

a water wheel, and the remnant of a tractor lying upturned with its treads in the air.

Dr. Ferris was talking about the crusaders of science and about the years of selfless devotion, unremitting toil and persevering research that had gone into Project X.

It was odd—thought Dr. Stadler, studying the ruins of the farm—that there should be a herd of goats in the midst of such desolation. There were six or seven of them, some drowsing, some munching lethargically at whatever grass they could find among the sun-scorched weeds.

"Project X," Dr. Ferris was saying, "was devoted to some special research in the field of sound. The science of sound has astonishing aspects, which laymen would scarcely suspect. . . ."

Some fifty feet away from the farmhouse, Dr. Stadler saw a structure, obviously new and of no possible purpose whatever: it looked like a few spans of a steel trestle, rising into empty space, supporting nothing, leading nowhere.

Dr. Ferris was now talking about the nature of sound vibrations.

Dr. Stadler aimed his field glasses at the horizon beyond the farm, but there was nothing else to be seen for dozens of miles. The sudden, straining motion of one of the goats brought his eyes back to the herd. He noticed that the goats were chained to stakes driven at intervals into the ground.

". . . And it was discovered," said Dr. Ferris, "that there are certain frequencies of sound vibration which no structure, organic or inorganic, can withstand. . . ."

Dr. Stadler noticed a silvery spot bouncing over the weeds among the herd. It was a kid that had not been chained: it kept leaping and weaving about its mother.

". . . The sound ray is controlled by a panel inside the giant underground laboratory," said Dr. Ferris, pointing at the building on the knoll. "That panel is known to us affectionately as the 'Xylophone'—because one must be darn careful to strike the right keys, or, rather, to pull the right levers. For this special occasion, an extension Xylophone, connected to the one inside, has been erected here"—he pointed to the switchboard in front of the officials' stand—"so that you may witness the entire operation and see the simplicity of the whole procedure. . . ."

Dr. Stadler found pleasure in watching the kid, a soothing, reassuring kind of pleasure. The little creature seemed barely a week old, it looked like a ball of white fur with graceful long legs, it kept bounding in a manner of deliberate, gaily ferocious awkwardness, all four of its legs held stiff and straight. It seemed to be leaping at the sunrays, at the summer air, at the joy of discovering its own existence.

". . . The sound ray is invisible, inaudible and fully controllable in respect to target, direction and range. Its first public test, which you are about to witness, has been set to cover a small sector, a mere two miles, in perfect safety, with all space cleared for twenty miles beyond. The present generating equipment in our laboratory is capable of producing rays to cover—through the outlets which you may

observe under the dome—the entire countryside within a radius of a hundred miles, a circle with a periphery extending from the shore of the Mississippi, roughly from the bridge of the Taggart Transcontinental Railroad, to Des Moines and Fort Dodge, Iowa, to Austin, Minnesota, to Woodman, Wisconsin, to Rock Island, Illinois. This is only a modest beginning. We possess the technical knowledge to build generators with a range of two and three hundred miles—but due to the fact that we were unable to obtain in time a sufficient quantity of a highly heat-resistant metal, such as Rearden Metal, we had to be satisfied with our present equipment and radius of control. In honor of our great executive, Mr. Thompson, under whose farsighted administration the State Science Institute was granted the funds without which Project X would not have been possible, this great invention will henceforth be known as the Thompson Harmonizer!”

The crowd applauded. Mr. Thompson sat motionless, with his face held self-consciously stiff. Dr. Stadler felt certain that this small-time shyster had had as little to do with the Project as any of the movie-usher attendants, that he possessed neither the mind nor the initiative nor even the sufficient degree of malice to cause a new gopher trap to be brought into the world, that he, too, was only the pawn of a silent machine—a machine that had no center, no leader, no direction, a machine that had not been set in motion by Dr. Ferris or Wesley Mouch, or any of the cowed creatures in the grandstands, or any of the creatures behind the scenes—an impersonal, unthinking, unembodied machine, of which none was the driver and all were the pawns, each to the degree of his evil. Dr. Stadler gripped the edge of the bench: he felt a desire to leap to his feet and run.

“... As to the function and the purpose of the sound ray, I shall say nothing. I shall let it speak for itself. You will now see it work. When Dr. Blodgett pulls the levers of the Xylophone, I suggest that you keep your eyes on the target—which is that farmhouse two miles away. There will be nothing else to see. The ray itself is invisible. It has long been conceded by all progressive thinkers that there are no entities, only actions—and no values, only consequences. Now, ladies and gentlemen, you will see the action and the consequences of the Thompson Harmonizer.”

Dr. Ferris bowed, walked slowly away from the microphone and came to take his seat on the bench beside Dr. Stadler.

A youngish, fattish kind of man took his stand by the switchboard—and raised his eyes expectantly toward Mr. Thompson. Mr. Thompson looked blankly bewildered for an instant, as if something had slipped his mind, until Wesley Mouch leaned over and whispered some word into his ear. “Contact!” said Mr. Thompson loudly.

Dr. Stadler could not bear to watch the graceful, undulating, effeminate motion of Dr. Blodgett’s hand as it pulled the first lever of the switchboard, then the next. He raised his field glasses and looked at the farmhouse.

In the instant when he focused his lens, a goat was pulling at its chain, reaching placidly for a tall, dry thistle. In the next instant, the goat rose into the air, upturned, its legs stretching upward and jerking, then fell into a gray pile made of seven goats in convulsions.