

all seemed to know Dr. Ferris and to seek him out, as if he were the master of ceremonies—or the star—of the occasion.

"If you would kindly be specific for a moment," said Dr. Stadler, "and tell me what—"

"Hi, Spud!" called Dr. Ferris, waving to a portly, white-haired man who filled the full-dress uniform of a general.

Dr. Stadler raised his voice: "I said, if you would kindly concentrate long enough to explain to me what in hell is going on—"

"But it's very simple. It's the final triumph of . . . You'll have to excuse me a minute, Dr. Stadler," said Dr. Ferris hastily, tearing forward, like an overtrained lackey at the sound of a bell, in the direction of what looked like a group of aging rowdies; he turned back long enough to add two words which he seemed reverently to consider as a full explanation: "*The press!*"

Dr. Stadler sat down on the wooden bench, feeling unaccountably reluctant to brush against anything around him. The three grandstands were spaced at intervals in a semi-curve, like the tiers of a small, private circus, with room for some three hundred people; they seemed built for the viewing of some spectacle—but they faced the emptiness of a flat prairie stretching off to the horizon, with nothing in sight but the dark blotch of a farmhouse miles away.

There were radio microphones in front of one stand, which seemed reserved for the press. There was a contraption resembling a portable switchboard in front of the stand reserved for officials; a few levers on polished metal sparkled in the sun on the face of the switchboard. In an improvised parking lot behind the stands, the glitter of luxurious new cars seemed a brightly reassuring sight. But it was the building that stood on a knoll some thousand feet away that gave Dr. Stadler a vague sense of uneasiness. It was a small, squat structure of unknown purpose, with massive stone walls, no windows except a few slits protected by stout iron bars, and a large dome, grotesquely too heavy for the rest, that seemed to press the structure down into the soil. A few outlets protruded from the base of the dome, in loose, irregular shapes, resembling badly poured clay funnels; they did not seem to belong to an industrial age or to any known usage. The building had an air of silent malevolence, like a puffed, venomous mushroom; it was obviously modern, but its sloppy, rounded, ineptly unspecific lines made it look like a primitive structure unearthed in the heart of the jungle, devoted to some secret rites of savagery.

Dr. Stadler sighed with irritation; he was tired of secrets. "Confidential" and "Top Confidential" had been the words stamped on the invitation which had demanded that he travel to Iowa on a two-day notice and for an unspecified purpose. Two young men, who called themselves physicists, had appeared at the Institute to escort him; his calls to Ferris' office in Washington had remained unanswered. The young men had talked—through an exhausting trip by government plane, then a clammy ride in a government car—about science, emergencies, social equilibriums and the need of secrecy, till he knew less than he had known at the start; he noticed only that two words kept recurring in their jabber, which had also appeared

in the text of the invitation, two words that had an ominous sound when involving an unknown issue: the demands for his "loyalty" and "cooperation."

The young men had deposited him on a bench in the front row of the grandstand and had vanished, like the folding gear of a mechanism, leaving him to the sudden presence of Dr. Ferris in person. Now, watching the scene around him, watching Dr. Ferris' vague excited, loosely casual gestures in the midst of a group of newsmen he had an impression of bewildering confusion, of senseless, chaotic inefficiency—and of a smooth machine working to produce the exact degree of that impression needed at the exact moment.

He felt a single, sudden flash of panic, in which, as in a flash of lightning, he permitted himself to know that he felt a desperate desire to escape. But he slammed his mind shut against it. He knew that the darkest secret of the occasion—more crucial, more untouchable, more deadly than whatever was hidden in the mushroom building—was that which had made him agree to come.

He would never have to learn his own motive, he thought; he thought it, not by means of words, but by means of the brief, vicious spasm of an emotion that resembled irritation and felt like acid. The words that stood in his mind, as they had stood when he had agreed to come were like a voodoo formula which one recites when it is needed and beyond which one must not look: *What can you do when you have to deal with people?*

He noticed that the stand reserved for those whom Ferris had called the intellectual elite was larger than the stand prepared for government officials. He caught himself feeling a swift little sneak of pleasure at the thought that he had been placed in the front row. He turned to glance at the tiers behind him. The sensation he experienced was like a small, gray shock: that random, faded, shopworn assembly was not his conception of an intellectual elite. He saw defensively belligerent men and tastelessly dressed women—he saw mean, rancorous, suspicious faces that bore the one mark incompatible with a standard bearer of the intellect: the mark of uncertainty. He could find no face he knew, no face to recognize as famous and none likely ever to achieve such recognition. He wondered by what standard these people had been selected.

Then he noticed a gangling figure in the second row, the figure of an elderly man with a long, slack face that seemed faintly familiar to him, though he could recall nothing about it, except a vague memory, as of a photograph seen in some unsavory publication. He leaned toward a woman and asked, pointing, "Could you tell me the name of that gentleman?" The woman answered in a whisper of awed respect, "That is Dr. Simon Pritchett!" Dr. Stadler turned away, wishing no one would see him, wishing no one would ever learn that he had been a member of that group.

He raised his eyes and saw that Ferris was leading the whole press gang toward him. He saw Ferris sweeping his arm at him, in the manner of a tourist guide, and declaring, when they were close enough to be heard, "But why should you waste your time on me