whew! Jim tried to interrupt, but the flow went on. From it he gathered that the aliens had evoked a few hostile reactions from U.S. Air Force installations. Also the aliens soon learned that great intergroup hostilities existed on Earth. They had actually been on the verge of leaving -"Go look better planet" - when they learned about the Mars mission. It seemed to them that this would be the ideal place and way to meet humanity. So here they were, and here were our two astronauts -deep in converse, without having seen the forms or faces of their new friends. (For from the start, there had seemed to both men no question that a friendly meeting was in progress, and friendship was growing between them every moment.)

"Now you want to say Hello others, so we talk more?"

"Yes indeed."

A picture sequence in their minds prepared them and then the whole back wall of their compartment irised open, giving onto a great, softly glowing space. When they went to it they saw that the "mound of bubbles" was actually a shell around an open core; all the "bubbles" gave onto a common open space, in which were a few structures whose use or meaning they couldn't guess. All around the walls, ceiling, floor were the openings of compartments similar to their own,

some brightly lighted, some dim, some dark, so that the whole formed a kind of grand auditorium or meeting hall. At the mouths of nearly every individual compartment was an alien, or two or more, all with their great single eyes turned eagerly in their direction.

And here I have to pause, or put in asterisks or somehow prepare you before I describe what you notice I've omitted so far- the aliens' shapes.

The color of course you know -sky blue in the main, with here and there blues lighter or darker, from slate to peacock blue, from pale blue foam to deep marine. And the great eyes were quite human shaped, though the size of footlockers. And the tentacles you have met- each had groups of sucker discs which were apparently quiescent unless the owner wished to cling.

It is their general shape you don't yet know.

There is one, and only one, Earthly animal that they resembled, and they resembled it very closely. To put it bluntly, the aliens looked like gigantic cerulean octopuses.

Imagewise, of course, it was terrible.

In addition to being unspellable (octopusses, octopuses, octopoi, octopi, octopodes?), it conjured up every old horror cliché. And it was undeniable—they were in fact simply big, air-breathing octopuses; we all learned later that they had evolved in their planet's oceans, and slowly adapted to land as their oceans dried. Their mantles lost the propulsive function, and four of their back tentacles had evolved to limbs suitable for walking on land, leaving the other four to take on hand-and-arm and telepathic transmission abilities.

Their heads were large and bald and shiny above the single eye, and their mantles began where a chin should be, concealing their noses and mouths, or beaks, or whatever. Also to be glimpsed beneath the mantle's rippling edges were a mass of darker blue furlike organs, among which seemed to be some very small, delicate tentacles of unknown use.

The Earthly media of course went wild at first—GINAT BLUE OCTOPUSES ON MARS! Shrilled even the staidest. Octopus!—the name alone makes for the world's worst PR. That's why I've given you all the preliminary stuff, instead of just dictating from the newsclips.

The photos, when they came, made things a little better, because their postures were so versatile and graceful. And their basically radial bodies were obviously in transition to a bilateral symmetrical form—the four "back" leg-tentacles were much larger and longer, to free the front four. In fact if—as happened later—a small one wore a long robe with a hood to conceal the shiny bald dome above the eye, it could pass for a large somewhat top-heavy human form. And the spent much of their time thus upright, looking rather like multiply armed Indian deities, and smelling delightful. So that, as soon as Earth saw more of them, the original "sci-fi" horror images were seen to be ludicrously inappropriate, and were forgotten.

While Todd and Jim were taking in the nature of their audience, and vice-versa, their new friends were folding back the walls of their compartments and dragging the cushions to the edge of the front.

"We speak one-to-all like this. We show you." And the motioned to Todd and Jim to take seats. "No fear fall off, everybody catch."



Then they stationed themselves on each side, laid their transmission-tentacles across Jim's and Todd's shoulders, and seemed to listen.

"No-clothes too thick. Can take off, please? Air good here." So, the men gingerly lifted off their helmets—getting a real blast of carnation scent—and then started peeling down. They felt a bit odd about it in front of all those eager eyes, but what the hell, their bodies were no more alien than a wombat's to them. So they sat down again, nude, and the tentacles came back. "Ahhh! Good!"

And with that the two big aliens stretched their other transmitter arms out to the aliens in the compartment next door, and these did the same to those around them, so that in a minute the whole great amphitheater was intricately laced together, with the men as the foci.

While this was happening, Todd felt a plucking at his shins. He looked down, and there was this dark blue tentacle coming up at him from a compartment below. He heard, or sensed, what could only have been a giggle, and next instant three big round bright eyes were staring up at him over the edge of the floor. A spicy fume of interest wafted up.

The alien next to him emitted a reproving sound, and batted at the eyes with a spare limb. "Young ones!" Peering down, Todd and Jim saw a cluster of smaller aliens in the chamber below, evidently trying to get in on the network by short circuit. "It's okay." He grinned. "No problem to us."

So their two big friends let the little fellows sneak tendrils in to touch the men's legs and feet.

"Okay ... you go first?" said the one next to Jim. "Oh, wait. Us name Angli. An-gli," it repeated aloud. "You name?"

"Hello, Angli!" said Jim to them both. "Us name hu-mans. But"—he pointed at the other—"you have special personal name, for you only?"

Well, that was their introduction to the one great difficulty of mind-speech-asking questions. It took minutes for them to get sorted out as individuals, and even so they weren't sure they had it right. Jim said, "The customary thing here seems to be to call up a quick flash-image of the person, or his eye, or something special about him or her. I don't think verbal names are used much. But our friends seem to be something like Urizel and Azazel, for what it's worth. We'll try calling them that and see if it works." Then he put his arm around Todd. "We together, hu mans," he said. "But he alone"—gesturing—"is Todd. I -me, here—am Jim. Todd . . . Jim. Jim . . . Todd. Get it?"

"Me Jane, you Tarzan," muttered Todd.

"Shut up, you idiot, this is no time to clown. We'll have to be sure somehow that they know what a joke is. All right. Urizel, Azazel, and all the rest of you Angli what do you want to know about us humans first?"

And so started the greatest show and tell anthropology class of their lives.

Surprisingly soon, it got itself organized with their two friends alternately passing questions to the men. Not surprisingly, in view of their TV fare, the first queries were mainly about economics. Todd had the pleasure of trying to answer, "What is 'money?'" He managed to form a picture of a medium of exchange passing from hand to hand in the human world. And luckily, the Angli seemed to have something to relate this to; Jim got a visual image of furry

brown creatures carrying on their tails stacks of big square things with holes in them that had to be clumsy coins.

"Gosh, what does a really rich one do?" Todd didn't expect an answer, but the Angli had picked up the drift of his query, and he got a clear mental picture of a pompous looking brown alien followed by a formal train of specialized coin bearers, their long tails erect and loaded to the tips with big discs.

Both humans and Angli laughed.

"What do you do with money?" Azazel asked. Jim gulped and tried to visualize a bank teller, vaults, checkbooks.

"I fear I'm not doing justice to the international banking system," he said to Todd. "But, dammit, ours has to make more sense than carrying your money around on your tail!"

"I'm beginning to wonder," Todd muttered. "No, no," he said to Azazel. "Not important."

It was now very apparent that the humans were by no means the first new race the Angli had met. Fleeting images of many other aliens, worlds, cities, ships, crossed their perceptions from various Angli minds. These aliens seemed to have spent years jaunting about the galaxy, meeting people and things.

As to the Angli's own home world the notion that they were Martians was disposed of very early they were shown an image of a planet not unlike Earth, but greener, near a GO type sun. A view of the nearby constellations enabled the men to guess that it was near the nebula in Orion's sword. A close up view showed a lush, attractive landscape with a bubbledome town.

And the Angli were not alone! Another intelligent race lived there no, wait, had lived there once "many times ago." The blurred image of a porpoiselike creature with legs seemed to have passed through many minds. "They go" but whether they had left or died off was never clear; these Angli perhaps didn't know. The Angli were alone there now.

One last fact that came out was sensational: the "bubbles" the men were in wasn't their only ship. They had maybe half a dozen ships and stuff parked on Luna, on the back side of our moon, where we couldn't see them. One or more contained a lot more Angli, who wanted simply to sleep until a really promising planet was found. ("Wake us when we get someplace!") Very young Angli were also asleep there. Another one -or more contained members of another race, whose planet had been in trouble, so the Angli volunteered to find them a new one. (In their experience, the galaxy seemed to be full of all kinds of planets just waiting to be found.) This particular race needed an aquatic environment, it seemed.

Another ship seemed to contain assorted seeds and supplies; despite their casual behavior, the Angli really had great practical sense about essentials. And at least two were empty- one had contained a race the Angli had successfully relocated. And a final one contained a spectacular cargo we on Earth were soon to get a view of.

(Of course, on learning that other ships existed, the general and others promptly began to suspect that the Angli also had battleships or other military capabilities parked up there, and many covert plans were laid to sneak around Luna and peek. But they all came to nothing, and nothing hostile ever showed up.)

Each query raised a dozen others; the hours passed like minutes. Finally, a growing emptiness in their middles forced the men to call a halt.

"We eat now?"

The Angli too, it seemed, were tired and hungry, although so fascinated that they seemed ready to go on indefinitely. But at Jim's question a cheer broke out among the young ones below. In no time they had produced great baskets of what looked like hardtack, and were carrying them around the auditorium, passing a container out to each row. Each Angli in turn helped him -or herself to a piece, and tucked it neatly under a mantle fold in their central bodies, where the men had surmised their mouths, or beaks, might be.

"We've got to get this gender business straightened out," Todd said with his mouth full. "Oh, cripes. How do we do that, Tarzan?"

"Maybe we don't, until we can produce a real Jane." And so it turned out. He seemed to evoke a response to his first tries at describing human sexes "Humans like Jim and me here" he indicated his genitalia "we call 'men.' Other humans have lumps here but not here we call them 'women.' And it takes the two kinds together to make young ones." Todd continued. "How do you make young?"

But here all impression of understanding faded, and an Angli question, "What you call Mathlon?" stumped everybody. Mind-visions of an Angli picking things out of a puddle didn't help.

Theodora Tanton here again. I just excerpted all that above from Jim's long report, to give the atmosphere and show some of the problems; I guess that some parts belong in the after lunch session. And don't shoot me, sisters, about the gender part and the "lumps" -that's just what the man said. I put most dialogue as if it were ordinary speech instead of explaining whether it was telepathy or audible speech each time. Men and Angli were developing a sort of half speech/half thought lingo that worked well.

The afternoon, or what was left of it, went as fast as the morning, and soon the sunlight that filtered through into the great central dome was visibly reddening into a typical Martian sunset.

"We go back now, please," the men said. "Our people have much fear."

"Ohh kayee!" said Urizel, and they all laughed. One thing the men couldn't get over was how human their laughter was- and they thought ours was incredibly Anglian.

So they closed up the doors, the humans suited up, the module lifted away silently from its slot, and the trip repeated itself in reverse. They tried again- it had come up all day- to understand the source of its power, but always the same answer baffled them. "We do with bodies. Like so -"and the speaker would loft himself a few meters, apparently effortlessly, and descend again. "You no do, eh? We find many races no do; only one we find can do." And a picture came in their minds of a large, raylike being, sailing and flapping above an alien landscape. The Angli tapped his head regretfully. "Fly pretty, but not have much brain. Come later, maybe."

Now on their return trip they could see their friends loading in, and it was obvious that they propelled their craft by simply pushing it up from inside, as a man under a table might lift it with his back-but with no need to press down on anything. Nor did it seem tiring.

"Antigravity is the best guess we can make," Jim told Earth later.

One more item they were shown: in both the end compartments was a window in the floor, beside which was a bank of what turned out to be outside lights, including infrared. They were powered by small batteries.

"Use up fast," Azazel said, frowning. And they didn't turn the lights on again until they were over the Earth Lander. This contraption was the first construction of metal or wires the men had seen. It looked handmade. "We get from special people," Azazel said, and transmitted a brief shot of some sort of aliens in an apparent workshop. "Not on our home."

"We make light too," Urizel said, and from under his (or her) mantle suddenly came a soft blue glow, which brightened to a point, then turned off. "Is work," the big Angli said expressively. Light was evidently strictly for emergency use. They seemed to have fantastically good night vision; the men suspected that their use of the floodlights as they neared the Lander was more for the Earthmen's sake than their own. "You no see so good in dark."

"Maybe they were surprised when we didn't seem to see their approach last night," Jim said.

And then it was time to say good bye and get back in their own little craft. And report to Mission Control.

"I bet they don't let us off the hook for hours and hours and hours," Todd said. And he was proved right. Kevin remembers vividly the shout that rang through Mission Control when the camera picked up their approaching lights. And then it took half the night to relay and record what I've put down here, plus a lot of repeats and mix ups I've cut out.

Oh I've forgotten one big thing. Just as they were leaving the dome a senior looking Angli sent them a message through Azazel.

"He say, why not we take you home to Earth? Go quick, like maybe thirty forty your days. We get human now up in sky, leave your ships here, you come back and get some other time. And you help us say Hello and make friendship with Earth?"

"What an offer! And with a soft landing at the end," crooned Todd ecstatically.

"Tell him yes, most happy," replied Jim. "Say is he your leader?"

Now that brings up another subject I've been postponing their government. As far as we ever found out, they virtually had none. The older Angli formed a loose set of council that anybody who wanted to could be in. Any question, like where to go next, or what to do about a specific problem, was apparently solved by informal mind melding. People would put up ideas, and they'd be mulled over until a consensus evolved. What happened in the event of a serious disagreement? But there doesn't seem to have been any. "Oh, we take turns," said Azazel negligently.

Anyway, thus it was that the great homecoming of our successful Mars mission was in an alien ship in no way under the control of NASA, although they politely accepted all our communications. And they seemed surprised at the close supervision expected from and by Mission Control. On their home world, apparently, people just wandered hither and yon, off to a moon, or whatever.

One of the rites of growing up, it seemed, was making your own vehicle (they

were indeed gigantic dried seed pods) and fitting it out for long trips. With their long range mind speech capability, there were no problems about getting lost, and their world seemed to have had few dangers. About the only mishap that seemed likely to occur to young ones jaunting about was when their presence or chatter annoyed some elder citizen who would complain to the council and have them grounded for a week or two. Like youngers everywhere, they prized mobility and were always putting in work improving their craft, which virtually served as alternate homes. The climate, one gathered, was very benign.

It sounded idyllic; I wasn't the only one to start to wonder why, really, they had left ...

The day of their arrival on Earth has been so amply covered in schoolbooks that I have only small pieces to add, like about the riot. What went on at first was all standard this great beige bubbly wafting down toward a cleared off area in a sea of people, escorted for the last miles by practically everything the Air Force could put in the air. It sat down resiliently and before it had finished heaving, Angli all over the top began opening doors and looking out. A group escorting the three astronauts got out together and flew them down to where a cordoned and carpeted way to the receiving stand was marked off.

There were Urizel and Azazel, and a pair of aged senior councillors the men had persuaded to come along. Their progress was highly informal; people could see that the men were trying to report back to their Commander in Chief in a stylish, military way, but the Angli were hard to keep in line. They began thought broadcasting to the crowd in general, right over the heads of the officials. And then they hooked into the PA system with "Hello! Peace! Friends!" And the press corps broke the lines by the ship and began infiltrating everywhere. Kevin was with the NASA Press contingent; he passed me a few tidbits. And the aged councillors, to whom one Earthman was much like another, began greeting the police and Secret Service men who were standing, arms linked, with their backs to the ship, trying to contain the swaying crowd. And during the official party's slow progress to the stand, Angli began coming out of the ship and making short flights over the heads of the crowd.

The stage was set for trouble, and it happened five or six dark blue young Angli came out together with their arms full of something and flew over the crowd to the right, looking for a place to land and calling out "Friends!" and laughing that human laugh. What they had was blooms from the ship's hydroponics big, fragrant stalks that unfortunately looked a bit like hand grenades. The crowd was too thick below them, so they began dropping the flowers onto people's heads. At that, the humans below started to mill, some people backing away in alarm while others pressed forward curiously. And the youngsters circled overhead, laughing and pelting people with flowers.

Suddenly someone took real fright, and a small local stampede away from the Angli started. Others, seeing people running and feeling themselves pushed, began to run and push aimlessly too. Shouting broke out. The pushing intensified fast and a woman screamed and went down.

All this showed only as a confused place on the edge of the TV screens, while the astronauts and the Angli were still straggling up the cordoned pathway to the stand where the presidential party was waiting. As the sound of shouting rose from off screen, the United States Marine Band broke into a louder march piece, which amplified the confusion over an outbreak of real screaming and yells.

Urizel, sensing what was happening, dropped Todd's arm and flew over the

tangle with the idea of shooing the youngsters back to the ship. But the arrival of this monster of much greater size frightened more people. The fallen woman was trampled and began to shriek. Urizel, spotting her, dived to the spot and sent his long tentacles down to extricate her, really scaring the people nearby.

About then, police sirens started up, an ambulance got its warbler going and began pressing into the scene. This excited more people outside the immediate nucleus. Some tried to gather their families and run, while others ran toward the uproar. The yelling developed a panicky, ominous beat. Meanwhile, those on the red carpet were still making their slow way to the President on the stand.

Now, every telepathic race is well aware of the terrible danger of contagious panic, the threat of a mind storm. Both inside the ship and out, the Angli became aware of what was going on, and about to get much worse. Their response was automatic.

In perfect synchrony, they all stopped whatever they were doing, and sent out a united, top power mental command: "Quiet! Be calm! Sleep! . . . QUIET! BE CALM! SLEEP!" It blasted the field.

So powerful was this thought command that by the first repetition the yells and shouts died in people's throats. The uproar tapered down to a strange silence, in which the band raggedly played on for a few bars before they too were overwhelmed. Running people slowed to a walk, to a standstill; their heads drooped, and they saw the ground looking invitingly comfortable, attracting them to relax down. And suddenly, all in the moments that the great command silently went out, what had been a wildly agitated mob became a field of peaceful sleepers. Some slept sitting with their heads on their knees, others sprawled full length, their heads on any neighboring body.

The police and Secret Service men were of course affected too, and after a moment's heroic resistance, they went down in waves atop their sleeping charges.

The band and the PA system were silent, and on the receiving stand the dignitaries retained presence of mind only to locate a convenient chair before collapsing into sleep. The President was already dozing; he opened his mouth and emitted a few snorts indicative of deeper slumbers, while his lady slept decorously beside him. A stray seagull alighted on the Secretary of State, and went to sleep on one leg.

Close overhead, at what had been the center of the disturbance, floated Urizel, the woman he had rescued sleeping in his grasp. He spotted the stalled ambulance, which emanated images of physical aid.

"Wake up," he said to the crew. "Here is human hurt." They snapped back to consciousness rubbing their eyes, and jumped to man the stretcher.

"Put her here."

A press photographer beside them also woke, reaching by reflex for his camera, and got the banner headline shots of his life -Urizel stooping low with the unconscious woman draped photogenically across his tentacles, his great eye luminous with compassion and concern. "ALIEN RESCUES WOMAN FROM CROWD! ALIEN CARRYING GIRL HE SAVED TO AMBULANCE!"

(I found out from Kevin, who had been there too and waked first, that the photographer had luckily missed an even more sensational shot. Urizel, noting that this human he carried seemed to differ from the astronauts, had seized

the opportunity to check out the locations and nature of those "lumps" Todd had told him of- in the process rearranging quite a lot of her clothes.)

The woman turned out to be a Mrs. C. P. Boynton. She was only slightly bruised, and her statements to the press were ecstatic.

"I was so scared, I knew that hundreds of people would trample on me and I'd be killed. I just prayed to God. 'Help me!' And suddenly there was this great blue being flying over me like an angel, and he just reached down and pulled me out from under all those terrible feed And oh, he smells so lovely!"

What I want to convey is that the Angli would be getting a very good press, right from Day One.

Back at the stand, the official greetings to and by the President finally came off. Perry tactfully roused the great man by murmuring, "Sir, I believe you were about to say a few words," and he automatically rose up into his speech just in time to divert the aged councillors from returning to their ship. And the band began to play, rather disjointedly -but it isn't true that they then or ever played "Nearer My God to Thee." And the reception rolled off.

When it came time for Todd, Jim, and Perry to part company from their alien friends, with whom they'd spent over a month of intimate travel, things got pretty emotional. During the voyage home, the Rev. Perry had been observed to attach himself to Azazel in particular. Now, up on the receiving stand, the great blue forms of the Angli were turning away, to go back to their ship and leave the humans to their own. They were up on their back tentacles, their heads towering above everything as they bade polite farewells to the President, his lady, and the Secretary of State, now minus his seagull. Perry quietly moved closer. Suddenly he dropped to his knees and flung his long arms around the tentacles Azazel was standing on. (Perry was a huge man.) After a moment of confusion, it became clear that he was simply hugging the alien, his face laid against Azazel's side, and weeping. He was also mumbling something that sounded so private that no one listened, except Kevin. And no one knew what thought speech he was sending to his big alien friend, or receiving back from him.

The strange tableau lasted only an instant. Then Perry got up with great dignity and stepped back into line with Todd and Jim. And the moment was swamped by the hand tentacle shaking going on all around.

Kevin, who had been just outside the stand, told me afterward that at the end Perry had said clearly, "Non Angli sed angeli " and if you don't place the quotation at first, listen on.

Now to sum up the impression the aliens were making, I'll give you a letter I received in response to my first appeal for eyewitnesses. It was written by one Cora Lee Boomer, aged eighty nine, like this:

"Of course I only saw it on TV you know. Maybe I saw it better that way. The Army cleared off this big sandy place, Dry Lake Something. And they had guards all over. But the people just filled it up. And about eleven A.M., I remember because it was time to feed the baby, Donald, we saw it coming down in the sky. It was like a big bunch of grapes only no stems.

"And it kept coming down, real slow, I guess not to hurt anything, and pretty soon a helicopter was going around it, taking pictures. It was kind of tan colored, with antennae sticking out. All these round things pressed together like something I used to see honeycombs. When they sent pictures from close up you could see all these blue eyes inside looking out. So beautiful.

Excuse me, I can't say it right.

"Mostly I try not to think about it; even today I can just see it. But that man I had then, he thought he was so smart. And I was a young fool, I did whatever he wanted. He said that it was all no good. Stay away from Whitey junk, he said. Excuse me. I was so young.

"But when they landed and got out with the three men and I saw their eyes close up, I had a feeling he was wrong. They looked so beautiful. Like caring and understanding. And smiling too. I should have believed my own eyes.

"So I only saw things start. He came in and saw me looking at it and turned the set off -it was on all the channels, see- and said, 'Get my lunch,' so I never saw much of them after that. And of course I never got to go.

"I think now he was wrong, he was crazy. They were good, good. But I was so young and the baby kept me pretty busy, and with my job. Now I'm old I know there's more to life I wonder what it be like. George, he's long gone.

"I just remember that big loving eye. Sometimes I cry a lot.

"I hope this is what you said you wanted. Sincerely, Cora Lee Boomer."

This is Theodora Tanton again, saying, well, that was the way the Earth's first meeting with the Angli went. I know the White Book doesn't tell about the riot, and the little points Kevin saw. But they're important, to show how people were starting to feel a certain way about the aliens, to explain part of what happened later.

People could have been disappointed, see, or bored. The aliens brought no hardware. And all the films and fiction we used to see kind of assumed that our first contact with ALIENS was going to result in a lot of new fancy technology, or at least a cure for the common cold. Goodies. But as Urizel said, these people brought us only peace and friendship -at least on the surface people could see. Their own goodies, like antigravity and telepathy, were just in their bodies- they could no more explain them or transmit them than we could hand over our sense of smell.

And then more things happened to excite the press. To everyone's surprise, the big ship simply broke up next day, with Angli flying pieces of it all over. Soon there was nothing left in NASA's guard ring but some struts and potted plants.

"ALIENS WANT TO SEE WORLD! ALIENS TO VISIT CATHEDRALS! ALIENS STUDY WORLD RELIGIONS! CALL FOR LANGUAGE SPEAKERS! ALIENS DO NOT READ OR WRITE! ALIENS WANT TO MEET EVERYBODY ON EARTH!" (That would be some of the youngsters chatting up the press. People had trouble sorting out the kids' stuff, at first.)

So Angli started turning up in little groups, or even alone, all over, at any time of day or night. Of course that gave the security forces of all the big nations total fits.

It turned out they needn't have worried too much about the Angli's safety. (Their own security was another matter.) But it's hard to assassinate a telepath -hostile thoughts blasted out signals to them long before the thinker could act. I don't know if this is in the White Book or not, but just to show you:

One afternoon some Angli were in Libya, chatting with people at a market by a



highway where cars were whizzing by like mad amongst the livestock and all. Suddenly every Angli grabbed a nearby human or two and shot straight up in the air, maybe twenty meters. At the same time, two more Angli grabbed a certain car, and flying with it, simply flipped it tail over into the empty space they'd made. Next second there was an explosion as a bomb went off inside the car, and a few people got cuts. The would be bombers were dead.

It all happened so fast people were totally bewildered; they had to piece together afterward that some crazies had been going to blow the Angli up. And the Angli had taken defensive steps both for themselves and nearby people. That part of it was what stuck in people's minds when it was all over that Angli automatically rescued you.

Then there was another big episode that may be in the White Book. It was when an Angli named Gavril was being taken on a scenic drive down the great road called the Corniche, in France. Gavril got tired of looking at the dirty Mediterranean- I guess he could hear the thoughts of dying fish and seabirds and started casting about.

Next thing, he had flashed up onto the air from the open convertible, paced the car briefly, and then come to rest on a railway overpass. A rail line ran below the road. By the time his hosts got back to him, he was standing with closed eye, so evidently deep in concentration that they just waited.

Then train hootings began in the distance and Gavril opened his eye.

"Is o kayee now," he said. "People see people." And he lofted back into the car, offering no explanation. Of course his hosts began questioning, especially as there seemed to be some excitement starting, down by the railroad.

What had happened, it transpired, is that Gavril had picked up the thoughts of two trainloads of people approaching each other at terrific speed in the tunnels below. Happening to notice that the line was single track, he became concerned and hopped off to check.

Yes, he realized. They were heading for a frightful crash. Gavril shot strong mental blasts at the trains' engineers- it was hard work simultaneously at targets speeding opposite ways- "Danger! STOP!" As I said, it was difficult. When he finally brought them to a stop, the headlight of each train was just visible to the other.

Well, when his hosts realized what he'd done, they called in the press, and hundreds of grateful passengers besieged the scene. A photo of Gavril hovering over a locomotive, captioned, "ANGE DE MERCI," appeared in all the big French papers that night. Apparently about six hundred people would have died without his intervention; somebody, presumably terrorists, had bugged the automatic switch and alarm systems.

Well, of course there was no holding the media after that, and scads of episodes, true and concocted, were headlined. There grew up a feeling that Angli were symbols of benevolence or good fortune and that it was lucky to be in the presence of one. People actually began plucking at them, hoping to tear off a little scrap of "armor" to carry with them like rabbit's feet, I guess. But of course they weren't wearing armor; they were in their skins. The situation would have been dangerous and painful had it not been for their telepathic warnings. As it was, a couple of youngsters got scratched, and they all took to wearing flowing scarves they could cut up and pass out. "Is a little cra zee, people your world," Todd said Urizel told him. Of course profuse apologies were extended by all authorities, but there is no

controlling mobs. And the Angli began drawing mobs, crowds of very emotionally wrought up people, quite different from merely curious or sensation-seekers.

During this period, there were things going on that I should know and tell you, because for sure they're not in the White Book, but you know, I never completed my research -never began it really. To do so I've have had to go to what's left of a dozen countries, and get into the U.S.S.R. and even find certain hospitals. For the Angli were visiting places and talking to people they never saw fit to mention to NASA or anybody here, even to Todd, Jim, and Perry who had become their more or less official escorts.

Well, you may ask, what kind of inside story do I have, if I never did the research? Oh, the research was just an ornament I envisioned to the real tale that fell into my hands. Wait!

And that aside about the hospitals is a guess, by the way. It could have been university labs, or even private industry facilities. The gist of it is that somehow some Angli found the means to do a spot of sophisticated scientific research into human physiology. And they seemed to have an instinct for places where the press was strictly controlled, but that only came out later.

What came out then were two things of overpowering interest. First was their plan to leave.

To leave? To leave? To just go jaunting off somewhere out in the galaxy and maybe never come back?

This was a jolt. Maybe some higher ups somewhere had done some serious thinking about how all this would end, but it hadn't reached the public. In fiction and films there was always some sort of permanence after the great Earth/Alien meeting; either the aliens were trying to take over, or Earthmen had beaten a path to their planetary doorstep, or something implied that there would be more contact, or at least some permanent effects. Not just this "Hello, nice to meet you, bye bye" business the aliens seemed to have in mind. A visit. Was that all this was?

The answer seemed to be Yes.

Why? Not that anyone had thought seriously of their staying around forever, but, well, why leave so soon?

Answer: They had things to attend to. There were all those beavers, or crodociles, or whatever, sleeping up on the moon, waiting for the Angli to find them a water world. And there were- God, there were all those other Angli up there, waiting to wake up when they found a real planet! And of course Earth wouldn't do. Here the Angli tried to be tactful, but it soon came out -Earth was to them a sort of planetary slum, too dirty and polluted and used up and overcrowded to live in. "An interesting place to visit, but- "

Not, of course, that any government had actually extended them an offer of real estate. (Some private citizens, especially those from Texas and Australia who seemed to own extraordinary amounts of the Earth's surface, did make some offers to "interested Angli families.")

What would be really nice, people thought, would be if the Angli were to settle on the Moon, or someplace relatively close. What about Venus or Mars? Couldn't they remake one, with some magical planet shaping devices? And stay around?

Answer: Too bad, but we really haven't any magical planet shaping tools, and

everything else in your particular solar system is quite, quite uninhabitable. Sorry again.

As all this went on at an accelerating tempo, various people extended to the Angli some truly remarkable job offers, or suggested ways that they could make a living on Earth. Even the Mafia turned out to be very interested in their possibilities as security guards, with that telepathic alarm system. Strange Arabs called upon them at night. Several large churches even offered them substantial sums to stay and lead services. And a great many national intelligence or security agencies tendered offers.

All of these the Angli listened to with good humored mystification. One evening when Earthly economics were being discussed, an Angli pulled out a coconut sized pod filled with what appeared to be five to ten carat diamonds of exquisite color. "Like these good?" he asked. "We pick up, over there" waving a tentacle in the general direction of the Alpha Centauri. "Get get quick." By the time the matter was explained the bottom had fallen out of the diamond market from Pretoria to Zurich. And it was intimated that they had resources of gold, or anything you cared to name, cached about.

What they really liked personally, was flowers. Particularly dandelions of large size. Private applications to the Angli took on a distinctly different tone after this.

But it did not affect the public's emotional view of them as simply benevolent miracle workers, angels of mercy or, now that we are getting nearer to the point, simply angels. Clearly a great outcry of mourning, a great weeping, lay ahead. The day they would leave would be so black. People couldn't think about it.

And then came the second event, or shock.

The Angli seemed to be completing their study of our cultures and especially our religions if "study" isn't too formal a term for what they did, which was simply to ask questions. They were very interested in anything we were doing, whether it was running a paint factory or conducting a service in Notre Dame. But they always asked people about their beliefs, or rather, about their god or gods. And one question which never failed to come up was, "Where is your god?"

After they had received an inventory of descriptions of, say, the Hindu pantheon, they always wound things up by asking, "Where are they? Where are they now?"

They got strange answers, of course. People pointed to the sky, or Westminster Abbey, or the Golden Pavilion; one man took them to the Grand Canyon. But when it came to seeing a given god or gods--well, we had to struggle with terms like "immaterial" or "transcendent" or "immanent." And they seemed . . . not exactly disappointed, but very serious.

Finally one day Todd turned the tables on them. "Do you have a god?" he asked.

"Oh yes. Many."

"And where are your gods?"

They were talking on a balcony overlooking the moonlit Great Pagoda of Moulmein. Azazel waved a tentacle moonward. "Up there."

"Your gods are up there with your ships? In spirit, you mean?"

"No. Gods there! Many. Most medium, some very old, one new big one, the greatest now. In ship."

Well, everybody figured they were sculptures, or images, or sacred relics of some sort. But the Angli assured us they were alive, very much alive. Only sleeping, like the other Angli.

Well, uh, er ... could they be seen? Could we go there and see some?

But they were asleep, Azazel repeated. Then he and Urizel conferred.

"Maybe is good they wake up one time," Urizel concluded. "Travel sleep long. You want me bring them here, show you?"

Did we!

Three reporters were present.

"ANGLI HAVE REAL GODS ASLEEP ON MOON." "ANGLI GODS TO VISIT EARTH!"

And so an Angli delegation took off for Luna, to prepare their gods. And U.S. officialdom prepared to receive a supernatural visitation. Of course they didn't believe, then, that they'd be getting anything supernatural; their thinking ran to imagining Angli dressed up in costumes.

But the Angli seemed to be taking this very seriously. They returned from all over Earth, and their original ship reconstituted itself. Seeing this, the reception committee decided they had best take it more seriously too, and a committee of Earth's religious heads were convened to be in the reception stand. The Pope at that time was a great traveler, and very with it; he insisted on being present. Of course, this threw official ecclesiastical circles into turmoil, as sanctioning a pagan religion. But he said, "Nonsense. All of us better come, to see what they've got." And the Patriarch of the Greek Orthodox faith for once agreed. The two British Archbishops were naturally eager. And the Protestant denominations joined in. So, seeing this unprecedentedly ecumenical gathering of Christians, the heads of other faiths were stimulated to attend, and what had started as a simple showing of alien idols, or something of the sort, grew into the full scale worldwide summit meeting of every religious affiliation that we all saw on TV. It all required a special supercommittee, and the protocol was a nightmare.

What it was really like, by the end of a few days, was a sort of confrontation of all Earth's religions with their alien counterparts. But it was a confrontation we'd lost from the start: while we had human officials in all kinds of fancy garb and ceremonial ways, they had -gods.

As we soon saw, when, that night a week or so later -it took place at night another great bubbleship came drifting moth quiet into the searchlights' glare and settled into its cleared landing spot. ('The officials had learned from the first fiasco; there was a carpeted path to the reception committee, but the whole area alongside the ship where informal Angli excursions might take place was cleared too. And the crowd was held well back, behind some temporary banks of seats to which admission was charged. Great video screens hung over the field, so all who came could see.)

And they came! The stands were soon overfull, with people crammed in everywhere.

As the ship settled, it could be seen that this was a larger craft, with

bigger "bubbles," and a huge central bubble or dome. All the Angli were now present, lined up in a cordon around the perimeter in an unusually orderly fashion. And with them were a troop of Earth children, their arms full of flowers to present to the visiting divinities.

An outer door opened, and out shambled a huge, somewhat decrepit Angli figure, his great eye watering and blinking in the glare. He was festooned all over with what appeared to be animal remains, especially fish heads and tails, and his head bore the gigantic mask of some unknown beast.

"An er animist totem of early days," said the announcer's voice. "Surprisingly long lived." Angli attendants handed the tribal godlet a dripping morsel to eat, and led it to a roped off area of resting couches. It sprawled on tentacles rather than walking upright, being evidently from a time when the Angli were still semiaquatic.

Next to emerge was a swathed barrel shape, obese and possibly somewhat senile. Its eye rolled in what appeared to be malevolent confusion, as it was led away waddling, leaving a wet, slimy trail.

"An early fertility deity," the announcer a hastily summoned anthropologist explained. "The next to appear will be avatars of this early form. You will note the increasing cultural complexity."

(The more alert members of the press, seeing the trend of events, were sending out emergency calls for anthropologists, ethnologists, and anyone who might interpret matters.)

"This," said one of these, as the file of ever taller and more impressive Angli divinities made their various ways down the red carpet, "would represent about the Earthly level of Astarte or Ishtar.

The Angli goddess, a veiled form undulating past him, turned her huge eye and sent him a look that made him drop his notepad.

By this time it was evident, from the height and demeanor of the newcomers, that they were not ordinary Angli dressed in costumes, let alone statuary or mobile idols. No; this was another order of beings, coming into view before them in the night, and the crowd grew strangely silent. Even today, we don't know what they were. We only know we saw gods.

The last in this group struck even Earthly eyes as a radiant figure, and she alone appeared conscious of the dignitaries' stand. The dazzling lights, her sparkling, shimmering form and veils, made her- for it was to all Earthly eyes a "she"- at one moment a bizarrely seductive alien, at the next a surpassing Earthly beauty. As she paced gracefully down the carpet, she flung up one cerulean limb, and out of the dark overhead a nighthawk dropped to it and perched there. From somewhere strange music played.

With a slight air of disdain she let her attendants turn her into the roped off waiting area, and as she turned, her painted eye shot straight at the Papal Eminence an unmistakable wink. Then she stooped to accept an armful of flowers from a bedazzled child, proceeded into the reserved area, and stretched out upon an oversized, scroll ended divan.

It needed no commentator to tell the viewers that great Aphrodite had passed by.

Behind her came a vast grizzled figure who limped, as had the Earthly Vulcan. And after a little space, a towering, commanding figure who glittered with

menace as he strode contemptuously down the way, alien weapons held high. Yet his eye seemed clear and boyish, though all else spoke of war and wrath; even so had Mars appeared to his mother.

Then came troops and bevvies of bewilderingly decked and jeweled figures, some carrying emblematic instruments minor deities, as they might be Muses, or Nereids, Dreads, Dryads of the Greek pantheon, or Peris and Algerits and Indus of others. These danced along under rainbows, piping or singing, to herald the advent of a grand, hoary elder figure, the inevitable old male of unlimited power and authority, whether Zeus, Jove, Wotan, or Jehovah. Although the night was perfectly clear, the rumble of far off thunder accompanied them.

Singing had broken out among the Angli as they all passed by; it was the first time humans had heard the Angli sing, and they found the chants both strange and pleasing.

And on and on they came, deities resembling nothing familiar to Western eyes but more familiar to Persian, Indian, or Chinese: some in weird built out costumes and serpentine decorations, great curled and feathered headpieces representing frowning grins, or elongations of the eye to dreamlike proportions. In hieratic poses, they made their ways to the appointed spot, and attendant heraldic animals came with them. Also in the air were random sparks, or flames, that looked sometimes like flowers, sometimes like snowflakes, but seemed to have a life of their own, as they danced and clustered here and there.

Finally in the midst of what appeared to be a throng of patriarchal tribal or national divinities, there stood out one of seemingly great power, draped in long white robes. He was oddly attended by what looked at first like small mechanical toys in the shapes of alien children, with sweet luminous eyes. But they were alive.

"A culminant patristic deity," the announcer explained. "He repeatedly reincarnated himself in his own son. Evidently he still has a few believers left. And now- " He went into a huddle with his Angli consultants.

In the pause that followed, all could see that one of the small son-figures had slowed to a stop, and seemed disoriented or ill. But a nearby Angli stooped and patted it solicitously, and it soon revived and ran on.

The somewhat shaken commentator was asking the Angli, "Why do you carry with you these-uh- apparently living gods of old dead religions? I'd think that your one real god or gods would be enough."

"Ah," said the Angli (some of whom could now speak several Earth languages quite well), "but you see, the minds and spirits of those who worshiped those gods are still in us, under the surface of civilization. And civilization can fail. When we notice that one of those old divinities is growing in vigor, in vitality, yes?- it gives us warning. Too many among us are unknowingly worshipping those qualities again. So" - he made stamping motions- "like small fires, we put out quick. You see? But now -"

The singing had fallen silent, and for a few breaths no one moved; there was a feeling of something impending.

Into the silence there stepped, or materialized, a tall robed and veiled figure twice the height of any that had gone before. It was indefinably female. As she came down the way, her face turned toward the dignitaries' stand, she gave no sign, but there was a concerted indrawing of breaths, almost a gasp. Across her single eye was a domino mask; in the depths of its

opening could be seen a deep spark of smoldering red gold. But where the rest of her face and head should be was only black emptiness under the hood. Her garments moved as though covering a gaunt figure, but no feet or hands revealed themselves. Where she passed, children hid their faces in their flowers. And the line of Angli bowed like willows in a silent wind.

Beside her paced an alien animal that she seemed to be restraining on a choke chain; one of her long sleeves descended to its head, but no hand could be seen. Below the creature's eye was a tangle of tusks and cruel fangs; its limbs were coarsely padded and savagely spurred, and its expression was a blend of coldness and hate. Once, as she moved, her beast lifted its head and gave out a long-drawn baying sound, and the distant thunder growled.

As this apparition neared the stand, it was seen that a great single regal seat was placed for her apart from the others. In this she seated herself impassively. The surrounding Angli had dropped to what would have been a kneeling position in humans, and the nearby humans involuntarily turned their eyes away, and dropped their heads low.

"This is she whom we now worship," the Angh by the announcer said. "She has many names but only one essence. Here you might call her the law of Cause and Effect."

"What is the . . . the animal?"

"That is her instrument of vengeance on all who violate her commandments. Either knowingly or unknowingly. Listen!"

From all around the horizon came the echo of a baying sound.

"Alas, my poor friends on your Earth -you do not worship her, but I fear your race has done violence to her Law. It may be that some terrible punishment is readying itself for your innocent ones."

Bravely, the human commentator asked, "You mean, like meddling with the atom?"

"No. That is just what I do not mean. That might have fretted only one of our tribal gods. The Law of Cause and Effect has no objection to inquiry, and she will always answer. Her vengeance is reserved for those who activate a Cause without desiring its Effect. Like the failure to anticipate the result of accelerated multiplication upon a finite surface."

"But "

"Hush." To the crowds, who had heard little of this complex interchange and were becoming restless, he spoke out: "Please do not rise now. There is one more to pass."

But nothing visible came from the great ship. Only those nearest to it suddenly shivered, as though a cold wind had passed, though nothing stirred. It reached the stairs to the reception stand, and apparently flowed upward; several dignitaries were seen to hug their elbows to their sides and shudder.

Far away, lightning flashed, once. Then all was over.

"That was the shadow of the God to Come," the announcer said clearly. "Though what it will be we know no more than you ..."

Did you see the Pope cross himself?

Well, the rest you must have seen; they took the ropes down and invited everyone who wanted to to mingle with the gods. (Luckily the security forces had been prepared for some such Angli type informality, and got things organized in time.)

"In their present incarnate form, our gods are quite harmless," the announcer said. "But they do have a habit, when bored or restless, of dematerializing into pure energy- if I grasp your language correctly- and in that form they can be very dangerous indeed."

Even as he spoke, there came a high tinkling crash like expensive crystal breaking, from the direction of Aphrodite's couch, and it was seen that the goddess had vanished, leaving only a cloud of white particles like doves or long finned white fishes, who danced in Brownian motion before dispersing.

A moment later the original old tribal animist deity also took himself out, with a minor boom, and the dancing of a few unidentifiable particles in the air where he had been.

But all this you have seen, and even also the preparation of the Angli for immediate departure, after they took their refreshed gods back to Luna in the morning.

Their preparations also were highly informal, consisting merely of getting into their bubbles and reconstituting their ship with what souvenirs they had picked up. (They were partial to postcards of cathedrals and bathing beaches, and dried flowers.)

Aghast at the suddenness of all this, Earth prepared to mourn the departure of those wonderful visitors. And then the great announcement came. That you must remember. A senior Angli simply asked, "Anybody want come with us? We find good place."

Yes, they meant it. Would humans care to come a roving with them? Not to be parted, but instead to find, with their dear new friends, a pristine Earth of clear sky and blue waters? A whole fresh start, with guardian angels?

Would they? WOULD THEY?

They would! In such numbers that the Angli had to announce a limit of a million, to be accommodated asleep in their empty bubbleships. There would be, by the way, no aging or death while in coldsleep.

Their selection process, like everything else, was simple and informal. In the United States, Angli simply asked for room in parking lots (every shopping mall owner in the land offered one) and stationed themselves in any convenient place, holding a football size pod that had an open end. Applicants were invited to hold one hand in the pod for a minute or two, while the Angli stared at it. The pod felt empty inside. Applicants could wiggle their fingers, hold still, or feel the sides; it seemed to make no difference, and the pod did not appear to change. After an instant or so the Angli simply said Yes or No, and that was that. Those accepted were told to go out to the ship with three kilos -6.6 pounds -of whatever they wanted. Suggested wear -this got printed on a slip -was one comfortable exercise suit, work gloves, sun visor, and sneakers.

What basis were they chosen on, for this momentous voyage?

"They take the ones they like," Waefyel told me.



"But what does the pod do?"

"That way no arguments." I remembered these people were telepaths. An Angli could investigate a mind in depth while its owner was holding his hand in a pod.

But who is Waefyel?

Well, I forgot to tell you about meeting my own special Angli friend. Most of the rest of this comes from him. I met him, like so much else, through Kevin. Waefyel was acting as gofer for one of the aged councillors, who turned out to enjoy meeting humans at those big receptions. The aged councillor would run out of water, or that hardtack stuff, which was all they ate, and Waefyel would get it for him. He met Kevin bringing coffee to a human counterpart.

Technically, Waefyel was a young adult, male (question mark -we never got that straightened out) and as nice as an Angli could be, which was very sweet indeed. But nice as he was, he couldn't get me accepted to go after I flunked the pod test. I tried again- they had no objection -and again and again, but it was always No- and then they were over their million.

"What's the matter with me, Waefyel?"

He shrugged, an impressive gesture in an octopus.

"Maybe know too much."

"Me? But don't you people like one to be smart?"

"No, we like. Only some kinds smart get killed by other humans."

"Oh." But I knew what he meant.

However, the Anglis didn't take a million boneheads, or a million anything. The group, what I saw of it when I went out to the ship, was as close to a random sample as you could come. (One selector had a weakness for redheads.) However, they did appear to eliminate obvious no goods, junkies, the badly crippled -I tell you, everybody tried, before it was over! and a lot of people I personally didn't like the looks of either.

The ones who got to go had a stamper pressed to their foreheads. It didn't leave any detectable mark, and they were told they could wash the place, or whatever. (That had to be printed too; the Angli got tired of answering.) At the ship, an Angli just glanced at the spot.

I asked Waefyel if it was a thought imprint, and he laughed. "No need." I kicked myself mentally -of course, if a telepath looked there, the person's thoughts would automatically tell whether he'd been stamped or not.

Oh- one more thing about the selectees: At the ship, the men got misted with an aerosol and were given an injection.

"What's that for?"

Waefyel giggled.

"For fertility. You make too many young ones, no can educate."

"You mean they'll all be infertile? Won't they die out?"

"For twenty of your years only. Then another twenty. Then another." The concept in his mind was cycle. "Yes -that way no spoil everything, until learn better."

"How do they do it?"

And here's where I learned about the sophisticated research.

Apparently some Angli who liked fussing with bioscience had found an opportunity to gene splice a bacterium that would cause a human male's immune system to destroy, or rather inactivate, his own sperm. The antibodies, or whatever, wore out after about twenty years, thus allowing the man a couple of fertile ejaculations; but the system was self renewing, and it kicked back in and the infertility closed down for another two decades. And so on. It was also dominant inheritable.

Neat, no?

It seems there was an argument about the twenty years. Some Angli opted for forty, but they were persuaded that they were overreacting from revulsion at the state of our affairs.

And of course you know all about the rest.

I remarked to Waefyel, a pity they couldn't do it to all Earth. But the men's objections would be violent. He giggled again.

"You no see sunsets? Pretty green lights, no?"

"Well, yes, but they've been explaining that "

"We do it already," he said. "Coming down in air now. Trouble, whew! To make so much. Good your bacteria breed fast too."

"What?"

Well, as I say, you know all about that. I was just the first to happen to know. Lord, I remember all the to do, the fertility clinics besieged- of course it was blamed on women first. But finally it became too clear to ignore, especially as it affected a few related primates in a partial way. And the men had symptoms, too -they got sore and puffy when a large number of active sperm were getting killed.

But you know all that: how we have an oldest generation of mixed ages, like me and older, and after that one generation all aged about forty, and then another about twenty. And then nobody, but some women are just getting pregnant now. ("MOTHERHOOD AGAIN!" "HUMAN BIRTHS RESUME!" "WILL IT LAST THIS TIME?" It won't, I promise you.)

This was their going away present to us, see.

"We do good thing you," as Waefyel put it. "Now maybe bad trouble coming not so bad."

And it hasn't, has it? We did just tiptoe by the worst of the war scares, but everyone worldwide was so preoccupied with trying to make babies that things quieted down fast. Of course it was hell on economies that were based on the asinine idea of endless growth, but that's a lot better than being exterminated. People who really go for the idea of a planet with fifty billion people standing on top of each other were disappointed. But all the ecological

stuff, the poisoning and wastage and sewage and erosion, all became soluble, once the steady thunder of newborn humans cascading from everfertile bellies eased to a sprinkle every twenty years.

People would have had to face the idea of a static economy sooner or later; it was the Angli's gift to let us do it while there were still living oceans left.

But that's all beside the point.

When I got over the trauma of not being selected to go- no, I only sound like I'm crying -I was still worrying that little old question: Why, really, did the Angli leave that paradise planet they came from? Why?

"We want go see new places," Waefyel said. "We bored."

But he didn't say it right. Maybe telepaths transmit whether they want to or not.

"Waefyel- what really happened to those other people who were living on your planet?"

"They go away, maybe, or they die. I think they die."

That sounded sincere.

"Your people didn't kill them off, by any chance?"

"Oh, no! No!"

You can't fake shock like that- I think.

"So you just left, bringing your gods with you. What about the Angli that are still there? What'll they do with no gods?"

"No Angli stay, is all here. Up on moon."

"Hmm. Small race, aren't you?"

"Three, four million. Is enough."

"And your gods. Hey, those gods were really alive, weren't they?"

We were lying on a little beach on one of the Virgin Islands, where Waefyel had flown us. (If only I could live on hardtack, what journeys we could have made! I did try the stuff, but it tasted like dried galoshes.)

"Of course they live," he said. "They do things for people. All gods do."

"Ours don't," I said lazily. "Hey, do other peoples have live gods?"

"Yes." His big eye looked sad. "Except you. You first we find. No live gods here."

"Hey, you mean it. I thought gods were just an idea."

"Oh no, is real. Look out, you getting too hot."

"Yeah, thanks. Why did your gods want to leave that lovely planet?"

"Go with us."

"You mean a god has to go where its people go? Hey, what happened to the other people's gods, the ones that died off? What happens to gods when their people die?"

"Usually -new word, see? Usually, gods go too. Lost in air, finish. Sometimes ... not." His big eye was looking somber again. Not sad, just very serious. "We don't know why."

"Dead people's gods just evaporate. How sad. Hmm. But sometimes not, eh? What happens to a bunch of gods who live on with no people?"

"I don't know." He sat up. "Look, is too hot for you here. I listen your skin burning."

"Sorry. I didn't mean to fry audibly." But I picked it up. What? Just something. Time to change the subject, for Waefyel. Well, maybe it bored him. But I didn't think it was that. In my bones, I felt I was poking into something hidden. Something the Angli wanted hidden.

"I hope your gods will like the new planet you find. You'll be there, with the humans, won't you?"

"Oh yes I" He smiled. "We find nice big one, lots of room. Lots of flowers." He touched a neck chain of dandelion flowers I had twisted for him. (Yes, they have dandelions and crabgrass even on the Virgin Islands.)

"I bet our people will go back to the stone age," I said idly. (I didn't care if they went back to the Paleocene, if only I could have gone with them.) "Hey, maybe they'll start worshiping that old totemanimal of yours."

"Maybe." As though involuntarily, his eye took on a dreamy smile.

"And then when they get more advanced, they can worship that Old Fertility Symbol. I guess they'll be in the mood. And work up to the lovelies. You know, that's neat! Here we don't have any gods of our own, and you provide us with a complete set, ready to go, carryout gods! Why do you suppose we don't have gods of our own, Waefyel? Is something wrong with us? People make their gods, really, don't they?"

"I think so. Yes. What is wrong by you? We don't know. Maybe you have poison, maybe you kill gods!" He laughed and fussed at my hair- I had pretty hair then -with his tentacle tip. "But I don't think so. Some of the wise ones think you made a bad pattern of gods, some kind missing, see, so they couldn't go on and make more. A 'defective series,' that's right?"

"That's wrong, apparently. I wonder what we left out. Do you know?"

"No ... but I think you got too many war gods. Not enough ones who take care."

"That sounds right." I was about falling asleep there in the beauty with the lapping little waves on the pink sand, and this lovely friend beside me ...

"I think we go inside now. Look Tee Vee. I carry you."

"Oh, Waefyel." (Don't expect me to tell you about it, but we had something physical going between us. Especially then. It's not what you'd guess, either.)

Now there was a man staying at the hotel there. A serious older man, a sort of student. That evening we all got chatting, out on the terrace looking at the sunset. It did show the most lovely weird green light. Beautiful infertility, drifting down. The uproar about that hadn't started yet. Anyway, this older man started talking about angels. Rather pointedly, too. Funny topic, I thought.

"Did you know that angels were the lowest order of divine beings?" he asked me. "If there was something to be done, a flaming sword to be brandished, somebody to be admonished, or a message delivered- particularly a message -they called in an angel. They were the workhorses and message bearers."

"Yes," said Waefyel unguardedly. I wondered what interest ancient myths about angels could possibly have for him. Probably he just enjoyed practicing his English; he did love that.

"Like gofers," I said. "The gofers of the gods."

So of course I had to explain gofers. (He was an older man.) Waefyel was delighted too. His first English pun, if that's what it is.

"How did angels get born?" I asked. "What about those little ones, cherubs, cherubim? Were they little angels?"

"No," said the man. "The connection of cherubs with infants is a late degradation. As to how angels got born, I wonder. I've never heard of an angel's mother or father."

"From the energy in the air," said Waefyel unexpectedly. "Elementals."

"Is there energy in the air?" I asked.

"You saw it. When gods dematerialize, a lot of it is around. Elementals," he repeated. And then suddenly frowned as if he were mad at himself, and shut up.

Next day we had to fly back. It was the twenty third of August. The day after was the twenty fourth. And even you must know what happened then:

They left.

Don't expect me to tell you a word about that, either.

Me just standing there, looking up at a vanishing point that reflected sunlight for one last instant. Me and a couple of million, no more than that just standing there with eyes streaming our hearts out, looking up at a sky that would be empty forever ...

But at least I know, for all the good it does me, what had held me in its arms. Waefyel let out just enough so it had to be true. You get the picture, don't you? Or do I have to explain it?

I put it to Waefyel once, at the end.

"You're not an animal, like me, are you? You're something created out of energy, out of the minds of that race that died. You Angli are just pretending to be people."

"Smart little one."

"Like parasites. Oh, Waefyel"

"No. Symbiotes -I know word. You good for us, we good for you."

"But you've trapped a million humans to go with you and keep you alive!'"

"They need us. They happy."

Surely you see. There they were, when that other race who had made them died off -a whole complete pantheon of pantheons, all those gods from earliest to last, from highest to the lowest "workhorses." As good as dead, doomed to live forever on an empty planet with no living energy to need them or support them.

So what did they do? I mean, what did the higher ups, the really big gods, do? This whole evolution of orphaned, unemployed gods, doomed with no people?

Why, they ordered their faithful workhorses, their lowest order of functionaries, their angeli (the sound of that name was just one of those cosmic coincidences, by the way; it meant nothing to them) well, they ordered their angeli to build ships and take them somewhere. To find a race that needed gods and take them there!

And eventually they got here and found a people with no gods ...

And now some of our people will have gods again. And the gods will have people. Let them; I'm not jealous. All I want is one of the gofers back.

My gofer of the gods.