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GUIDED MISSILES
CAN NOT BE
CONTROLLED!**

The folly of a recent U.S.
proposal before the U.N.

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BRAMBLE BUSH

BY ALAN E. NOURSE

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*There was a man in our town, and he was wondrous wise;
He jumped into a bramble bush and scratched out both his eyes.
And when he saw what he had done, with all his might and main
He jumped into another bush and scratched them in again.*
MOTHER GOOSE

Dr. David Lessing found Jack Dorffman and the boy waiting in his office when he arrived at the Hoffman Center that morning. Dorffman looked as though he'd been running all night. There were dark pouches under his eyes; his heavy unshaven face seemed to sag at every crease. Lessing glanced sharply at his Field Director and sank down behind his desk with a sigh. "All right, Jack—what's wrong?"

"This kid is driving me nuts," said Dorffman through clenched teeth. "He's gone completely hay-wire. Nobody's been able to get near him for three weeks, and now at six o'clock this morning he decides he's leaving the Farm. I talk to him, I sweat him down, I do everything but tie him to the bed, and I waste my time. He's leaving the Farm. Period."

"So you bring him down here," said Lessing sourly. "The worst place he could be, if something's really wrong." He looked across at the boy. "Tommy? Come over and sit down."

There was nothing singular about the boy's appearance. He was thin, with a pale freckled face and the guileless expression of any normal eight-year-old as he blinked across the desk at Lessing. The awkward grey monitor-helmet concealed a shock of sandy hair. He sat with a mute appeal in his large grey eyes as Lessing flipped the reader-switch and blinked in alarm at the wildly thrashing pattern on the tape.

The boy was terrorized. He was literally pulsating with fear.

Lessing sat back slowly. "Tell me about it, Tommy," he said gently.

"I don't want to go back to the Farm," said the boy.

"Why?"

"I just don't. I hate it there."

"Are you frightened?"

The boy bit his lip and nodded slowly.

"Of me? Of Dr. Dorffman?"

"No. Oh, no!"

"Then what?"

Again the mute appeal in the boy's eyes. He groped for words, and none came. Finally he said, "If I could only take this off—" He fingered the grey plastic helmet.

"You think *that* would make you feel better?"

"It would, I know it would."

Lessing shook his head. "I don't think so, Tommy. You know what the monitor is for, don't you?"

"It stops things from going out."

"That's right. And it stops things from going in. It's an insulator. You need it badly. It would hurt you a great deal if you took it off, away from the Farm."

The boy fought back tears. "But I don't want to go back there—" The fear-pattern was alive again on the tape. "I don't feel good there. I never want to go back."

"Well, we'll see. You can stay here for a while." Lessing nodded at Dorffman

and stepped into an adjoining room with him. "You say this has been going on for *three weeks*?"

"I'm afraid so. We thought it was just a temporary pattern—we see so much of that up there."

"I know, I know." Lessing chewed his lip. "I don't like it. We'd better set up a battery on him and try to spot the trouble. And I'm afraid you'll have to set it up. I've got that young Melrose from Chicago to deal with this morning—the one who's threatening to upset the whole Conference next month with some crazy theories he's been playing with. I'll probably have to take him out to the Farm to shut him up." Lessing ran a hand through sparse grey hair. "See what you can do for the boy downstairs."

"Full psi precautions?" asked Dorffman.

"Certainly! And Jack—in this case, be *sure* of it. If Tommy's in the trouble I think he's in, we don't dare risk a chance of Adult Contact now. We could end up with a dead boy on our hands."

Two letters were waiting on Lessing's desk that morning. The first was from Roberts Bros., announcing another shift of deadline on the book, and demanding the galley proofs two weeks earlier than scheduled. Lessing groaned. As director of psionic research at the Hoffman Medical Center, he had long since learned how administrative detail could suck up daytime hours. He knew that his real work was at the Farm—yet he hadn't even been to the Farm in over six weeks. And now, as the book approached publication date, Lessing wondered if he would ever really get back to work again.

The other letter cheered him a bit more. It bore the letterhead of the International Psionics Conference:

Dear Dr. Lessing:

In recognition of your position as an authority on human Psionic behavior patterns, we would be gratified to schedule you as principle speaker at the Conference in Chicago on October 12th. A few remarks in discussion of your forthcoming book would be entirely in order—

THE INTERNATIONAL PSIONICS CONFERENCE CHICAGO, ILLINOIS

They were waiting for it, then! He ran the galley proofs into the scanner excitedly. They knew he had something up his sleeve. His earlier papers had only hinted at the direction he was going—but the book would clear away the fog. He scanned the title page proudly. "A Theory of Psionic Influence on Infant and Child Development." A good title—concise, commanding, yet modest. They would read it, all right. And they would find it a light shining brightly in the darkness, a guide to the men who were floundering in the jungle of a strange and baffling new science.

For they were floundering. When they were finally forced to recognize that this great and powerful force did indeed exist in human minds, with unimaginable potential if it could only be unlocked, they had plunged eagerly into the search, and found themselves in a maddening bramble bush of contradictions and chaos. Nothing worked, and everything worked too well. They were trying to study phenomena which made no sense, observing things that defied logic. Natural laws came crashing down about their ears as they stood sadly by and watched things happen which natural law said could never happen. They had never been in this jungle before, nor in any jungle remotely like it. The old rules didn't work here, the old methods of study failed. And the more they struggled, the thicker and more impenetrable the bramble bush became—

But now David Lessing had discovered a pathway through that jungle, a theory to work by—

At his elbow the intercom buzzed. "A gentleman to see you," the girl said. "A Dr. Melrose. He's very impatient, sir."

He shut off the scanner and said, "Send him in, please."

Dr. Peter Melrose was tall and thin, with jet black hair and dark mocking eyes. He wore a threadbare sport coat and a slouch. He offered Lessing a bony hand, then flung himself into a chair as he stared about the office in awe.

"I'm really overwhelmed," he said after a moment. "Within the stronghold of psionic research at last. And face to face with the Master in the trembling flesh!"

Lessing frowned. "Dr. Melrose, I don't quite understand—"

"Oh, it's just that I'm impressed," the young man said airily. "Of course, I've seen old dried-up Authorities before—but never before a brand spanking new one."

old tired-up Authorities before—but never before a brand spanking new one, just fresh out of the pupa, so to speak!" He touched his forehead in a gesture of reverence. "I bow before the Oracle. Speak, oh Motah, live forever! Cast a pearl at my feet!"

"If you've come here to be insulting," Lessing said coldly, "you're just wasting time." He reached for the intercom switch.

"I think you'd better wait before you do that," Melrose said sharply, "because I'm planning to take you apart at the Conference next month unless I like everything I see and hear down here today. And if you don't think I can do it, you're in for quite a dumping."

Lessing sat back slowly. "Tell me—just what, exactly, do you want?"

"I want to hear this fairy tale you're about to publish in the name of 'Theory'," Melrose said. "I want to see this famous Farm of yours up in Connecticut and see for myself how much pressure these experimental controls you keep talking about will actually bear. But mostly, I want to see just what in psionic hell you're so busy making yourself an Authority about." There was no laughter in the man's sharp brown eyes.

"You couldn't touch me with a ten foot pole at this conference," snapped Lessing.

The other man grinned. "Try me! We shook you up a little bit last year, but you didn't seem to get the idea."

"Last year was different." Lessing scowled. "As for our 'fairy tale', we happen to have a staggering body of evidence that says that it's true."

"If the papers you've already published are a preview, we think it's false as Satan."

"And our controls are above suspicion."

"So far, we haven't found any way to set up logical controls," said Melrose. "We've done a lot of work on it, too."

"Oh, yes—I've heard about your work. Not bad, really. A little misdirected, is all."

"According to your Theory, that is."

"Wildly unorthodox approach to psionics—but at least you're energetic enough."

"We haven't been energetic enough to find an orthodox approach that got us anywhere. We doubt if you have, either. But maybe we're all wrong." Melrose grinned unpleasantly. "We're not unreasonable, your Majesty. We just ask to be shown. If you dare, that is."

Lessing slammed his fist down on the desk angrily. "Have you got the day to take a trip?"

"I've got 'til New Year."

Lessing shouted for his girl. "Get Dorffman up here. We're going to the Farm this afternoon."

The girl nodded, then hesitated. "But what about your lunch?"

"Bother lunch." He gave Melrose a sidelong glare. "We've got a guest here who's got a lot of words he's going to eat for us...."

Ten minutes later they rode the elevator down to the transit levels and boarded the little shuttle car in the terminal below the Hoffman Center. They sat in silence as the car dipped down into the rapid-transit channels beneath the great city, swinging northward in the express circuit through Philadelphia and Camden sectors, surfacing briefly in Trenton sector, then dropping underground once again for the long pull beneath Newark, Manhattan and Westchester sectors. In less than twenty minutes the car surfaced on a Parkway channel and buzzed north and east through the verdant Connecticut countryside.

"What about Tommy?" Lessing asked Dorffman as the car sped along through the afternoon sun.

"I just finished the prelims. He's not cooperating."

Lessing ground his teeth. "I should be running him now instead of beating the bushes with this—" He broke off to glare at young Melrose.

Melrose grinned. "I've heard you have quite a place up here."

"It's—unconventional, at any rate," Lessing snapped.

"Well, that depends on your standards. Sounds like a country day school, from what I've heard. According to your papers, you've even used conventional statistical analysis on your data from up here."

"Until we had to throw it out. We discovered that what we were trying to measure didn't make sense in a statistical analysis."

"Of course, you're sure you were measuring *something*."

"Oh, yes. We certainly were."

"Yet you said that you didn't know what."

"That's right," said Lessing. "We don't."

"And you don't know *why* your instruments measure whatever they're measuring." The Chicago man's face was thoughtful. "In fact, you can't really be certain that your instruments are measuring the children at all. It's not inconceivable that the *children* might be measuring the *instruments*, eh?"

Lessing blinked. "It's conceivable."

"Mmmm," said Melrose. "Sounds like a real firm foundation to build a theory on."

"Why not?" Lessing growled. "It wouldn't be the first time the tail wagged the dog. The psychiatrists never would have gotten out of their rut if somebody hadn't gotten smart and realized that one of their new drugs worked better in combatting schizophrenia when the doctor took the medicine instead of the patient. That was quite a wall to climb."

"Yes, wasn't it," mused Melrose, scratching his bony jaw. "Only took them seventy years to climb it, thanks to a certain man's theories. I wonder how long it'll take psionics to crawl out of the pit you're digging for it?"

"We're not digging any pit," Lessing exploded angrily. "We're exploring—nothing more. A phenomenon exists. We've known that, one way or another, for

centuries. The fact that it doesn't seem to be bound by the same sort of natural law we've observed elsewhere doesn't mean that it isn't governed by natural law. But how can we define the law? How can we define the limits of the phenomenon, for that matter? We can't work in the dark forever—we've *got* to have a working hypothesis to guide us."

"So you dreamed up this 'tadpole' idea," said Melrose sourly.

"For a working hypothesis—yes. We've known for a long time that every human being has extrasensory potential to one degree or another. Not just a few here and there—every single one. It's a differentiating quality of the human mind. Just as the ability to think logically in a crisis instead of giving way to panic is a differentiating quality."

"Fine," said Melrose. "Great. We can't *prove* that, of course, but I'll play along."

Lessing glared at him. "When we began studying this psi-potential, we found out some curious things. For one thing, it seemed to be immensely more powerful and active in infants and children than in adults. Somewhere along the line as a child grows up, something happens. We don't know what. We do know that the child's psi-potential gradually withdraws deeper and deeper into his mind, burying itself farther and farther out of reach, just the way a tadpole's tail is absorbed deeper and deeper into the growing frog until there just isn't any tail any more." Lessing paused, packing tobacco into his pipe. "That's why we have the Farm—to try to discover why. What forces that potential underground? What buries it so deeply that adult human beings can't get at it any more?"

"And you think you have an answer," said Melrose.

"We think we might be near an answer. We have a theory that explains the available data."

The shuttle car bounced sharply as it left the highway automatics. Dorffman took the controls. In a few moments they were skimming through the high white gates of the Farm, slowing down at the entrance to a long, low building.

"All right, young man—come along," said Lessing. "I think we can show you our answer."

in the main office building they donned the close-fitting psionic monitors required of all personnel at the Farm. They were of a hard grey plastic material, with a network of wiring buried in the substance, connected to a simple pocket-sized power source.

"The major problem," Lessing said, "has been to shield the children from any external psionic stimuli, except those we wished to expose them to. Our goal is a perfectly controlled psi environment. The monitors are quite effective—a simple Renwick scrambler screen."

"It blocks off all types of psi activity?" asked Melrose.

"As far as we can measure, yes."

"Which may not be very far."

Jack Dorffman burst in: "What Dr. Lessing is saying is that they seem effective for our purposes."

"But you don't know why," added Melrose.

"All right, we don't know why. Nobody knows why a Renwick screen works—why blame us?" They were walking down the main corridor and out through an open areaway. Behind the buildings was a broad playground. A baseball game was in progress in one corner; across the field a group of swings, slides, ring bars and other playground paraphernalia was in heavy use. The place was teeming with youngsters, all shouting in a fury of busy activity. Occasionally a helmeted supervisor hurried by; one waved to them as she rescued a four-year-old from the parallel bars.

They crossed into the next building, where classes were in progress. "Some of our children are here only briefly," Lessing explained as they walked along, "and some have been here for years. We maintain a top-ranking curriculum—your idea of a 'country day school' wasn't so far afield at that—with scholarships supported by Hoffman Center funds. Other children come to us—foundlings, desertees, children from broken homes, children of all ages from infancy on. Sometimes they stay until they have reached college age, or go on to jobs. As far as psionics research is concerned, we are not trying to be teachers. We are strictly observers. We try to place the youngsters in positions where they can develop what potential they have—*without* the presence of external psionic

influences they would normally be subject to. The results have been remarkable."

He led them into a long, narrow room with chairs and ash trays, facing a wide grey glass wall. The room fell into darkness, and through the grey glass they could see three children, about four years old, playing in a large room.

"They're perfectly insulated from us," said Lessing. "A variety of recording instruments are working. And before you ask, Dr. Melrose, they are all empirical instruments, and they would all defy any engineer's attempts to determine what makes them go. We don't know what makes them go, and we don't care—they go. That's all we need. Like that one, for instance—"

In the corner a flat screen was flickering, emitting a pale green fluorescent light. It hung from the wall by two plastic rods which penetrated into the children's room. There was no sign of a switch, nor a power source. As the children moved about, the screen flickered. Below it, a recording-tape clicked along in little spurts and starts of activity.

"What are they doing?" Melrose asked after watching the children a few moments.

"Those three seem to work as a team, somehow. Each one, individually, had a fairly constant recordable psi potential of about seventeen on the arbitrary scale we find useful here. Any two of them scale in at thirty-four to thirty-six. Put the three together and they operate somewhere in the neighborhood of six hundred on the same scale." Lessing smiled. "This is an isolated phenomenon—it doesn't hold for any other three children on the Farm. Nor did we make any effort to place them together—they drew each other like magnets. One of our workers spent two weeks trying to find out why the instruments weren't right. It wasn't the instruments, of course."

Lessing nodded to an attendant, and peered around at Melrose. "Now, I want you to watch this very closely."

He opened a door and walked into the room with the children. The fluorescent screen continued to flicker as the children ran to Lessing. He inspected the block tower they were building, and stooped down to talk to them, his lips moving soundlessly behind the observation wall. The children laughed and jabbered, apparently intrigued by the game he was proposing. He walked to the table and

tapped the bottom block in the tower with his thumb.

The tower quivered, and the screen blazed out with green light, but the tower stood. Carefully Lessing jogged all the foundation blocks out of place until the tower hung in midair, clearly unsupported. The children watched it closely, and the foundation blocks inched still further out of place....



Then, quite casually, Lessing lifted off his monitor. The children continued staring at the tower as the screen gave three or four violent bursts of green fire and went dark.

The block tower fell with a crash.

Moments later Lessing was back in the observation room, leaving the children busily putting the tower back together. There was a little smile on his lips as he saw Melrose's face. "Perhaps you're beginning to see what I'm driving at," he said slowly.

"Yes," said Melrose. "I think I'm beginning to see." He scratched his jaw. "You think that it's adult psi-contact that drives the child's potential underground—that somehow adult contact acts like a damper, a sort of colossal candle-snuffer."

"That's what I think," said Lessing.

"How do you know those children didn't make you take off your monitor?"

Lessing blinked. "Why should they?"

"Maybe they enjoy the crash when the blocks fall down."

"But that wouldn't make any difference, would it? The blocks still fall down."

Melrose paced down the narrow room. "This is very good," he said suddenly, his voice earnest. "You have fine facilities here, good workers. And in spite of my flippancy, Dr. Lessing, I have never imagined for a moment that you were not an acute observer and a careful, highly imaginative worker. But suppose I told you, in perfect faith, that we have data that flatly contradicts everything you've told me today. Reproducible data, utterly incompatible with yours. What would you

say to that?"

"I'd say you were wrong," said Lessing. "You couldn't have such data. According to the things I am certain are true, what you're saying is sheer nonsense."

"And you'd express that opinion in a professional meeting?"

"I would."

"And as an Authority on psionic behavior patterns," said Melrose slowly, "you would kill us then and there. You would strangle us professionally, discredit anything we did, cut us off cold." The tall man turned on him fiercely. "Are you blind, man? Can't you see what danger you're in? If you publish your book now, you will become an Authority in a field where the most devastating thing that could possibly happen would be—the *appearance of an Authority*."

Lessing and Dorffman rode back to the Hoffman Center in grim silence. At first Lessing pretended to work; finally he snapped off the tape recorder in disgust and stared out the shuttle-car window. Melrose had gone on to Idlewild to catch a jet back to Chicago. It was a relief to see him go, Lessing thought, and tried to force the thin, angry man firmly out of his mind. But somehow Melrose wouldn't force.

"Stop worrying about it," Dorffman urged. "He's a crackpot. He's crawled way out on a limb, and now he's afraid your theory is going to cut it off under him. Well, that's his worry, not yours." Dorffman's face was intense. "Scientifically, you're on unshakeable ground. Every great researcher has people like Melrose sniping at him. You just have to throw them off and keep going."

Lessing shook his head. "Maybe. But this field of work is different from any other, Jack. It doesn't follow the rules. Maybe scientific grounds aren't right at all, in this case."

Dorffman snorted. "Surely there's nothing wrong with theorizing—"

"He wasn't objecting to the theory. He's afraid of what happens after the theory."

"So it seems. But why?"

"Have you ever considered what makes a man an Authority?"

"He knows more about his field than anybody else does."

"He *seems* to, you mean. And therefore, anything he says about it carries more weight than what anybody else says. Other workers follow his lead. He develops ideas, formulates theories—and then *defends them for all he's worth*."

"But why shouldn't he?"

"Because a man can't fight for his life and reputation and still keep his objectivity," said Lessing. "And what if he just happens to be wrong? Once he's an Authority the question of what's right and what's wrong gets lost in the shuffle. It's *what he says* that counts."

"But we *know* you're right," Dorffman protested.

"Do we?"

"Of course we do! Look at our work! Look at what we've seen on the Farm."

"Yes, I know." Lessing's voice was weary. "But first I think we'd better look at Tommy Gilman, and the quicker we look, the better—"

A nurse greeted them as they stepped off the elevator. "We called you at the Farm, but you'd already left. The boy—" She broke off helplessly. "He's sick, Doctor. He's sicker than we ever imagined."

"What happened?"

"Nothing exactly—happened. I don't quite know how to describe it." She hurried them down the corridor and opened a door into a large children's playroom. "See what you think."

The boy sat stolidly in the corner of the room. He looked up as they came in, but there was no flicker of recognition or pleasure on his pale face. The monitor helmet was still on his head. He just sat there, gripping a toy fire engine tightly in his hands.

Lessing crossed the room swiftly. "Tommy," he said.

The boy didn't even look at him. He stared stupidly at the fire engine.

"Tommy!" Lessing reached out for the toy. The boy drew back in terror, clutching it to his chest. "Go away," he choked. "Go away, go away—" When Lessing persisted the boy bent over swiftly and bit him hard on the hand.

Lessing sat down on the table. "Tommy, listen to me." His voice was gentle. "I won't try to take it again. I promise."

"Go away."

"Do you know who I am?"

Tommy's eyes shifted haltingly to Lessing's face. He nodded. "Go away."

"Why are you afraid, Tommy?"

"I hurt. My head hurts. I hurt all over. Go away."

"Why do you hurt?"

"I—can't get it—off," the boy said.

The monitor, Lessing thought suddenly. Something had suddenly gone horribly wrong—could the boy really be sensing the source of the trouble? Lessing felt a cold knot gather in the pit of his stomach. He knew what happened when adult psi-contact struck a psi-high youngster's mind. He had seen it a hundred times at the Farm. But even more—he had felt it in his own mind, bursting from the child. Like a violent physical blow, the hate and fear and suspicion and cruelty buried and repressed in the adult mind, crushing suddenly into the raw receptors of the child's mind like a smothering fog—it was a fearful thing. A healthy youngster could survive it, even though the scar remained. But this youngster was sick—

And yet *an animal instinctively seeks its own protection*. With trembling fingers Lessing reached out and opened the baffle-snap on the monitor. "Take it off, Tommy," he whispered.

The boy blinked in amazement, and pulled the grey helmet from his head. Lessing felt the familiar prickly feeling run down his scalp as the boy stared at him. He could feel deep in his own mind the cold chill of terror radiating from

...him. He could feel deep in his own mind the cold chill of terror radiating from the boy. Then, suddenly, it began to fade. A sense of warmth—peace and security and comfort—swept in as the fear faded from the boy's face.

The fire engine clattered to the floor.

They analyzed the tapes later, punching the data cards with greatest care, filing them through the machines for the basic processing and classification that all their data underwent. It was late that night when they had the report back in their hands.

Dorffman stared at it angrily. "It's obviously wrong," he grated. "It doesn't fit. Dave, it doesn't agree with *anything* we've observed before. There must be an error."

"Of course," said Lessing. "According to the theory. The theory says that adult psi-contact is deadly to the growing child. It smothers their potential through repeated contact until it dries up completely. We've proved that, haven't we? Time after time. Everything goes according to the theory—except Tommy. But Tommy's psi-potential was drying up there on the Farm, until the distortion was threatening the balance of his mind. Then he made an adult contact, and we saw how he bloomed." Lessing sank down to his desk wearily. "What are we going to do, Jack? Formulate a separate theory for Tommy?"

"Of course not," said Dorffman. "The instruments were wrong. Somehow we misread the data—"

"Didn't you see his *face*?" Lessing burst out. "Didn't you see how he *acted*? What do you want with an instrument reading?" He shook his head. "It's no good, Jack. Something different happened here, something we'd never counted on. It's something the theory just doesn't allow for."

They sat silently for a while. Then Dorffman said: "What are you going to do?"

"I don't know," said Lessing. "Maybe when we fell into this bramble bush we blinded ourselves with the urge to classify—to line everything up in neat rows like pins in a paper. Maybe we were so blind we missed the path altogether."

"But the book is due! The Conference speech—"

"I think we'll make some changes in the book," Lessing said slowly. "It'll be costly—but it might even be fun. It's a pretty dry, logical presentation of ideas, as it stands. Very austere and authoritarian. But a few revisions could change all that—" He rubbed his hands together thoughtfully. "How about it, Jack? Do we have nerve enough to be laughed at? Do you think we could stand a little discredit, making silly asses of ourselves? Because when I finish this book, we'll be laughed out of existence. There won't be any Authority in psionics for a while—and maybe that way one of the lads who's *really* sniffing out the trail will get somebody to listen to him!

"Get a pad, get a pencil! We've got work to do. And when we finish, I think we'll send a carbon copy out Chicago way. Might even persuade that puppy out there to come here and work for me—"

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