

# EXTRASOLAR

High in the deep blue of the afternoon sky rode a tiny speck of glistening metal, scarcely visible in the glare of the sun. The workers on the machines below glanced up for a moment, then back to their work, though little enough it was on these automatic cultivators. Even this minor diversion was of interest in the dull monotony of green. These endless fields of castor bean plants had to be cultivated, but with the great machines that did the work it required but a few dozen men to cultivate an entire county.



The passengers in the huge plane high above them gave little thought to what passed below, engrossed with their papers or books, or engaged in casual conversation. This monotonous trip was boring to most of them. It seemed a waste of time to spend six good hours in a short 3,500 mile trip.

There was nothing to do, nothing to see, except a slowly passing landscape ten miles below. No details could be distinguished, and the steady low throb of the engines, the whirring of the giant propellers, the muffled roar of the air, as it rushed by, combined to form a soothing lullaby of power. It was all right for pleasure seekers and vacationists, but business men were in a hurry.

The pilot of the machine glanced briefly at the instruments, wondered vaguely why he had to be there at all, then turned, and leaving the pilot room in charge of his assistant, went down to talk with the chief engineer.

His vacation began the first of July, and as this was the last of June, he wondered what would have happened if he had done as he had been half inclined to do—quit the trip and let the assistant take her through. It would have been simple—just a few levers to manipulate, a few controls to set, and the instruments would have taken her up to ten or eleven miles, swung her into the great westward air current, and leveled her off at five hundred and sixty or so an hour toward 'Frisco'.

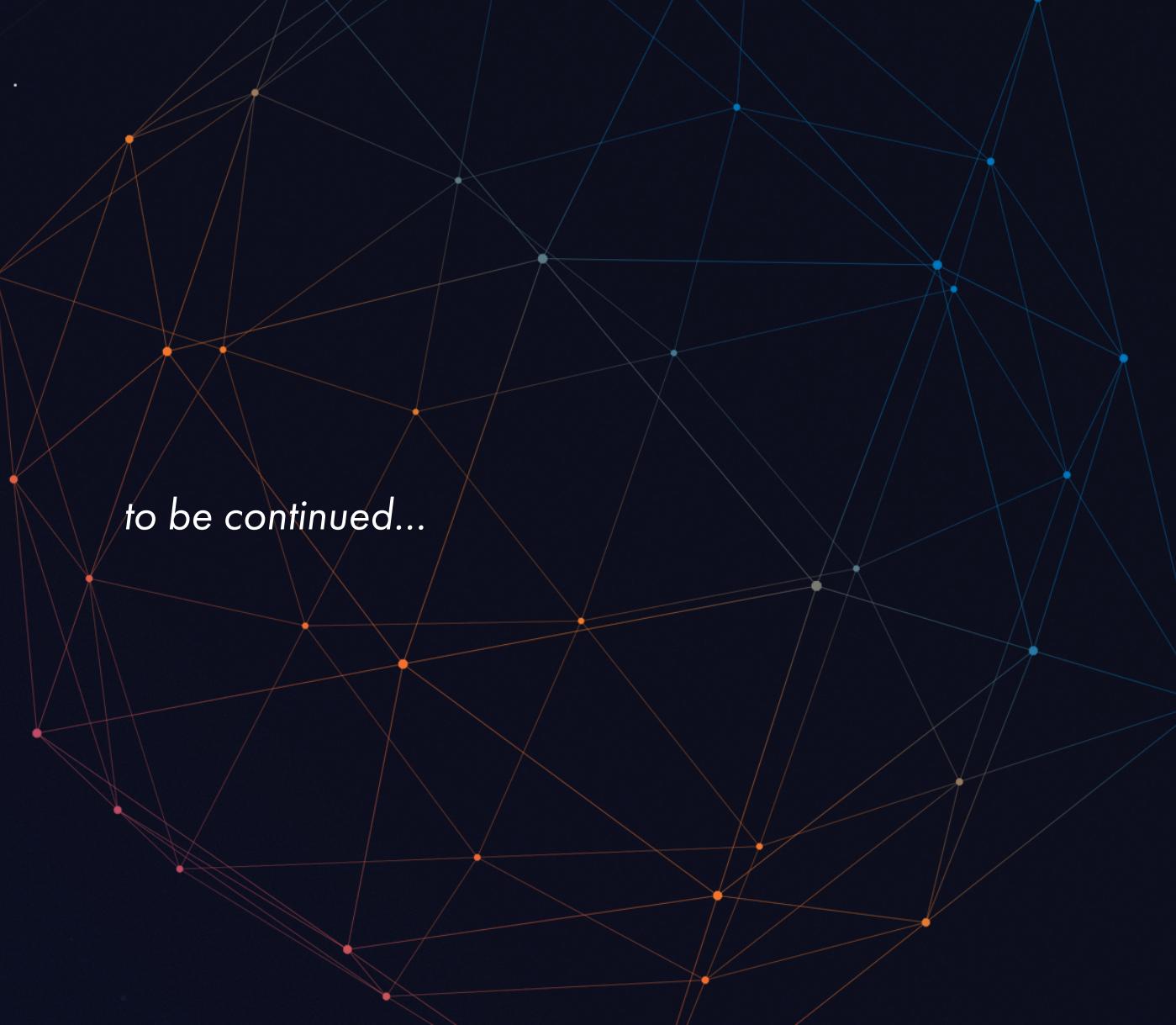
He yawned and sauntered down the hall. He yawned again, wondering what made him so sleepy.

He slumped limply to the floor and lay there breathing ever more and more slowly.

The officials of the San Francisco terminus of The Transcontinental Airways company were worried. The great Transcontinental express had come to the field, following the radio beam, and now it was circling the field with its instruments set on the automatic signal for an emergency pilot. They were worried and with good reason, for this flight carried over 900,000 dollars worth of negotiable securities. But what could attack one of those giant ships?

The great ship was landing gently now, brought in by the emergency pilot. The small field car sped over to the plane rapidly. Already the elevator was in place beside it, and as the officials in the car drew up under the giant wing, they could see the tiny figure of the emergency pilot beckoning to them. Swiftly the portable elevator carried them up to the fourth level of the ship.

What a sight met their eyes as they entered the main salon! At first glance it appeared that all the passengers lay sleeping in their chairs. On closer examination it became evident that they were not breathing! The ear could detect no heartbeat. The members of the crew lay at their posts, as inert as the passengers!



*to be continued...*