

He jerked his hand from knob to knob under the lighted dial. Nothing came through, no explanations, no pleas of technical trouble, no silence-hiding music. All stations were off the air.

He shuddered, he gripped the wheel, leaning forward across it, like a jockey at the close of a race, and his foot pressed down on the accelerator. The small stretch of highway before him bounced with the leaping of his headlights. There was nothing beyond the lighted strip but the emptiness of the prairies of Iowa.

He did not know why he had been listening to the broadcast; he did not know what made him tremble now. He chuckled abruptly—it sounded like a malevolent growl—either at the radio, or at those in the city, or at the sky.

He was watching the rare posts of highway numbers. He did not need to consult a map: for four days, that map had been printed on his brain, like a net of lines traced in acid. They could not take it away from him, he thought, they could not stop him. He felt as if he were being pursued; but there was nothing for miles behind him, except the two red lights on the rear of his car—like two small signals of danger, fleeing through the darkness of the Iowa plains.

The motive directing his hands and feet was four days behind him. It was the face of the man on the window sill, and the faces he had confronted when he had escaped from that room. He had cried to them that he could not deal with Galt and neither could they, that Galt would destroy them all, unless they destroyed him first. "Don't get smart, Professor." Mr. Thompson had answered coldly. "You've done an awful lot of yelling about hating his guts, but when it comes to action, you haven't helped us at all. I don't know which side you're on. If he doesn't give in to us peaceably, we might have to resort to pressure—such as hostages whom he wouldn't want to see hurt—and you're first on the list, Professor." "I?" he had screamed, shaking with terror and with bitterly desperate laughter. "I? But he damns me more than anyone on earth!" "How do I know?" Mr. Thompson had answered. "I heard that you used to be his teacher. And, don't forget, you're the only one he asked for."

His mind liquid with terror, he had felt as if he were about to be crushed between two walls advancing upon him: he had no chance, if Galt refused to surrender—and less chance, if Galt joined these men. It was then that a distant shape had come swimming forward in his mind: the image of a mushroom-domed structure in the middle of an Iowa plain.

All images had begun to fuse in his mind thereafter. Project X—he had thought, not knowing whether it was the vision of that structure or of a feudal castle commanding the countryside, that gave him the sense of an age and a world to which he belonged . . . I'm Robert Stadler—he had thought—it's my property, it came from my discoveries, they said it was I who invented it. . . . I'll show them!—he had thought, not knowing whether he meant the man on the window sill or the others or the whole of mankind. . . . His thoughts had become like chips floating in a liquid, without connections: To seize control . . . I'll show them! . . . To seize control, to rule . . . There is no other way to live on earth. . . .

These had been the only words that named the plan in his mind. He had felt that the rest was clear to him—clear in the form of a savage emotion crying defiantly that he did not have to make it clear. He would seize control of Project X and he would rule a part of the country as his private feudal domain. The means? His emotion had answered: Somehow. The motive? His mind had repeated insistently that his motive was terror of Mr. Thompson's gang, that he was not safe among them any longer, that his plan was a practical necessity. In the depth of his liquid brain, his emotion had held another kind of terror, drowned along with the connections between his broken chips of words.

These chips had been the only compass directing his course through four days and nights—while he drove down deserted highways, across a country collapsing into chaos, while he developed a monomaniac's cunning for obtaining illegal purchases of gas, while he snatched random hours of restless sleep, in obscure motels, under assumed names. . . . I'm Robert Stadler—he had thought, his mind repeating it as a formula of omnipotence. . . . To seize control—he had thought, speeding against the futile traffic lights of half-abandoned towns—speeding on the vibrating steel of the Taggart Bridge across the Mississippi—speeding past the occasional ruins of farms in the empty stretches of Iowa. . . . I'll show them—he had thought—let them pursue, they won't stop me this time. . . . He had thought it, even though no one had pursued him—as no one was pursuing him now, but the taillights of his own car and the motive drowned in his mind.

He looked at his silent radio and chuckled: the chuckle had the emotional quality of a fist being shaken at space. It's I who am practical—he thought—I have no choice . . . I have no other way . . . I'll show all those insolent gangsters, who forget that I am Robert Stadler . . . They will all collapse, but I won't! . . . I'll survive . . . I'll win! . . . I'll show them!

The words were like chunks of solid ground in his mind, in the midst of a fiercely silent swamp; the connections lay submerged at the bottom. If connected, his words would have formed the sentence: I'll show *him* that there is no other way to live on earth! . . .

The scattered lights in the distance ahead were the barracks erected on the site of Project X, now known as Harmony City. He observed, as he came closer, that something out of the ordinary was going on at Project X. The barbed-wire fence was broken, and no sentinels met him at the gate. But some sort of abnormal activity was churning in the patches of darkness and in the glare of some wavering spotlights: there were armored trucks and running figures and shouted orders and the gleam of bayonets. No one stopped his car. At the corner of a shanty, he saw the motionless body of a soldier sprawled on the ground. Drunk—he thought, preferring to think it, wondering why he felt unsure of it.

The mushroom structure crouched on a knoll before him; there were lights in the narrow slits of its windows—and the shapeless funnels protruded from under its dome, aimed at the darkness of the country. A soldier barred his way, when he alighted from his car