The soaring imagination of Jack Vance needs little introduction here. Twice a Hugo winner, long cherished by science-fiction enthusiasts for the vivid individuality of his style and the fertility of his inventive mind, this Californian had already reached the highest rank of the field when this novella of telekinetic powers appeared late in 1951. His work since that time has served only to consolidate the position he held then.

Telek

Jack Vance

I.

Geskamp and Shorn stood in the sad light of sundown, high on the rim of the new stadium. Wooded hills rolled away to either side; behind them, far to the west, the towers of Tran cut sword-shaped notches into the sky.

Geskamp pointed east, up Swanscomba Valley, now glowing a thousand tones of gold and green in the long light of sunset. "That's where I was born, by that row of poplars. I knew the valley well in the old days." He spent a moment in far reflection. "I hate to see the changes, the old things wiped out. There"—he pointed —"by the stream was Pimssi's croft and stone barn. There, where you see the grove of oaks, that was the village Cobent. There, by Poll Point, was the valley power tank. There, the Tran aquaport crossed the river, entered the tunnel. It was considered beautiful, the aquaport, antique, overgrown with ivy, stained with lichen. And only six months ago; already it seems a hundred years."

Shorn, intending to make a delicate request, considered how best to take advantage of Geskamp's nostalgia for the irretrievable past; he was faintly surprised to find Geskamp, a big jutfaced man with gray-blond hair, indulging in sentiment of any kind. "There is certainly no recognizing it now."

"No. It's all tidy and clean. Like a park. Look up that mile of clear lawn. I liked it better in the old days. Now it's waste, nothing else." Geskamp cocked his bristling eyebrows at Shorn. "Do you know, they hold me responsible, the farmers and villagers? Because I'm in charge, I gave the orders?"

"They strike out at what's closest."

"I merely earn my salary. I did what I could for them. Completely useless, of course; there never were people so obdurate as the Teleks. Level the valley, build a stadium. Hurry, in time for their midsummer get-together. I say, why not build in Mismarch Valley, around the mountain, where only sheepherders would be disturbed, no crofts and farms to be broken up, no village to be razed."

"What did they say to that?"

"It was Forence Nollinrude I spoke to; you know him?"

"I've seen him: one of their liaison committee. A young man, rather more lofty than the average."

Geskamp spat on the concrete under his feet. "The young ones are the worst. He asked, 'Do we not give you enough money? Pay them well, clear them out. Swanscomba Valley is where we will have our stadium.' So"—Geskamp held out his hands in a quick gesticulation—"I bring out my machines, my men. We fly in material. For those who have lived here all their lives there is no choice; they take their money and go. Otherwise some morning perhaps they look out their door and find polar ice or mountains of the moon. I'd not put such refinement past the Teleks."

"Strange tales are told," Shorn agreed.

Geskamp pointed to the grove of oaks. His shadow, cast against the far side of the stadium by the level rays of the sun, followed the motion. "The oaks they brought, so much did they condescend. I explained that transplanting a forest was a job of great delicacy and expense. They were indifferent. 'Spend as much as you like.' I told them there wasn't enough time; if they wanted the stadium inside the month; finally they were aroused. Nollinrude and the one called Henry Motch stirred themselves, and the next day we had all our forest—But would they dispose of the waste from the aquaport, cast it in the sea? No. 'You hire four thousand men, let them move the rubble, brick by brick if need be; we have business elsewhere.' And they were gone."

"A peculiar people."

"Peculiar?" Geskamp gathered his bushy eyebrows into arches of vast scorn. "Madmen. For a whim—a town erased, men and women sent forth homeless." He waved his hand around the stadium. "Two hundred million crowns spent to gratify irresponsible popinjays whose only—"

A droll voice above them said, "I hear myself bespoken."

The two men jerked around. A man stood in the air ten feet above them. His face was mercurial and lighthearted; a green cap hung waggishly to the side of his head; dark hair hung below, almost to his shoulders. He wore a flaring red cape, tight green trousers, black velvet shoes. "You speak in anger, with little real consideration. We are your benefactors; where would you be without us?"

"Living normal lives," growled Geskamp.

The Telek was disposed to facetiousness. "Who is to say that yours is a normal life? In any event, our whim is your employment; we formulate our idle dreams, you and your men enrich yourselves fulfilling them, and we're both the better for it."

"Somehow the money always ends up back with the Teleks. A mystery."

"No, no mystery whatever. It is the exercise of economic law. In any event, we procure the funds, and we would be fools to hoard. In our spending you find occupation."

"We would not be idle otherwise."

"Perhaps not. Perhaps . . . well, look." He pointed across the stadium to the shadows on the far wall. "Perhaps there is your bent." And as they watched, their shadows became active. Shorn's shadow bent forward, Geskamp's shadow drew back, aimed and delivered a mighty kick, then turned, bent, and Shorn's shadow kicked.

The Telek cast no shadow.

Geskamp snorted, Shorn smiled grimly. They looked back overhead, but the Telek had moved high and was drifting south.

"Offensive creature," said Geskamp. "A law should be passed confiscating their every farthing."

Shorn shook his head. "They'd have it all back by nightfall. That's not the answer." He hesitated, as if about to add something further.

Geskamp, already irked by the Telek, did not take the contradiction kindly. Shorn, an architectural draughtsman, was his subordinate. "I suppose you know the answer?"

"I know several answers. One of them is that they should all be killed."

Geskamp's irritation had never carried him quite so far. Shorn was a strange, unpredictable fellow. "Rather bloodthirsty," he said heavily.

Shorn shrugged. "It might be best in the long run."

Geskamp's eyebrows lowered into a straight bar of gold-gray bristle across his face. "The idea is impractical. The creatures are hard to kill."

Shorn laughed. "It's more than impractical—it's dangerous. If you recall the death of Vernisaw Knerwig—"

Vemisaw Knerwig had been punctured by a pellet from a high-power rifle, fired from a window. The murderer, a wild-eyed stripling, was apprehended. But the jail had not been tight enough to keep him. He disappeared. For months misfortune dogged the town. Poison appeared in the water supply. A dozen fires roared up one night. The roof of the town school collapsed. And one afternoon a great meteor struck down from space and obliterated the central square.

"Killing Teleks is dangerous work," said Geskamp. "It's not a realistic thought. After all," he said hurriedly, "they're men and women like ourselves; nothing illegal has ever been proved."

Shorn's eyes glittered. "Illegality? When they dam the whole stream of human development?"

Geskamp frowned. "I'd hardly say—"

"The signs are clear enough when a person pulls his head up out of the sand."

The conversation had got out of hand; Geskamp had been left behind. Waste and excess he admitted, but there were so few Teleks, so many ordinary people; how could they be dangerous? It was strange for an architect. He looked sidewise in cautious calculation.

Shorn was faintly smiling. "Well, what do you make of it?"

"You take an extreme position. It's hardly conceivable—"

"The future is unknown. Almost anything is conceivable. We might become Teleks, all of us. Unlikely? I think so myself. The Teleks might die out, disappear. Equally unlikely. They've always been with us, all of history, latent in our midst. What are the probabilities? Something like the present situation, a few Teleks among the great mass of common people?"

Geskamp nodded. "That's my opinion."

"Picture the future then. What do you see?"

"Nothing extraordinary. I imagine things will move along much as they have been."

"You see no trend, no curve of shifting relationships?"

"The Teleks are an irritation, certainly, but they interfere very little in our lives. In a sense they're an asset. They spend their money like water; they contribute to the general prosperity." He looked anxiously into the sky through the gathering dusk. "Their wealth, it's honestly acquired; no matter where they find those great blocks of metal."

"The metal comes from the moon, from the asteroids, from the outer planets."

Geskamp nodded. "Yes, that's the speculation."

"The metal represents restraint. The Teleks are giving value in return for what they could take."

"Of course. Why shouldn't they give value in return?"

"No reason at all. They should. But now—consider the trend. At the outset they were ordinary citizens. They lived by ordinary conventions; they were decent people. After the first congress they made their fortunes for performing dangerous and unpleasant tasks. Idealism, public service was the keynote. They identified themselves with all of humanity, and very praiseworthy, too. Now, sixty years later. Consider the Teleks of today. Is there any pretension to public service? None. They dress differently, speak differently, live differently. They no longer load ships or clear jungles or build roads; they take an easier way, which makes less demands on their time. Humanity benefits; they bring us platinum, palladium, uranium, rhodium, all the precious metals, which they sell at half the old price, and they pour the money back into circulation." He gestured across the stadium. "And meanwhile the old ones are dying and the new Teleks have no roots, no connection with common man. They draw ever farther away, developing a way of living entirely different from ours."

Geskamp said half-truculently, "What do you expect? It's natural, isn't it?"

Shorn put on a patient face. "That's exactly the point I'm trying to make. Consider the trend, the curve. Where does this 'natural' behavior lead? Always away from common humanity, the old traditions, always toward an elite-herd situation."

Geskamp rubbed his heavy chin. "I think that you're ... well, making a mountain out of a molehill."

"Do you think so? Consider the stadium, the eviction of the old property-owners. Think of Vernisaw Knerwig and the revenge they took."

"Nothing was proved," said Geskamp uneasily. What was the fellow up to? Now he was grinning, a superior sort of grin.

"In your heart, you agree with what I say; but you can't bring yourself to face the facts—because then you'd be forced to take a stand. For or against."

Geskamp stared out across the valley, wholly angry, but unable to dispute Shorn's diagnosis. "I don't see the facts clearly."

"There are only two courses for us. We must either control the Teleks, that is, make them answerable to human law—or we must eliminate them entirely. In blunt words—kill them. If we don't—they become the masters; we the slaves. It's inevitable."

Geskamp's anger broke surface.

"Why do you tell me all these things? What are you driving at? This is strange talk to hear from an architect; you sound like one of the conspirators I've heard rumors of."

"I'm talking for a specific purpose—just as I worked on this job for a specific purpose. I want to bring you to our way of thinking."

"Oh. So that's the way of it."

"And with this accomplished, recruit your ability and your authority toward a concrete end."

"Who are you? What is this group?"

"A number of men worried by the trend I mentioned."

"A subversive society?" Geskamp's voice held a tinge of scorn.

Shorn laughed. "Don't let the flavor of words upset you. Call us a committee of public-spirited citizens."

"You'd be in trouble if the Teleks caught wind of you," said Geskamp woodenly.

"They're aware of us. But they're not magicians. They don't know who we are."

"I know who you are," said Geskamp. "Suppose I reported this conversation to Nollinrude?"

Shorn grinned. "What would you gain?"

"A great deal of money."

"You'd live the rest of your life in fear of revenge."

"I don't like it," said Geskamp in a brutal voice. "I don't care to be involved in any undercover plots."

"Examine your conscience. Think it over."

II.

The attack on Forence Nollinrude came two days later.

The construction office was a long L-shaped building to the west of the stadium. Geskamp stood in the yard angrily refusing to pay a trucker more than the agreed scale for his concrete aggregate.

"I can buy it cheaper in half a dozen, places," roared Geskamp. "You only got the contract in the first place because I went to bat for you."

The trucker had been one of the dispossessed farmers. He shook his head mulishly. "You did me no favor. I'm losing money. It's costing me three crowns a meter."

Geskamp waved an arm angrily toward the man's equipment, a small hopper carried by a pair of ramcopters. "How do you expect to make out with that kind of gear? All your profit goes in running back and forth to the quarry. Get yourself a pair of Samson lifts; you'll cut your costs to where you can make a few crowns."

"I'm a farmer, not a trucker. I took this contract because I had what I have. If I go in the hole for heavy equipment, then I'm stuck with it. It'll do me no more good now, the job's three-quarters done. I want more money, Geskamp, not good advice."

"Well, you can't get it from me. Talk to the purchasing agent; maybe he'll break down. I got you the contract, that's as far as I go."

"I already talked to the purchasing agent; he said nothing doing."

"Strike up one of the Teleks then; they've got the money. I can't do anything for you."

The trucker spat on the ground. "The Teleks, they're the devils who started this whole thing. A year ago I had my dairy—right where that patch of water is now. I was doing good. Now I've got nothing; the money they gave me to get out, most of it's gone in this gravel. Now where do I go? I got my family."

Geskamp drew his bushy gray-blond eyebrows together. "I'm sorry, Hopson. But there's nothing I can do. There's the Telek now; tell him your troubles."

The Telek was Forence Nollinrude, a tall yellow-haired man, magnificent in a rust cape, saffron trousers, black velvet slippers. The trucker looked across the yard to where he floated a fastidious three feet above the ground, then resolved himself and trudged sullenly forward.

Shorn, inside the office, could hear nothing of the interview. The trucker stared up belligerently, legs spread out. Forence Nollinrude turned himself a little to the side, looked down with distaste deepening the lines at the corners of his mouth.

The trucker did most of the talking. The Telek replied in curt monosyllables, and the trucker became progressively more furious.

Geskamp had been watching with a worried frown. He started across the yard, with the evident intention of calming the trucker. As he approached, Nollinrude pulled himself a foot or two higher, drew slightly away, turned toward Geskamp, motioned toward the trucker as if requiring Geskamp to remove

the annoyance.

The trucker suddenly seized a bar of reinforcing iron, swung mightly,

Geskamp bawled hoarsely; Forence Nollinrude jerked away, but the iron caught him across the shins. He cried in agony, drew back, looked at the trucker. The trucker rose like a rocket, a hundred feet into the air, turned end for end, dived head-first to the ground. He struck with crushing force, pulping his head, his shoulders. But as if Nollinrude were not yet satisfied, the bar of iron rose and beat the limp body with enormous savage strokes.

Had Nollinrude been less anguished by the pain of his legs he would have been more wary. Almost as the trucker struck the ground, Geskamp seized a laborer's mattock, stalked close behind, swung. The Telek collapsed to the ground.

"Now," said Shorn to himself, "there will be hell to pay."

Geskamp stood panting, looking down at the body huddled in the finery that suddenly seemed not chosen human vestments, but the gaudy natural growth of a butterfly or flash-beetle in pathetic disarray. He became aware of the mattock he still held, flung it away as if it were red-hot, and stood wiping his hands nervously together.

Shorn knelt beside the body, searched with practiced swiftness. He found and pocketed a wallet, a small pouch, then rose to his feet.

"We've got to work fast." He looked around the yard. Possibly half a dozen men had witnessed the occurrence—a tool-room attendant, a form foreman, a couple of time-clerks, a laborer or two. "Get them all together, everyone who saw what happened; I'll take care of the body. Here, you!" He called to a white-faced lift operator. "Get a hopper down here."

They rolled the gorgeous hulk into the hopper. Shorn jumped up beside the operator, pointed. "Up there where they're pouring that abutment."

They swept diagonally up the great north wall, to where a pour-crew worked beside a receptor designed to receive concrete from loaded hoppers. Shorn jumped four feet from the hopper to the deck, went to the foreman. "There's a hold-up here; take your crew down to B-142 Pilaster and work there for a while."

The foreman grumbled, protested. The receptor was half-full of concrete.

Shorn raised his voice impatiently. "Leave it set. I'll send a lift up to move the whole thing."

The foreman turned away, barked ill-naturedly to his men. They moved with exaggerated slowness. Shorn stood tautly while they gathered their equipment and trooped down the ramp.

He turned to the lift operator. "Now."

The bedizened body rolled into the pour.

Shorn guided the dump-hose into position, pulled the trigger. Gray slush pressed down the staring face that had known so much power.

Shorn sighed slightly. "That's good. Now—we'll get the crew back on the job."

At Pilaster B-142 Shorn signaled the foreman, who glowered belligerently. Shorn was a mere draftsman, therefore a fumbler and impractical. "You can go back to work up above now."

Before the foreman could find words for an adequate retort, Shorn was back in the hopper.

In the yard he found Geskamp standing at the center of an apprehensive group.

"Nollinrude's gone." He looked at the body of the trucker who had caused the original outburst. "Somebody will have to take him home."

He surveyed the group, trying to gauge their strength, and found nothing to reassure him. Eyes shifted sullenly from his. With an empty feeling in his stomach Shorn knew that the fact of the killing could not be disposed of as easily as the body.

Shorn once more scanned the surroundings. A great blank wall rose immediately to the east; to the north were the Alban Hills, to the south the empty Swanscomba Valley.

Probably these few people were still alone in their knowledge of the killing. He looked from face to face. "A lot of people to keep a secret. If one of us talks—even to his brother or his friend, or his wife—then there's no more secret. You all remember Vernisaw Knerwig?"

A nervous mutter assured him that they did; that their urgent hope was to disassociate themselves from any part of the current episode.

Geskamp's face was working irritably. Shorn remembered that Geskamp was nominally in charge, and was possibly sensitive to any usurpation of his authority. "Yes, Mr. Geskamp? Did you have something to add?"

Geskamp drew back his heavy lips, grinning like a big blond dog. With an effort he restrained himself. "You're doing fine."

Shorn turned back to the others. "You men are leaving the job now. You won't be questioned by any Teleks. Naturally they'll know that Nollinrude has disappeared, but I hope they won't know where. Just in case you are asked—Nollinrude came and went. That's all you know. Another thing." He paused weightily. "If any one of us becomes wealthy and the Teleks become full of knowledge—this person will regret that he sold his voice." And he added, as if it were an inconsequential matter, "There's a group to cope with situations of this sort." He looked at Geskamp, but Geskamp kept stonily silent. "Now, I'll get your names—for future reference. One at a time—"

Twenty minutes later a carry-all floated off toward Tran.

"Well," said Geskamp bitterly, "I'm up to my neck in it now. Is that what you wanted?"

"I didn't want it this way. You're in a tough spot. So am I. With luck we'll come through. But—just in case—tonight we'll have to do what I was leading up to."

Geskamp squinted angrily. "Now I'm to be your cat's-paw. In what?"

"You can sign a requisition. You can send a pair of lifts to the explosives warehouse—"

Geskamp's bushy eyebrows took on an odd reverse tilt. "Explosives? How much?"

"A ton of mitrox."

Geskamp said in a tone of hushed respect: "That's enough to blow the stadium ten miles high!"

Shorn grinned. "Exactly. You'd better get that requisition off right now. Then you have the key to the generator room. Tomorrow the main pile is going in. Tonight you and I will arrange the mitrox under the piers."

Geskamp's mouth hung open. "But—"

Show's dour face became almost charming. "I know. Wholesale murder. Not sporting. I agree with you. A sneak attack. I agree. Stealth and sneak attacks and back-stabbing are our weapons. We don't have any others. None at all."

"But—why are you so confident of bloodshed?"

Shorn suddenly exploded in anger. "Man, get your head up out of the sand. What's our chance of getting every single one without exception?"

Geskamp jumped out of the company airboat assigned to his use, stalked with a set face around the stadium toward the construction office. Above him rose two hundred feet of sheer concrete, glowing in the morning sun. In his mind's eye Geskamp saw the dark cartons that he and Shorn had carried below like moles on the night previous; he still moving with reluctance and uncertainty, carried only by Shorn's fire and direction.

Now the trap was set. A single coded radio signal would pulverize the new concrete, fling a molten gout miles into the air, pound a gigantic blow at the earth.

Geskamp's honest face became taut as he wrestled with his conscience. Had he been too malleable? Think what a revenge the Teleks would take for such a disaster! Still, if the Teleks were as terrible a threat to human freedom as Shorn had half made him believe, then the mass killing was a deed to be resolutely carried through, like the killing of dangerous beasts. And certainly the Teleks only paid lip-service to human laws. His mind went to the death of Forence Nollinrude. In ordinary events there would be an inquiry. Nollinrude had killed the trucker; Geskatnp, swept by overwhelming rage and pity, had killed the Telek. At the worst a human court would have found him guilty of manslaughter, and no doubt have granted probation. But with a Telek—Geskamp's blood chilled in his veins. Maybe there was something to Shorn's extreme methods after all; certainly the Teleks could be controlled by no normal methods of law.

He rounded the corner of the tool room, noted an unfamiliar face within. Good. Home office had acted without inquisitiveness; the shifting of employees had interested no one with authority to ask questions.

He looked into the expediter's room. "Where's the draftsman?" he asked Cole, the steel detailer.

"Never showed up this morning, Mr. Geskamp." Geskamp cursed under his breath. Just like Shorn, getting him into trouble, then ducking out, leaving him to face it. Might be better to come clean with the whole incident; after all it had been an accident, a fit of blood-rage. The Teleks could understand so much, surely.

He turned his head. Something flickered at the edge of his vision. He looked sharply. Something like a big black bug whisked up behind a shelf of books. Big cockroach, thought Geskamp. A peculiar cockroach.

He attacked his work in a vicious humor, and foremen around the job asked themselves wonderingly what had got into Geskamp. Three times during the morning he looked into the office for Shorn, but Shorn had made no appearance.

And once, as he ducked under a low soffit on one of the upper decks, a black object darted up behind him. He jerked his eyes around, but the thing had disappeared under the beams.

"Funny bug," he said to the new form foreman, whom he was showing around the job.

"I didn't see it, Mr. Geskamp."

Geskamp returned to the office, obtained Shorn's home address—a hotel in the Marmion Tower—and put in a visiphone call.

Shorn was not in.

Geskamp turned away, almost bumped into the feet of a Telek standing in the air before him: a thin somber man with silver hair and oil-back eyes. He wore two tones of gray, with a sapphire clasp at the collar of his cape, and the usual Telek slippers of black velvet.

Geskamp's heart started thudding; this hands became moist. The moment he had been dreading. Where was Shorn?

"You are Geskamp?"

"Yes," said Geskamp. "I—"

He was picked up, hurled through the air. Far, fleeting below, went the stadium, Swanscomba Valley, the entire countryside. Tran was a gray and black honeycomb, he was in the sunny upper air, hurtling with unthinkable speed. Wind roared past in his ears, but he felt no pressure on his skin, no tear at his clothes.

The ocean spread blue below, and something glittered ahead—a complex edifice of shiny metal, glass and bright color. It floated high in the sunny air, with no support above or below.

Geskamp saw a glitter, a flash; he was standing on a floor of glass threaded and drawn with strands of green and gold. The thin gray man sat behind a table in a yellow chair. The room was flooded with sunlight; Geskamp was too dazed to notice further details.

The Telek said, "Geskamp, tell me what you know of Forence Nollinrude."

It appeared to Geskamp that the Telek was watching him with superior knowledge, as if any lie would be instantly known, dismissed with grim humor. He was a poor liar to begin with. He looked around for a place to rest his big body. A chair appeared.

"Nollinrude?" He seated himself. "I saw him yesterday. What about him?"

"Where is he now?"

Geskamp forced a painful laugh. "How would I know?"

A sliver of glass darted through the air, stung the back of Geskamp's neck. He rose to his feet, startled and angry.

"Sit down," said the Telek, in a voice of unnatural coolness.

Geskamp slowly sat down. A kind of faintness dimmed his vision, his brain seemed to move away, seemed to watch dispassionately.

"Where is Nollinrude?"

Geskamp held his breath. A voice said, "He's dead. Down in the concrete."

"Who killed him?"

Geskamp listened to hear what the voice would say.

III.

Shorn sat in a quiet tavern in that section of Tran where the old suddenly changes to the new. South were the sword-shaped towers, the neat intervening plazas and parks; north spread the ugly crust of three- and four-story apartments gradually blending into the industrial district.

A young woman with straight brown hair sat across the table from Shorn. She wore a brown cloak without ornament; looking into her face there was little to notice but her eyes—large, brown-black, somber; the rest of her face was without accent.

Shorn was drinking strong tea, his thin dark face in repose.

The young woman seemed to see an indication that the surface calm was false. She put out her hand, rested it on his, a quick exquisite gesture, the first time she had touched him in the three months of their acquaintance. "How could you have done differently?" Her voice became mildly argumentative. "What could you have done?"

"Taken the whole half-dozen underground. Kept Geskamp with me."

"How would that have helped? There'll be a certain number of deaths, a certain amount of destruction—how many and how much is out of our hands. Is Geskamp a valuable man?"

"No. He's a big hard-working likable fellow, hardly devious or many-tracked enough to be of use. And I don't think he would have come with me. He was to the point of open rebellion as it was—the type who resents infringement."

"It's not impossible that your arrangements are effective."

"Not a chance. The only matter for speculation is how many the Teleks destroy and whom."

The young woman relaxed somberly hack in her chair, stared straight ahead. "If nothing else, this episode marks a new place in the ... in the . . . I don't know what to call it. Struggle? Campaign? War?"

"Call it war."

"We're almost out in the open. Public opinion may be aroused, swung to our side."

Shorn shook his head gloomily. "The Teleks have bought most of the police, and I suspect that they own the big newspapers, through fronts of course. No, we can't expect much public support yet. We'll be called Nihilists, Totalitarists—"

The young woman quoted Turgenev. "If you want to annoy an opponent thoroughly or even harm him, you reproach him with every defect or vice you are conscious of in yourself."

"It's just as well." Shorn laughed bitterly. "Perhaps it's one of our big advantages, our freedom to merge into the masses. If everyone were anti-Telek, the Teleks would have an easy job. Kill everybody."

"Then they'd have to do all their own work."

"That's right, too."

She made a fluttering gesture, her voice was strained. "It's a blood penance on our century, on humanity—"

Shorn snorted. "Mysticism."

She went on as if she had not heard. "If men were to develop from sub-apes a thousand times—each of those thousand rises would show the same phases, and there would be a Telek phase in all of them. It's as much a part of humanity as hunger and fear and sex."

"And when the Teleks are out of the way—what's the next phase? Is history only a series of bloody phases? Where's the leveling-off point?"

She smiled wanly. "Perhaps when we're all Teleks."

Shorn gave her a strange look—calculation, curiosity, wonder. He returned to his tea as if to practical reality. "I suppose Geskamp has been trying to get hold of me all morning."

He considered a moment, then rose to his feet. "I'll call the job and find out what's happened."

A moment later he returned. "Geskamp's nowhere around. A message just came in for me at the hotel, and it's to be delivered by hand only."

"Perhaps Geskamp went of his own accord."

"Perhaps."

"More likely—" she paused. "Anyway, the hotel is a good place to stay away from."

Shorn clenched and unclenched his hands. "It frightens me."

"What?" She seemed surprised.

"My own—vindictiveness. It's not right to hate anyone. A person is bad because exterior forces have hurt his essentially good brain. I realize this—and yet I hate."

"The Teleks?"

"No, not the Teleks." He spoke slowly. "I fear them, good healthy fear. I kill them for survival. Those I *want* to kill, for pleasure, are the men who serve the Teleks for money, who sell their own kind." He clenched, unclenched his hands. "It's unhealthy to think like that."

"You're too much the idealist, Will."

Shorn mused, talking in a monotone. "Our war is the war of ants against giants. They have the power but they loom, we see them for miles. We're among the swarm. We move a hundred feet, into a new group of people, we're lost. Anonymity, that's our advantage. So we're safe—until a Judas-ant identifies us, drags us forth from the swarm. Then we're lost; the giant foot comes down, there's no escape. We—"

The young woman raised her hand. "Listen."

A voice from the sound-line, here running under the ceiling molding, said, "The murder of a Telek, Forence Nollinrude, liaison lieutenant, by subversive conspiracy has been announced. The murderer, Ian Geskamp, superintendent of construction at the Swanscomba Valley Stadium, has disappeared. It is expected that he will implicate a number of confederates when captured."

Shorn sat quietly.

"What will they do if they catch him? Will they turn him over to the authorities?"

Shorn nodded. "They've announced the murder. If they want to maintain the fiction of their subservience to Federal law, then they've got to submit to the regular courts. Once he's out of their direct custody, then no doubt he'll die—any one of a number of unpleasant deaths. And then there will be further acts of God. Another meteor, into Geskamp's home town, something of the sort—"

"Why are you smiling?"

"It just occurred to me that Geskamp's home town was Cobent Village, that used to be in Swanscomba Valley. They've already wiped that one off the map. But they'll do something significant enough to point up the moral—that killing Teleks is a very expensive process."

"It's odd that they bother with legality at all."

"It means that they want no sudden showdown. Whatever revolution there is to be, they want it to come gradually, with as little dislocation as possible, no sudden flood of annoying administrative detail." He sat tapping his fingers nervously. "Geskamp was a good fellow. I'm wondering about this message at the hotel."

"If he were captured, drugged, your name and address would come out. You would be a valuable captive."

"Not while I can bite down on my back tooth. Full of cyanide. But I'm curious about that message. If it's from Geskamp he needs help, and we should help him. He knows about the mitrox under the stadium. The subject might not arise during the course of questioning, especially under drugs, but we don't want to run the risk."

"Suppose it's a trick?"

"Well—we might learn something."

"I could get it," she said doubtfully.

Shorn frowned.

"No," she said, "I don't mean by walking in and asking for it; that would be foolish. You write a note

authorizing delivery of the message to bearer."

The young woman said to the boy, "It's very important that you follow instructions exactly."

"Yes, miss."

The boy rode the sidewalk to the Marmion Tower, whose seventh and eighth floors were given to the Cort Hotel. He rode the lift to the seventh floor, went quietly to the desk.

"Mr. Shorn sent me to pick up his mail." He passed the note across the desk.

The clerk hesitated, looked away in preoccupation, then without words handed the boy an envelope.

The boy returned to the ground floor, walked out into the street, where he paused, waited. Apparently no one followed him. He rode the sidewalk north, along the gray streets to the Tarrogat, stepped around the corner, jumped on the high-speed East Division sidewalk. Heavy commercial traffic growled through the street beside him, trucks and drays, a few surface cars. The boy spied a momentary gap, stepped to the outside band, jumped running into the street. He darted across, climbed on the sidewalk running in the opposite direction, watching over his shoulder. No one followed. He rode a mile, past the Flatiron Y, turned into Grant Avenue, jumped to the stationary, crouched by the corner.

No one came hurrying after.

He crossed the street, entered the Grand Maison Café.

The food panel made an island down the center; to either side were tables. The boy walked around the food panel, ignoring a table where a young woman in a brown cloak sat by herself. He ducked out an entrance opposite to where he entered, rounded the building, entered once more.

The young woman rose to her feet, followed him out. At the exit they brushed together accidentally.

The boy went about his business, and the young woman turned, went back to the rest room. As she opened the door a black beetle buzzed through with her.

She ducked, looked around the ceiling, but the insect had disappeared. She went to a visiphone, paid for sonic, dialed.

"Well?"

"I've got it."

"Anyone follow?"

"No. I watched him leave Marmion Tower. I watched behind him in—" her voice broke off.

"What's the matter?"

She said in a strained voice, "Get out of there fast. Hurry. Don't ask questions. Get away—fast!"

She hung up, pretending that she had not noticed the black bug pressed against the glass, crystal eyes staring at the visiphone dial.

She reached in her pouch, selected one of the four weapons she carried, drew it forth, closed her eyes, snapped the release.

White glare flooded the room, seared behind her closed lids. She ran out the door, picked up the dazed bug in her handkerchief, stuffed it into her pouch. It was strangely heavy, like a slug of lead.

She must hurry. She ran from the rest room, up through the café, out into the street.

Safe among the crowds she watched six emergency vans vomit Black and Golds who rushed to the exits of the Grand Maison Café.

Bitterly she rode the sidewalks north. The Teleks controlled the police, it was no secret.

She wondered about the beetle in her pouch. It evinced no movement, no sign of life. If her supposition were correct, it would be quiet so long as she kept light from its eyes, so long as she denied it reference points.

For an hour she wandered the city, intent on evading not only men, but also little black beetle-things. At last she ducked into a narrow passageway in the hard industry quarter, ran up a flight of wooden steps, entered a drab but neat sitting room.

She went to a closet, found a small canister with a screw top, gingerly pushed the handkerchief and the beetle-thing inside, screwed down the lid.

She removed her long brown cloak, drew a cup of coffee from the dispenser, waited.

Half an hour passed. The door opened. Shorn looked in. His face was haggard and pale as a dog skull; his eyes glowed with an unhealthy yellow light.

She jumped to her feet. "What's happened?"

"Sit still, Laurie, I'm all right." He slumped into a seat.

She drew another cup of coffee, passed it to him. "What happened?"

His eyes burned brighter. "As soon as I heard from you, I left the tavern. Twenty seconds later—no more —the place exploded. Flame shooting out the door, out the windows—thirty or forty people inside; I can hear them yelling now—" His mouth sagged. He licked his lips. "I hear them—"

Laurie controlled her voice. "Just ants."

Shorn assented with a ghastly grin. "The giant steps on forty ants, but the guilty ant, the marked ant, the intended ant—he's gone."

She told him about the black bug. He groaned ironically. "It was bad enough dodging spies and Black and Golds. Now little bugs—can it hear?"

"I don't know. I suppose so. It's shut up tight in the can, but sound probably gets through."

"We'd better move it."

She wrapped the can in a towel, tucked it in a closet, shut the door. When she returned, Shorn was eying her with a new look in his eye. "You thought very swiftly, Laurie."

She turned away to hide her pleasure. "I had to."

"You still have the message?"

She handed the envelope across the table.

He read, "Get in touch with Clyborn at the Perendalia."

"Do you know him?"

"No. We'll make discreet inquiries. I don't imagine there'll be anything good come out of it."

"It's so much—work."

"Easy for the giants. One or two of them manage the entire project. I've heard that the one called Dominion is in charge, and the others don't even realize there's dissatisfaction. Just as we appoint a dogcatcher, then dismiss the problem of stray dogs from our minds. Probably not one Telek in a hundred realizes that we're fighting for our lives, our futures, our dignity as human beings."

After a moment she asked, "Do you think we'll win, Will?"

"I don't know. We have nothing to lose." He yawned, stretched. "Tonight I meet Circumbright; you remember him?"

"He's the chubby little biophysicist."

Shorn nodded. "If you'll excuse me, I think I'll take a nap."

IV.

At eleven o'clock Shorn descended to the street. The sky was bright with glow from the lake-shore entertainment strip, the luxury towers of downtown Tran.

He walked along the dark street till he came to Bellman Boulevard, and stepped out onto the slipway.

There was a cold biting wind and few people were abroad; the hum of the rollers below was noticeable. He turned into Stockbridge Street, and as he approached the quarter-mile strip of night stores, the sidewalks became crowded and Shorn felt more secure. He undertook a few routine precautions, sliding quickly through doors, to break contact with any spy-beetles that might have fixed on him.

At midnight the fog blew thick in from the harbor, smelling of oil, mercaptan, ammonia. Pulling up his hood, Shorn descended a flight of stairs, pushed into a basement recreation hall, sidled past the dull-eyed men at the mechanical games. He walked directly toward the men's room, turned at the last minute into a short side corridor, passed through a door marked "Employees" into a workshop littered with bits and

parts from the amusement machines.

Shorn waited a moment, ears alert for sound, then went to the rear of the room, unlocked a steel door, slipped through into a second workshop, much more elaborately fitted than the first. A short stout man with a big head and mild blue eyes looked up. "Hello, Will."

Shorn waved his hand. "Hello, Gorman."

He stood with his back to the door, looking around the molding for a black, apparently innocent, beetle. Nothing in sight. He crossed the room, scribbled on a bit of paper. "We've got to search the room. Look for a flying spy cell, like this." He sketched the beetle he carried with him in the canister, then appended a postscript. "I'll cover the ventilator."

An hour's search revealed nothing.

Shorn sighed, relaxed. "Ticklish. If there was one of the things here, and it saw us searching, the Telek at the other end would have known the jig was up. We'd have been in trouble. A fire, an explosion. They missed me once already today, by about ten seconds." He set the canister on a bench. "I've got one of the things in here. Laurie caught it; rare presence of mind. Her premise is, that if its eyes and ears are made useless—in other words, if it loses its identity on a spatial frame of reference—then it ceases to exist for the Teleks, and they can no longer manipulate it. I think she's right; the idea seems intuitively sound."

Gorman Circumbright picked up the canister, jiggled it. "Rather heavy. Why did you bring it down here?"

"We've got to figure out a counter to it. It must function like a miniature video transmitter. I suppose Alvac Corporation makes them. If we can identify the band it broadcasts on, we can build ourselves detectors, warning units."

Circumbright sat looking at the can. "If it's still in operation, if it's still broadcasting, I can find out very swiftly."

He set the can beside an all-wave tuner. Shorn unscrewed the lid, gingerly removed the bug, still wrapped in cloth, set it on the bench. Circumbright pointed to a fluorescent scale, glowing at several points. He started to speak, but Shorn motioned for silence, pointed to the bug. Circumbright nodded, wrote, "The lower lines are possibly static, from the power source. The sharp line at the top is the broadcast frequency—very sharp. Powerful."

Shorn replaced the bug in the can. Circumbright turned away from the tuner. "If it's insensitive to infrared, we can see to take it apart, disconnect the power."

Shorn frowned doubtfully. "How could we be sure?"

"Give it to me." Circumbright clipped leads from an oscillograph to the back of the tuner, dialed to the spy-beetle's carrier frequency.

The oscillograph showed a normal sine-curve.

"Now. Turn out the lights."

Shorn threw the switch. The room was dark except for the dancing yellow-green light of the oscillograph and the dull red murk from the infrared projector.

Circumbright's bulk cut off the glow from the projector; Shorn watched the oscillograph face. There was no change in the wave.

"Good," said Circumbright. "And I think that if I strain my eyes I can ... or better, reach in the closet and hand me the heat-conversion lenses. Top shelf."

He worked fifteen minutes, then suddenly the carrier wave on the face of the oscillograph vanished. "Ah," sighed Circumbright. "That's got it. You can turn the lights back on now."

Together they stood looking down at the bug—a little black torpedo two inches long with two crystalline eyes bulging at each side of the head.

"Nice job," said Circumbright. "It's an Alvac product all right. I'll say a word to Graythorne; maybe he can introduce a few disturbing factors."

"What about that detector unit?"

Circumbright pursed his lips. "For each of the bugs there's probably a different frequency; otherwise they'd get their signals mixed up. But the power bank probably radiates about the same in all cases. I can

fix up a jury-rig which you can use for a few days, then Graythorne can bring us down some tailor-made jobs from Alvac, using the design data."

He crossed the room, found a bottle of red wine, which he sat beside Shorn. "Relax a few minutes."

Half an hour passed. Shorn watched quietly while Circumbright soldered together stock circuits, humming in a continuous tuneless drone.

"There," said Circumbright finally. "If one of those bugs gets within a hundred yards, this will vibrate, thump."

"Good." Shorn tucked the device tenderly in his breast pocket, while Circumbright settled himself into an armchair, stuffed tobacco in a pipe. Shorn watched him curiously. Circumbright, placid and unemotional as a man could be, revealed himself to Shorn by various small signs, such as pressing the tobacco home with a thumb more vigorous than necessary.

"I hear another Telek was killed yesterday."

"Yes. I was there."

"Who is this Geskamp?"

"Big blond fellow. What's the latest on him?"

"He's dead."

"Hum-m-m." Shorn was silent a moment, a sick feeling at the pit of his stomach. "How?"

"The Teleks turned him over to the custody of the Federal Marshal at Knoll. He was shot trying to escape."

Shorn felt as if anger were being pumped inside him, as if he were swelling, as if the pressure against his taut muscles were too great to bear.

"Take it easy," said Circumbright mildly.

"I'll kill Teleks from a sense of duty," said Shorn. "I don't enjoy it. But . . . and I feel ashamed, I'll admit . . . I *want* to kill the Federal Marshal at Knoll."

"It wasn't the Federal Marshal himself," said Circumbright. "It was two of his deputies. And it's always possible that Geskamp actually did try to escape. We'll know for sure tomorrow."

"How so?"

"We're moving out a little bit. There'll be an example made of those two if they're guilty. We'll narcotize them tonight, find out the truth. If they're working for the Teleks—they'll go." Circumbright spat on the floor. "Although I dislike the label of a terrorist organization."

"What else can we do? If we got a confession, turned them over to the Section Attorney, they'd be reprimanded, turned loose."

"True enough." Circumbright puffed meditatively.

Shorn moved restlessly in his chair. "It frightens me, the imminence, the urgency of all this—and how few, people are aware of it! Surely there's never been an emergency so ill-publicized before. In a week, a month, three months—there'll be more dead people on Earth than live ones, unless we get the entire shooting-match at once in the stadium."

Circumbright puffed at his pipe. "Will, sometimes I wonder whether we're not approaching the struggle from the wrong direction."

"How so?"

"Perhaps instead of attacking the Teleks, we should be learning more of the fundamental nature of telekinetics."

Shorn leaned back fretfully. "The Teleks don't know themselves."

"A bird can't tell you much about aerodynamics. The Teleks have a disadvantage which is not at all obvious —the fact that action comes too easy, that they are under no necessity to think. To build a dam, they look at a mountain, move it down into the valley. If the dam gives way, they move down another mountain, but they never look at a slide rule. In this respect, at least, they represent a retrogression rather than an advance."

Shorn slowly opened and closed his hands, watching as if it were the first time he had ever seen them. "They're caught in the stream of life, like the rest of us. It's part of the human tragedy that there can't be any compromise; it's them or us."

Circumbright heaved a deep sigh. "I've racked my brains . . . Compromise. Why can't two kinds of people live together? Our abilities complement each other."

"One time it was that way. The first generation. The Teleks were still common men, perhaps a little peculiar in that things always turned out lucky for them. Then Joffrey and his Telekinetic Congress, and the reinforcing, the catalysis, the forcing, whatever it was—and suddenly they're different."

"If there were no fools," said Circumbright, "either among us or among them, we could co-inhabit the earth. There's the flaw in any compromise negotiation—the fact of fools, both among the Teleks and the common men."

"I don't quite follow you."

Circumbright gestured with his pipe. "There will always be Telek fools to antagonize common-man fools; then the common-man fools will ambush the Teleks, and the Teleks will be very upset, especially since for every Telek, there are forty Earth fools eager to kill him. So they use force, terror. Inexorable, inevitable. But—they have a choice. They can leave Earth, find a home somewhere among the planets they claim they visit; they can impose this reign of power; or they can return to humanity, renounce telekinesis entirely. Those are the choices open to them."

"And our choices?"

"We submit or we challenge. In the first instance we become slaves. In the second we either kill the Teleks, drive them away, or we all become dead men."

Shorn sipped at his wineglass. "We might all become Teleks ourselves."

"Or we might find a scientific means to control or cancel out telekinesis." Circumbright poured a careful finger of wine for himself. "My own instinct is to explore the last possibility."

"There's nowhere to get a foothold in the subject."

"Oh I don't know. We have a number of observations. Telekinesis and teleportation have been known for thousands of years. It took the concentration of telekinetics at Joffrey's Congress to develop the power fully. We know that Telek children are telekinetic—whether by contagion or by genetics we can't be sure."

"Probably both. A genetic predisposition; parental training."

Circumbright nodded. "Probably both. Although as you know, in rare instances they reward a common man by making a Telek out of him."

"Evidently telekinesis is latent in everyone."

"There's a large literature of early experiments and observations. The so-called spiritualist study of poltergeists and house-demons might be significant."

Shorn remained silent.

"I've tried to systematize the subject," Circumbright continued, "deal with it logically. The first question seems to be, does the Law of Conservation of Energy apply or not? When a Telek floats a ton of iron across the sky by looking at it, is he creating energy or is he directing the use of energy from an unseen source? There is no way of knowing offhand."

Shorn stretched, yawned, settled back in his chair. "I have heard a metaphysical opinion, to the effect that the Telek uses nothing more than confidence. The universe that he perceives has reality only to the backdrop of his own brain. He sees a chair; the image of a chair exists in his mind. He orders the chair to move across the room. His confidence and reality is so great that, in his mind, he believes he sees the chair move, and he bases his future actions on the perception. Somehow he is not disappointed. In other words, the chair has moved because he believes he has moved it."

Circumbright puffed placidly on his pipe.

Shorn grinned. "Go on; I'm sorry I interrupted you."

"Where does the energy come from? Is the mind a source, a valve or a remote control? There are the three possibilities. Force is applied; the mind directs the force. But does the force *originate* in the mind, is the force *collected, channeled through* the mind, or does the mind act like a modulator, a grid in a vacuum tube?"

Shorn slowly shook his head. "So far we have not even defined the type of energy at work. If we

knew that, we might recognize the function of the mind."

"Or vice versa. It works either way. But if you wish, consider the force at work. In all cases, an object moves in a single direction. That is to say, there has been no observed case of an explosion or a compression. The object moves as a unit. How? Why? To say the mind projects a force field is ignoring the issue, redefining at an equal level of abstraction."

"Perhaps the mind is able to control the poltergeists —creatures like the old Persian genii."

Circumbright tapped the ash from his pipe. "I've considered the possibility. Who are the poltergeists? Ghosts? Souls of the dead? A matter for speculation. Why are the Teleks able to control them, and ordinary people not?"

Shorn grinned. "I assume these are rhetorical questions—because I don't have the answers."

"Perhaps a form of gravity is at work. Imagine a cup-shaped gravity screen around the object, open on the side the Telek desires motion. I have not calculated the gravitational acceleration generated by matter at its average universal density, from here to infinity, but I assume it would be insignificant. A millimeter a day, perhaps. Count the cup-shaped gravity-screen out; likewise a method for rendering the object opaque to the passage of neutrinos in a given direction."

"Poltergeists, gravity, neutrinos—all eliminated. What have we left?"

Circumbright chuckled. "I haven't eliminated the poltergeists. But I incline to the Organic Theory. That is, the concept that all the minds and all the matter of the universe are interconnected, much like brain cells and muscular tissue of the body. When certain of these brain cells achieve a sufficiently close vinculum, they are able to control certain twitchings of the corporeal frame of the universe. How? Why? I don't know. After all, it's only an idea, a sadly anthropomorphic idea."

Shorn looked thoughtfully up at the ceiling. Circumbright was a three-way scientist. He not only proposed theories, he not only devised critical experiments to validate them, but he was an expert laboratory technician. "Does your theory suggest any practical application?"

Circumbright scratched his ear. "Not yet. I need to cross-fertilize it with a few other notions. Like the metaphysics you brought up a few moments ago. If I only had a Telek who would submit himself to experiments, we might get somewhere—And I think I hear Dr. Kurgill."

He rose to his feet, padded to the door. He opened it; Shorn saw him stiffen.

A deep voice said, "Hello, Circumbright; this is my son. Cluche, meet Gorman Circumbright, one of our foremost tacticians."

The two Kurgills came into the laboratory. The father was short, spare, with simian length to his arms. He had a comical simian face with a high forehead, long upper lip, flat nose. The son resembled his father not at all: a striking young man with noble features, a proud crest of auburn hair, an extreme mode of dress, reminiscent of Telek style. The elder was quick of movement, talkative, warm; the younger was careful of eye and movement.

Circumbright turned toward Shorn. "Will—" he stopped short. "Excuse me," he said to the Kurgills. "If you'll sit down, I'll be with you at once."

He hurried into the adjoining storeroom. Shorn stood in the shadows.

"What's the trouble?"

Shorn took Circumbright's hand, held it against the warning unit in his pocket.

Circumbright jerked. "The thing's vibrating!"

Shorn looked warily into the room beyond. "How well do you know the Kurgills?"

Circumbright said, "The doctor's my lifelong friend; I'd go my life for him."

"And his son?"

"I can't say."

They stared at each other, then by common accord, looked through the crack of the door. Cluche Kurgil had seated himself in the chair Shorn had vacated, while his father stood in front of him, teetering comfortably on his toes, hands behind his back.

"I'd swear that no bug slipped past us while I stood in the doorway," muttered Circumbright.

"No. I don't think it did."

"That means it's on one or the other of their persons."

"It might be unintentional—a plant. But how would the Teleks know the Kurgills intended to come down here?"

Shorn shook his head.

Circumbright sighed. "I guess not."

"The bug will be where it can see, but where it can't be seen—or at least, not noticed."

Their glances went to the ornate headdress Cluche Kurgill wore on one side of his head: a soft roll of gray-green leather, bound by a strip across his hair, trailing a dangle of moon-opals past his ear.

Circumbright said in a tight voice, "We can expect destruction at any time. Explosion—"

Shorn said slowly, "I doubt if they'll send an explosion. If they feel they are unsuspected, they'll prefer to bide their time."

Circumbright said huskily, "Well, what do you propose then?"

Shorn hesitated a moment before replying. "We're in a devil of a ticklish position. Do you have a narcohypnotic stinger handy?"

Circumbright nodded.

"Perhaps then—"

Two minutes later Circumbright rejoined the Kurgilis. The old doctor was in a fine humor. "Gorman," he said to Circumbright; "I'm very proud of Cluche here. He's been a scapegrace all his life—but now he wants to make something of himself."

"Good," said Circumbright with hollow heartiness. "If he were of our conviction, I could use him right now —but I wouldn't want him to do anything against his—"

"Oh, no, not at all," said Cluche. "What's your problem?"

"Well, Shorn just left for a very important meeting—the regional chiefs—and he's forgotten his code book. I couldn't trust an ordinary messenger, but if you will deliver the code book, you'd be doing us a great service."

"Any little thing I can do to help," said Cluche. "I'll be delighted."

His father regarded him with fatuous pride. "Cluche has surprised me. He caught me out just the day before yesterday, and now nothing must do but that he plunges in after me. Needless to say I'm very pleased; glad to see that he's a chip off the old block, nothing stands in his way."

Circumbright said, "I can count on you then? You'll have to follow instructions exactly."

"Quite all right, sir, glad to help."

"Good," said Circumbright. "First thing then—you'll have to change your clothes. You'd be too conspicuous as you are."

"Oh, now!" protested Cluche. "Surely a cloak—"

"No!" snapped Circumbright. "You'll have to dress as a dock worker from the skin out. No cloak would hide that headgear. In the next room you'll find some clothes. Come with me, I'll make a light."

He held open the door; reluctantly Cluche stepped through.

The door closed. Shorn expertly seized Cluche's neck, digging strong fingers into the motor nerves. Cluche stiffened, trembling.

Circumbright slapped the front of his neck with a barbful of drug, then fumbled for Cluche's headdress. He felt a smooth little object bulging with two eyes like a tadpole. He said easily. "Can't seem to find the light—" He tucked the bug into his pouch. "Here it is. Now—your pouch. I'll put it into this locker; it'll be safe till you get back." He winked at Shorn, shoved the pouch into a heavy metal tool chest.

They looked down at the sprawled body. "There's not much time," said Circumbright. "I'll send Kurgill home, and we'll have to get out ourselves." He looked regretfully around the room. "There's a lot of fine equipment here—we can get more, I suppose."

Shorn clicked his tongue. "What will you tell Kurgill?"

"Um-m-m. The truth would kill him."

"Cluche was killed by the Teleks. He died defending the code book. The Teleks have his name; he'll have to go underground himself."

"He'll have to go under tonight. I'll warn him to lay low, say in Capistrano's, until we call him, then we can give him the bad news. As soon as he's gone we'll take Cluche out the back way, to Laurie's."

Cluche Kurgill sat in a chair, staring into space. Circumbright leaned back smoking his pipe. Laurie, in white pajamas and a tan robe, lay sidewise on a couch in the corner watching; Shorn sat beside her.

"How long have you been spying for the Teleks, Cluche?"

"Three days."

"Tell us about it."

"I found some writings of my father's which led me to believe he was a member of a sub-organization. I needed money. I reported to a police sergeant who I knew to be interested. He wanted me to furnish him the details; I refused. I demanded to speak to a Telek. I threatened the policeman—"

"What is his name?"

"Sergeant Cagolian Loo, of the Moxenwohl Precinct."

"Go on."

"Finally he arranged an appointment with Adlari Dominion. I met Dominion at the Pequinade, out in Vireburg. He gave me a thousand crowns and a spy cell which I was to carry with me at all times. When anything interesting occurred I was to press an attention button."

"What were your instructions?"

"I was to become a conspirator along with my father, accompanying him as much as possible. If my efforts resulted in the arrest of important figures, he hinted that I might be made a Telek myself."

"Did he intimate how his metamorphosis is accomplished?"

“No.”

"When are you to report to Dominion again?"

"I 'am to contact him by visiphone at 2:00 P.M. tomorrow, at Glarietta Pavilion."

"Is there any password or identification code?"

"No."

Silence held the room for several minutes. Shorn stirred, rose to his feet. "Gorman—suppose I were to be metamorphosed, suppose I were to become a Telek."

Circumbright chewed placidly on his pipestem. "It would be a fine thing. I don't quite understand how you'll manage. Unless," he added in a dry voice, "you intend to turn us all in to Adlari Dominion."

"No. But look at Cluche. Look at me."

Circumbright looked, grimaced, straightened up in his seat.

Shorn watched expectantly. "Could it be done?"

"Oh. I see. Give you more nose, a longer chin, fuller cheeks, a lot of red hair—"

"And Cluche's clothes."

"You'd pass."

"Especially if I come with information."

"That's what is puzzling me. What kind of information could you give Dominion that would please him but wouldn't hurt us?"

Shorn told him.

Circumbright puffed on his pipe. "It's a big decision. But it's a good exchange. Unless he's got the same thing already, from other sources."

"Such as Geskamp? In which case, we lose nothing."

"True." Circumbright went to the visiphone. "Tino? Bring your gear over to—" He looked at Laurie:

"What's the address?"

"29, 24, 14 Martinvelt."

V.

The red-haired man moved with a taut wiriness that had not been characteristic of Cluche Kurgill. Laurie inspected him critically.

"Walk slower, Will. Don't flail your arms so. Cluche was very languid."

"Check this." Shorn walked across the room.

"Better."

"Very well. I'm gone. Wish me luck. My first stop is the old workshop for Cluche's spy cell. He'd hardly be likely to leave it there."

"But aren't you taking a chance, going back to the workshop?"

"I don't think so. I hope not. If the Teleks planned to destroy it, they would have done so last night." He waved his hand abruptly and was gone.

He rode the sidewalk, aping the languorous and lofty democracy he associated with Cluche. The morning had been overcast and blustery, with spatters of cold rain, but at noon the clouds broke. The sun surged through gaps in the hurrying rack, and the great gray buildings of Tran stood forth like proud lords. Shorn tilted his head back; this was the grandeur of simple bulk, but nevertheless impressive. He himself preferred construction on a smaller scale, buildings to suit a lesser number of more highly individualized people. He thought of the antique Mediterranean temples, gaudy in their pinks and green and blues, although now the marble had bleached white. Such idiosyncrasy was possible, even enforced, in the ancient monarchies. Today every man, in theory his own master, was required to mesh with his fellows, like a part in a great gear cluster. The culture-colors and culture-tones came out at the common denominator, the melange of all colors: gray. Buildings grew taller and wider from motives of economy—the volume increased by the cube but the enclosing surface only by the square. The motif was utilitarianism, mass policy, each tenant relinquishing edges and fringes of his personality, until only the common basic core—a sound roof, hot and cold water, good light, air-conditioning, and good elevator service—remained.

People living in masses, thought Shorn, were like pebbles on a beach, each grinding and polishing his neighbor until all were absolutely uniform. Color and flair were to be found only in the wilderness and among the Teleks. Imagine a world populated by Teleks; imagine the four thousand expanded to four hundred million, four billion! First to go would be the cities. There would be no more concentrations, no more giant *gray* buildings, no directed rivers of men and women. Humanity would explode like a nova. The cities would corrode and crumble, great mournful hulks, the final monuments to medievalism. Earth would be too small, too limited. Out to the planets, where the Teleks claimed to roam at will. Flood Mars with blue oceans, filter the sky of Venus. Neptune, Uranus, Pluto—call them in, bestow warm new orbits upon them. Bring in even Saturn, so vast and yet with a surface gravity only a trifle more than Earth's—But, these great works, suppose they exhausted the telekinetic energy, wherever it originated? Suppose some morning the Teleks awoke and found the power gone!

Then—the crystal sky-castles falling! Food, shelter, warmth needed, and no secure gray cities, no ant-hill buildings, none of the pedestrian energies of metal and heat and electricity. Then what calamity! What wailing and cursing!

Shorn heaved a deep sigh. Speculation. Telekinetic energy might well be infinite. Or it might be at the point of exhaustion at this moment. Speculation, and not germane to his present goal.

He frowned. Perhaps it was important. Perhaps some quiet circuit in his mind was at work, aligning him into new opinions—

Ahead was the basement recreation hall. Shorn guiltily realized that he had been swinging along at his own gait, quite out of character with the personality of Cluche Kurgill. Best not forget these details, he told himself guiltily; there would be opportunity for only one mistake.

He descended the stairs, strode through the hall, past the clicking, glowing, humming game machines, where men, rebelling at the predictability of their lives, came to buy synthetic adventure and surprise.

He walked unchallenged through the door marked "Employees"; at the next door he paused, wondering whether he had remembered to bring the key, wondering if a spy cell might be hidden in the shadows, watching the door.

If so, would Cluche Kurgill be likely to possess a key? It was in the bounds of possibility, he

decided, and in any event would not he interpreted as suspicious.

Shorn groped into his pouch. The key was there. He opened the door, and assuming the furtive part of a spy, entered the workshop.

It was as they had left it the night before. Shorn went quickly to the tool chest, found Circumbright's pouch, brought forth the bug, set it carefully into his headdress.

Now—get out as fast as possible. He looked at his watch; Twelve noon. At two, Cluche's appointment with Adlari Dominion, chief of the Telek Liaison Committee.

Shorn ate an uncomfortable lunch in one corner of the Mercantile Mart Foodarium, a low-ceilinged acreage dotted with tables precisely as a tile floor, and served by a three-tier display of food moving slowly under a transparent case. His head itched furiously under the red toupee, and he dared not scratch lest he disturb Tino's elaborate effort. Secondly, he decided that the Foodarium, the noon resort of hurried day-workers, was out of character for Cluche Kurgill. Among the grays and dull greens and browns, his magnificent Telek-style garments made him appear like a flamingo in a chicken-run. He felt glances of dull hostility; the Teleks were envied but respected; one of their own kind aping the Teleks was despised with the animosity that found no release elsewhere.

Shorn ate quickly and departed. He followed Zyke Alley into Multiflores Park, where he sauntered back and forth among the dusty sycamores.

At two he sat himself deliberately in a kiosk, dialed Glarietta Pavilion on the visiphone. The connection clicked home; the screen glowed with a fanciful blackand-white drawing of Glarietta Pavilion, and a terse man's voice spoke. "Glarietta Pavilion."

"I want to speak to Adlari Dominion; Cluche Kurgill calling."

A thin face appeared, inquisitive, impertinent, with a lumpy nose, pale-blue eyes set at a birdlike slant. "What do you want?"

Shorn frowned. He had neglected an important item of information; it would hardly do to ask the man in the visiphone if he were Adlari Dominion, whom he was supposed to have met three day previously.

"I had an appointment for today at two," and cautiously he watched the man in the screen.

"You can report to me."

"No," said Shorn, now confident. The man was too pushing, too authoritative. "I want to speak to Adlari Dominion. What I have to say is not for your ears."

The thin man glared. "I'll be the judge of that; Dominion can't be bothered every five minutes."

"If Dominion learns that you are standing in my way, he will not be pleased."

The thin face flushed red. His hand swept up, the screen went pale-green. Shorn waited.

The screen lit once more, showing a bright room with high white walls. Windows opened on sun-dazzled clouds. A man, thin as the first-to answer the screen, but somber, with gray hair and oil-black eyes, looked quietly at him. Under the bore of the sharp eyes, Shorn suddenly felt uneasy. Would his disguise hold up?

"Well, Kurgill, what do you have to tell me?"

"It's a face-to-face matter."

"Hardly wise," Dominion commented. "Don't you trust the privacy of the visiphone? I assure you it's not tapped."

"No. I trust the visiphone. But—I stumbled on something big. I want to be sure I get what's coming to me."

"Oh." Dominion made no play at misunderstanding. "You've been working—how long?"

"Three days."

"And already you expect the greatest reward it's in our power to bestow?"

"It's worth it. If I'm a Telek, it's to my advantage to help you. If I'm not—it isn't. Simple as that."

Dominion frowned slightly. "You're hardly qualified to estimate the value of your information."

"Suppose I knew of a brain disease which attacks only Teleks. Suppose I knew that inside of a year half or three-quarters of the Teleks would be dead?"

Dominion's face changed not a flicker. "Naturally I want to know about it."

Shorn made no reply.

Dominion said slowly, "If such is your information, and we authenticate it, you will be rewarded suitably."

Shorn shook his head. "I can't take the chance. This is my windfall. I've got to make sure I get what I'm after; I may not have another chance."

Dominion's mouth tightened, but he said mildly enough, "I understand your viewpoint."

"I want to come up to the Pavilion. But a word of warning to you; there's no harm in clear understanding between friends."

"None whatever."

"Don't try drugs on me. I've got a cyanide capsule in my mouth. I'll kill myself before you get something for nothing."

Dominion smiled grimly. "Very well, Kurgill. Don't execute yourself, swallow it by mistake."

Shorn smiled likewise. "Only as a gesture of protest. How shall I come up to Glarietta?"

"Hire a cab."

"Openly?"

"Why not?"

"You're not afraid of counter espionage?"

Dominion's eyes narrowed; his head tilted slightly, "I thought we discussed that at our previous meeting."

Shorn took care not to protest his recollection too vehemently. "Very well. I'll be right up."

Glarietta Pavilion floated high above the ocean, a fairy-book cloud-castle—shining white terraces, ranked towers with parasol roofs, gardens verdant with foliage and vines trailing down into the air.

The cab slid down on a landing fiat. Shorn alighted. The driver looked at him without favor. "Want me to wait?"

"No, you can go." Shorn thought wryly, he'd either be leaving under his own power or not be leaving at all.

A door slid back before him; he entered a hall walled with russet orange, purple and green prisms, glowing in the brilliant upper air light. In a raised alcove sat a young woman, a beautiful creature with glossy butter-colored hair, a cream-smooth face.

"Yes, sir?" she asked, impersonally courteous.

"I want to see Adlari Dominion. I'm Cluche Kurgill."

She touched a key below her. "To your right."

He climbed a glass staircase which spiraled up a green glass tube, came out in a waiting room walled with gold-shot red rock that had never been quarried on Earth. Dark-green ivy veiled one wall; white columns opposite made a graceful frame into a herbarium full of green light and lush green growth, white and scarlet flowers.

Shorn hesitated, looked around him. A golden light blinked in the wall, an aperture appeared. Adlari Dominion stood in the opening. "Come in, Kurgill."

Shorn stepped into the wash of light, and for a moment lost Dominion in the dazzle. When vision returned, Dominion was lounging in a hammock-chair supported by a glistening rod protruding horizontally from the wall. A red leather ottoman was the only other article of furniture visible. Three of the walls were transparent glass, giving on a magnificent vista: clouds bathed in sunlight, blue sky, blue sea.

Dominion pointed to the ottoman. "Have a seat."

The ottoman was only a foot high; sitting in it Shorn would be forced to crane his neck to see Dominion.

"No, thanks. I prefer to stand." He put a foot on the ottoman, inspected Dominion cooly, eye to eye.

Dominion said evenly, "What do you have to tell me?"

Shorn started to speak, but found it impossible to look into the smoldering black eyes and think at the same time. He turned his eyes out the window to a pinnacle of white cloud. "I've naturally considered

this situation carefully. If you've done the same . . . as I imagine you have . . . then there's no point in each of us trying to outwit the other. I have information that's important, critically important to a great number of Teleks. I want to trade this information for Telek status." He glanced toward Dominion whose eyes had never faltered, looked away once more.

"I'm trying to arrange this statement with absolute clarity, so there'll be complete understanding between us. First, I want to remind you, I have poison in my mouth. I'll kill myself before I part with what I know, and I guarantee you'll never have another chance to learn what I can tell you." Shorn glanced earnestly sidewise at Dominion. "No hypnotic drug can act fast enough to prevent me from biting open my cyanide—Well, enough of that.

"Second: I can't trust any verbal or written contract you make; if I accepted such a contract I'd have no means to enforce it. You are in a stronger position. If you deliver your part of the bargain, and I fail to deliver my part, you can still arrange that I be . . . well, penalized. Therefore, to demonstrate your good faith, you must make delivery before I do.

"In other words, make me a Telek. Then I'll tell you what I know."

Dominion sat staring at him a full thirty seconds. Then he said softly, "Three days ago Cluche Kurgill was not so rigorous."

"Three days ago, Cluche Kurgill did not know what he knows now."

Dominion said abruptly, "I cannot argue with your exposition. If I were you, in your position, I would make the same stipulation. However"—he looked Shorn keenly up and down—"three days ago I would have considered you an undesirable adjunct."

Shorn assumed a lofty expression. "Judging from the Teleks I have known, I would not have assumed you to be so critical."

"You talk past your understanding," said Dominion crisply. "Do you think that men like Nollinrude, for instance, who was just killed, are typical of the Teleks? Do you think that we are all careless of our destiny?" His mouth twisted contemptuously. "There are forces at work which you do not know of, tremendous patterns laid out for the future. But enough; these are high-level ideas."

He floated clear of his chair, lowered to the floor. "I agree to your stipulation. Come with me, we'll get it over with. You see, we are not inflexible; we can move swiftly and decisively when we wish."

He led Shorn back into the green glass tube, jerked himself to the upper landing, watched impatiently while Shorn circled up the steps.

"Come." He stepped out on a wide white terrace bathed in afternoon sunlight, went directly to a low table on which rested a cubical block of marble.

He reached into a cabinet under the table, pulled out a small speaker, spoke into the mesh. "The top two hundred to Glarietta Pavilion." He turned back to Shorn. "Naturally there'll be certain matters you must familiarize yourself with."

"In order to become a Telek, you mean?"

"No, no," snapped Dominion. "That's a simple mechanical matter. Your perspective must be adjusted; you'll be living with a new orientation toward life."

"I had no idea it was quite so involved."

"There's a great deal you don't understand." He motioned brusquely. "Now to business. Watch that marble block on the table. Think of it as part yourself, controlled by your own nervous impulses. No, don't look around; fix on the marble block. I'll stand here." He took a place near the table. "When I point to the left, move it to the left; when I point to the right, move it to the right. Mind now, the cube is part of your organism, part of your flesh, like your hands and feet."

There was murmuring and a rustle behind Shorn; obedient to Dominion he fastened his eyes on the cube. "Now." Dominion pointed to the left.

Shorn willed the cube to the left. "The cube is part of you," said Dominion. "Your own body."

Shorn felt a cool tremor at his skin. The cube moved to the left.

Dominion pointed to right. Shorn willed the cube to the right. The tingling increased. It was as if he were gradually finding himself immersed in cool carbonated water.

Left. Right. Left. Right. The cube seemed to be nearer to him, though be had not moved. As near as his own hand. His mind seemed to break through a tough sphincter into a new medium, cool and wide; he saw the world in a sudden new identity, something part of himself.

Dominion stepped away from the table; Shorn was hardly conscious that he no longer made directive gestures. He moved the cube right, left, raised it six feet into the air, twenty feet, sent it circling high around the sky. As he followed it with his eyes, he became aware of Teleks standing silently behind him, watching expressionlessly.

He brought the cube back to the table. Now he knew how to do it. He lifted himself into the air, moved across the terrace, set himself down. When he looked around the Teleks had gone.

Dominion wore a cool smile. "You take hold with great ease."

"It seems natural enough. What is the function of the others, the Teleks behind on the terrace?"

Dominion shrugged. "We know little of the actual mechanism. At the beginning, of course, I helped you move the cube, as did the others. Gradually we let our minds rest, and you did it all."

Shorn stretched. "I feel myself the center, the hub, of everything—as far as I can see."

Dominion nodded without interest. "Now—come with me." He sped through the air. Shorn followed, exulting in his new power and freedom. Dominion paused by the corner of the terrace, glanced over his shoulder. Shorn saw his face in the foreshortened angle: white, rather pinched features, eyes subtly tilted, brows drawn down, mouth subtly down-curving. Shorn's elation gave way to sudden wariness. Dominion had arranged the telekinetic indoctrination with a peculiar facility. The easiest way to get the desired information, certainly; but was Dominion sufficiently free from vindictiveness to accept defeat? Shorn considered the expression he had surprised on Dominion's face.

It was a mistake to assume that any man, Telek or not, would accept with good grace the terms dictated by a paid turncoat.

Dominion would restrain himself until he learned what Shorn could tell him, then—And then?

Shorn slowed his motion. How could Dominion arrange a moment of gloating before he finally administered the *coup de grace?* Poison seemed most likely. Shorn grinned. Dominion would consider it beautifully just if Shorn could be killed with his own poison. A sharp blow or pressure under the jaw would break the capsule in his tooth.

Somehow Dominion would manage.

They entered a great echoing hall, suffused with green-yellow light that entered through panes in the high-vaulted dome. The floor was silver-shot marble; dark-green foliage grew in formal raised boxes. The air was fresh and odorous with the scent of leaves.

Dominion crossed without pause. Shorn halted halfway across.

Dominion-turned his head. "Come."

"Where?"

Dominion's mouth slowly bent into a grimace that was unmistakably dangerous. "Where we can talk."

"We can talk here. I can tell you what I want to tell you in ten seconds. Or if you like, I'll take you to the source of the danger."

"Very well," said Dominion. "Suppose you reveal the nature of the threat against the Teleks. A brain disease, you said?"

"No. I used the idea as a figure of speech. The danger I refer to is more cataclysmic than a disease. Let's go out in the open air. I feel constricted." He grinned at Dominion.

Dominion drew in a deep breath. It must infuriate him, thought Shorn, to be commanded and forced to obey a common man and a traitor to boot. Shorn made a careless gesture. "I intend to keep my part of the bargain; let's have no misunderstanding there. However —I want to escape with my winnings, if you understand me."

"I understand you," said Dominion. "I understand you very well." He made an internal adjustment, managed to appear almost congenial. "However, perhaps you misjudge my motives. You are a Telek now; we conduct ourselves by a strict code of behavior which you must learn."

Shorn put on a face as gracious as Dominion's. "I suggest, then, that we hold our conference down on Earth."

Dominion pursed his lips. "You must acclimate yourself to Telek surroundings—think, act, like a Telek."

"In due time," said Shorn. "At the moment I'm rather confused; the sense of power comes as a great intoxication."

"It apparently has not affected your capacity for caution," Dominion observed dryly.

"I suggest that we at least go out into the open, where we can talk at leisure."

Dominion sighed. "Very well."

VI.

Laurie went restlessly to the dispenser, drew tea for herself, coffee for Circumbright. "I just can't seem to sit still—"

Circumbright inspected the pale face with scientific objectivity. If Laurie condescended to even the slightest artifice or coquetry, he thought, she would become a creature of tremendous charm. He watched her appreciatively as she went to the window, looked up into the sky.

Nothing to see but reflected glow; nothing to hear but the hum of far traffic.

She returned to the couch. "Have you told Dr. Kurgill —of Cluche?"

Circumbright stirred his tea. "Naturally I couldn't tell him the truth."

"No." Laurie looked off into space. She shuddered. "I've never been so nervous before. Suppose—" Her forebodings could find no words.

"You're very fond of Shorn, aren't you?"

The quick look, the upward flash of her eyes, was enough.

They sat in silence.

"Shh," said Laurie. "I think he's coming." Circumbright heard nothing.

Laurie rose to her feet. They both watched the door latch. It moved. The door slid back. The hall was empty.

Laurie gasped in something like terror. There came a tapping at the window.

They wheeled. Shorn was outside, floating in the air.

For a moment they stood paralyzed. Shorn rapped with his knuckles; they saw his mouth form the words, "Let me in."

Laurie walked stiffly to the window, swung it open. Shorn jumped down into the room.

"Why did you scare us like that?" she asked indignantly.

"I'm proud of myself. I wanted to demonstrate my new abilities." He drew himself a cup of coffee. "I guess you'll want to know my adventures."

"Of course!"

He sat down at the table and described his visit to Glarietta Pavilion.

Circumbright listened placidly. "And now what?"

"And now—you've got a Telek to experiment on. Unless Dominion conceives a long-distance method of killing me. He's spending a restless night, I should imagine."

Circumbright grunted.

"First," said Shorn, "they put a bug on me. I expected it. They knew I expected it. I got rid of it in the Beaux-Arts Museum. Then I began thinking, since they would expect me to dodge the bug, and feel secure after I'd done so, no doubt they had a way to locate me again. Tracker material sprayed on my clothes, fluorescent in a nonvisual frequency. I threw away Cluche's clothes, which I didn't like in the first place, washed in three changes of solvicine and water, disposed of the red wig. Cluche Kurgill had disappeared. By the way, where is Cluche's body?"

"Safe."

"We can let it be found tomorrow morning. With a sign on him reading, 'I am a Telek spy.' Dominion

will certainly hear of it; he'll think I'm dead, and that will be one problem the less."

"Good idea."

"But poor old Dr. Kurgill," remonstrated Laurie. "He'll never believe such a note."

"No ... I suppose not." She looked Shorn over from head to feet. "Do you feel different from before?"

"I feel as if all of creation were part of me. Identification with the cosmos, I guess you'd call it."

"But how does it work?"

Shorn deliberated. "I'm really not sure. I can move the chair the same way I move my arm, with about the same effort."

"Evidently," said Circumbright, "Geskamp had told them nothing of the mitrox under the stadium."

"They never asked him. It was beyond their imagination that we could conceive such an atrocity." Shorn laughed. "Dominion was completely flabbergasted. Bowled over. For a few minutes I think he was grateful to me."

"And then."

"And then, I suppose he remembered his resentment, and began plotting how best to kill me. But I told him nothing until we were in the open air; any weapon he held I could protect myself from. A bullet I could think aside, even back at him; a heat-gun I could deflect."

"Suppose his will on the gun and your will clashed?" Circumbright asked mildly.

"I don't know what would happen. Perhaps nothing. Like a man vacillating between two impulses. Or perhaps the clash and the subsequent lack of reaction would invalidate both our confidences, and down we'd fall into the ocean. Because now we were standing on nothing, a thousand feet over the ocean."

"Weren't you afraid, Will?" asked Laurie.

"At first—yes. But a person becomes accustomed to the sensation very quickly. It's a thing we've all experienced in our dreams. Perhaps it's only a trifling aberration that stands in the way of telekinesis for everyone."

Circumbright grunted, loaded his pipe. "Perhaps we'll find that out, along with the other things."

"Perhaps. Already I begin to look at life and existence from another viewpoint."

Laurie looked worried. "I thought things were just the same."

"Fundamentally, yes. But this feeling of power—of not being tied down—" Shorn laughed. "Don't look at each other like that. I'm not dangerous. I'm only a Telek by courtesy. And now, where can we get three pressure suits?"

"At this time of night? I don't know."

"No matter. I'm a Telek. We'll get them. Provided of course you'd like to visit the Moon. All expense tour, courtesy of Adlari Dominion. Laurie, would you like to fly up, fast as light, fast as thought, stand in the Earthshine, on the lip of Eratosthenes, looking out over the Mare Imbrium—"

She laughed uneasily. "I'd love it, Will. But—I'm scared."

"What about you, Gorman?"

"No. You two go. There'll be other chances for me."

Laurie jumped to her feet. Her cheeks were pink, her mouth was red and half-open in excitement. Shorn looked at her with a sudden new vision. "Very well, Gorman. Tomorrow you can start your experiments. Tonight—"

Laurie found herself picked up, carried out through the window.

"Tonight," said Shorn by her side, "we'll pretend that we're souls—happy souls—exploring the universe."

Circumbright lived in a near-abandoned suburb to the north of Tran. His house was a roomy old antique, rearing like a balky horse over the Meyne River. Big industrial plants blocked the sky in all directions; the air reeked with foundry fumes, sulfur, chlorine, tar, burnt-earth smells.

Within, the house was cheerful and untidy. Circumbright's wife was a tall strange woman who worked ten hours a day in her studio, sculpturing dogs and horses. Shorn had met her only once; so far as he knew she had no interest or even awareness of Circumbright's anti-Telek activities.

He found Circumbright basking in the sun watching the brown river water roll past. He sat on a little porch he had built apparently for no other purpose but this.

Shorn dropped a small cloth sack in his lap. "Souvenirs."

Circumbright opened the bag unhurriedly, pulled out a handful of stones, each tagged with a card label. He looked at the first, hefted it. "Agate." He read the label. "Mars. Well, well." A bit of black rock was next. "Gabbro? From . . . let's see. Ganymede. My word, you wandered far afield." He shot a bland blue glance up at Shorn. "Telekinesis seems to have agreed with you. You've lost that haggard hunted expression. Perhaps I'll have to become a Telek myself."

"You don't look haggard and hunted. Quite the reverse."

Circumbright returned to the rocks. "Pumice. From the Moon, I suppose." He read the label. "No—Venus. You made quite a trip."

Shorn looked up into the sky. "Rather hard to describe. There's naturally a feeling of loneliness. Darkness. Something like a dream. Out on Ganymede we were standing on a ridge, obsidian, sharp as a razor. Jupiter filled a third of the sky, the red spot right in the middle, looking at us. There was a pink and blue dimness. Peculiar. Black rock, the big bright planet. It was—weird. I thought, suppose the power fails me now, suppose we can't get home? It gave me quite a chill."

"You seem to have made it."

"Yes, we made it." Shorn seated himself, thrust out his legs. "I'm not hunted and haggard, but I'm confused. Two days ago I thought I had a good grasp on my convictions—"

"And now?"

"Now—I don't know."

"About what?"

"About—our efforts. Their ultimate effect, assuming we're successful."

"Hm-m-m." Circumbright rubbed his chin. "Do you still want to submit to experiments?"

"Of course. I want to know why and how telekinesis works."

"When will you be ready?"

"Whenever you wish."

"Now?"

"Why not? Let's get started."

"As soon as you're ready, we'll try encephalographs as a starting point."

Circumbright was tired. His face, normally pink and cherubic, sagged; filling his pipe, his fingers trembled.

Shorn leaned back in the leather chaise longue, regarded Circumbright with mild curiosity. "Why are you so upset?"

Circumbright gave the litter of paper on the workbench a contemptuous flick of the fingers. "It's the cursed inadequacy of the technique, the instruments. Trying to paint miniatures with a whisk broom, fix a watch with a pipe wrench. There"—he pointed—"encephalograms. Every lobe of your brain. Photographs—by x-ray, by planar section, by metabolism triggering. We've measured your energy flow so closely that if you tossed me a tennis ball I'd find it on paper somewhere."

"And there's what?"

"Nothing suggestive. Wavy lines on the encephalograms. Increased oxygen absorption. Pineal tumescence. All gross by-products of whatever is happening."

Shorn yawned and stretched. "About as we expected."

Circumbright nodded heavily. "As we expected. Although I hoped for—something. Some indication where the energy came from—whether through the brain, from the object itself, or from—nowhere."

Shorn caused water to leap from a glass, form a wet glistening hoop in the air. He set it around Circumbright's neck, started it contracting slowly.

"Hey," cried Circumbright reproachfully. "This is serious business."

Shorn snaked the water back in the glass. Circumbright leaned forward. "Where do *you* feel the energy comes from?"

Shorn reflected. "It seems to be in matter itself—just as motion seems to be part of your hand."

Circumbright sighed in dissatisfaction. He continued half-querulously. "And at what speed does telekinesis work? If it's light-speed, then the action presumably occurs in our own space-time. If it's faster, then it's some other medium, and the whole thing's unknowable."

Shorn rose to his feet. "We can check the last with comparative facility."

Circumbright shook his head. "We'd need instruments of a precision I don't have on hand."

"No. Just a stop watch and—let's see. A flare, a timer, a couple of spacesuits."

"What's your idea?" Circumbright asked suspiciously.

"I'm taking you space-walking."

Circumbright rose uncertainly. "I'm afraid I'll be frightened."

"If you're an agoraphobe don't try it."

Circumbright blew out his cheeks. "I'm not that."

"You wait here," said Shorn. "I'll be back in ten minutes with the spacesuits."

Half an hour later, they stumped out on Circumbright's little sun porch. Circumbright's outfit had been intended for a larger man; his head projected only half up into the head-bubble, to Shorn's amusement. "Ready?"

Circumbright, his blue eyes wide and solemn, nodded. "Up we go."

Earth dwindled below, as if snatched out from under their feet. Speed without acceleration. To all sides was blackness, the black of vacancy, continuing emptiness. The moon rolled over their shoulders, a pretty pocked ball, black and silver.

The sun dwindled, became a disk of glare which seemed to cast no light, no heat. "We're seeing it by its high frequencies," Shorn observed. "A kind of reverse Doppler effect—"

"Suppose we run into an asteroid or a meteorite?"

"Don't worry, we won't."

"How do you know? You couldn't stop in time."

Shorn ruminated. "No. It's something to think about. I'm not sure whether or not we have momentum. Another experiment for you to worry about. But after today I'll send some kind of shield out ahead of us, just in case."

"Where are we going?"

"Out to one of Jupiter's satellites. Look, there goes Mars." He dropped the telescopic lens in front of his eyes. "There's Io. We'll land on Io."

They stood on a dim gray table, a few feet above a tortured jumble of black scoriae. Frozen white stuff, like rock salt, lay in the crevices. The horizon was near, very sharp. Jupiter filled a quadrant of the sky to the left.

Shorn arranged the flare and the timer on a flat area. "I'll set it for ten minutes. Now—on the count of five I'll start the timer and you start your stop watch."

"Ready."

"One . . . two . . . three . . . four ... five." He looked at Circumbright. Circumbright nodded. "Good. Now, we take ourselves out into space where we can watch."

Io dwindled to a tarnished metal disk, a bright spot.

"We're far enough, I think. Now we watch for the flare, and check the time by your stop watch. The increment over ten minutes will give us the light-distance from Io to where we're—" Shorn considered. "What are we doing? Standing? Floating?"

"Waiting."

"Waiting. After knowing the light distance, we can make our tests."

"Are we sure that we're not moving now? If we're moving, our observations will be inaccurate."

Shorn shook his head. "We're not moving. It's the way telekinesis works. I stop us dead, in relation to Io, the same way a man on roller skates stops by grabbing a post. He just—stops himself."

"You know more about it than I do."

"It's more intuition than knowledge—which is suggestive in itself. How's the time?"

"Nine minutes. Ten . . . Twenty seconds. Thirty seconds. Forty. Fifty—one—two—three—"

They looked toward Io through the telescopic visors. Circumbright counted on in the same cadence. "Four—five—six—seven—eight—nine—ten minutes. One—two—three—"

A brief flicker appeared from the dull disk. Circumbright clamped down on the stem of his stop watch. "Three point six seconds. Allow two tenths of a second reaction time. That gives three point four seconds. Over six hundred thousand miles. Now what?"

"Let me have your stop watch. I'll set it to zero. Now." Shorn squared himself toward Io. "Now we'll try telekinesis on a whole world."

Circumbright blinked. "Suppose there's not enough energy available?"

"We'll soon know." He looked at Io, pressed the stop watch starter.

One second—two seconds—three seconds—Io jerked ahead in its orbit.

Shorn looked at the stop watch. "Three point seven. A tenth of a second, which might be error. Apparently telekinesis works almost instantaneously."

Circumbright looked glumly out toward incandescent Sirius. "We'll play merry hell trying to get any significant results with my lab equipment. Somebody's got to invent some new tools—"

Shorn followed his gaze out toward Sirius. "I wonder what the limit of action is."

Circumbright asked doubtfully, "You're not going to try this ... knack of yours on Sirius?"

"No. We'd have to wait eight years for the light to reach us. But—" He contemplated the massive form of Jupiter. "There's a challenging subject right there."

Circumbright said uneasily, "Suppose the effort drains the source of telekinetic energy—like a short circuit drains a battery? We might be left out here helpless—"

Shorn shook his head. "It wouldn't work that way. My mind is the critical factor. Size doesn't mean much, so long as I can grasp it, take hold of all of it."

He stared at Jupiter. Seconds passed. "About now, if it's going to happen."

Jupiter quivered, floated up across twenty degrees of sky, dropped back into its former orbit.

Circumbright looked almost fearfully at Shorn. Shorn laughed shakily. "Don't worry, Gorman. I'm not out of my mind. But think of the future! All these wasted worlds moved in close, bathing in sunlight. Wonderful new planets for men to live on—"

They turned their faces toward the sun. Earth was a mist-white ball, growing larger. "Think," said Circumbright, "think of what a mad Telek could do. He could come out here as we did, pick up the Moon, toss it into North America or Europe as easily as dropping a rock into the mud. Or he could look at Earth, and it would start to move toward the sun—through the corona, and Earth would be singed, seared clean; he could drop it into a sunspot."

Shorn kept his eyes turned away from Earth. "Don't put ideas into my mind."

"It's a real problem," insisted Circumbright.

"I imagine that eventually there will be an alarm system of some kind; and as soon as it sounds, every mind will grab on to conditions as they are, and hold tight. Or maybe a corps of guardians—"

VII.

Back on Earth, in Laurie's apartment on upper Martinvelt, Shorn and Circumbright sat drinking coffee.

Circumbright was unaccustomedly nervous and consulted his watch at five-minute intervals.

Shorn watched quizzically. "Who are you expecting?" Circumbright glanced quickly, guiltily, round the room. "I suppose there's no spy beetle anywhere close."

"Not according to the detector cell."

"I'm waiting for the messenger. A man called Luby, from East Shore."

"I don't think I know him."

"You'd remember him if you did."

Laurie said, "I think I hear him now."

She went to the door, slid it back. Luby came into the room, quiet as a cat. He was a man of forty who looked no more than seventeen. His skin was clear gold, his features chiseled and handsome, his hair a close cap of tight bronze curls. Shorn thought of the Renaissance Italians—Cesare Borgia, Lorenzo Medici.

Circumbright made introductions which Luby acknowledged with a nod of the head and a lambent look; then he took Circumbright aside, muttered in a rapid flow of syllables.

Circumbright raised his eyebrows, asked a question; Luby shook his head, responded impatiently. Circumbright nodded, and without another word Luby left the room, as quietly as he had entered.

"There's a high-level meeting—policy makers—out at Portinari Gate. We're wanted." He rose to his feet, stood indecisively a moment. "I suppose we had better be going."

Shorn went to the door, looked out into the corridor. "Luby moves quietly. Isn't it unusual to concentrate top minds in a single meeting?"

"Unprecedented. I suppose it's something important." Shorn thought a moment. "Perhaps it would be better to say nothing of my new—achievements."

"Very well."

They flew north through the night, into the foothills, and Lake Paienza spread like a dark blot below, rimmed by the lights of Portinari.

Portinari Gate was a rambling inn six hundred years old, high on a hillside, overlooking lake and town. They dropped to the soft turf in the shadow of great pines, walked to the back entrance.

Circumbright knocked, and they felt a quiet scrutiny.

The door opened, an iron-faced woman with a halo of iron-gray hair stood facing them. "What do you want?"

Circumbright muttered a password; silently she stepped back. Shorn felt her wary scrutiny as he and Laurie entered the room.

A brown-skinned man with black eyes and gold rings in his ears flipped up a hand. "Hello, Circumbright."

"Hello . . . Thursby, this is Will Shorn, Laurita Chelmsford."

Shorn inspected the brown man with interest. The Great Thursby, rumored co-ordinator of the world-wide anti-Telek underground.

There were others in the room, sitting quietly, watchfully. Circumbright nodded to one or two, then took Shorn and Laurie to the side.

"I'm surprised," he said. "The brains of the entire movement are here." He shook his head. "Rather ticklish."

Shorn felt of the detector. "No spy cells."

More people entered, until possibly fifty men and women occupied the room. Among the last group was the young-old Luby.

A stocky dark-skinned man rose to his feet. "This meeting is a departure from our previous methods, and I hope it won't be necessary again for a long time."

Circumbright whispered to Shorn, "That's Kasselbarg, European Post."

Kasselbarg swung a slow glance around the room. "We're starting a new phase of the campaign. Our first was organizational; we built a world-wide underground, a communication system, set up a ladder of command. Now—the second stage: preparation for our eventual action . . . which, of course, will constitute the third stage.

"We all know the difficulties under which we work: since we can't hold up a clear and present danger, our government is not sympathetic to us, and in many cases actively hostile—especially in the persons of suborned police officials. Furthermore we're under the compulsion of striking an absolutely decisive blow on our first sally. There won't be a second chance for us. The Teleks must be"—he paused—"they must be killed. It's a course toward which we all feel an instinctive revulsion, but any other course bares us to the incalculable power of the Teleks. Now, any questions, any comments?"

Shorn, compelled by a sudden pressure he only dimly understood, rose to his feet. "I don't want to

turn the movement into a debating society—but there's another course where killing is unnecessary. It erases the need of the decisive blow, it gives us a greater chance of success."

"Naturally," said Kasselbarg mildly, "I'd like to hear your plan."

"No operation, plan it as carefully as you will, can guarantee the death of every Telek. And those who aren't killed may go crazy in anger and fear; I can picture a hundred million deaths, five hundred million, a billion deaths in the first few seconds after the operation starts—but does not quite succeed."

Kasselbarg nodded. "The need for a hundred per cent *coup* is emphatic. The formulation of such a plan will constitute Phase Two, of which I just now spoke. We certainly can't proceed on any basis other than a ninety-nine per cent probability of fulfillment."

The iron-faced woman spoke. "There are four thousand Teleks, more or less. Here on Earth ten thousand people die every day. Killing the Teleks seems a small price to pay for security against absolute tyranny. It's either act now, while we have limited freedom of choice, or dedicate the human race to slavery for as long into the future as we can imagine."

Shorn looked around the faces in the room. Laurie was sympathetic; Circumbright looked away uncomfortably; Thursby frowned thoughtfully; Kasselbarg waited with courteous deference.

"Everything you say is true," Shorn said. "I would be the most ruthless of us all, if these four thousand deaths did not rob the human race of the most precious gift it possesses. Telekinesis to date has been misused; the Teleks have been remarkable for their selfishness and egotism. But in reacting to the Teleks' mistakes, we should not make mistakes of our own."

Thursby said in a cool clear voice, "What is your concrete proposal, Mr. Shorn?"

"I believe we should dedicate ourselves, not to killing Teleks, but to giving telekinesis to every sane man and woman."

A small red-haired man sneered, "The ancient fallacy, privilege for the chosen ones—in this case, the sane. And who, pray, determines their sanity?"

Shorn smiled. "Your fallacy is at least an ancient; surely there's nothing occult about sanity. But let me return to my fundamental proposition—that taking telekinesis out of monopoly and broadcasting it is a better solution to the problem than killing Teleks. One way is up, the other down; building versus destruction. In one direction we put mankind at its highest potential for achievement; in the other we have four thousand dead Teleks, if our plan succeeds. Always latent is the possibility of a devastated world."

Thursby said, "You're convincing, Mr. Shorn. But aren't you operating on the unproved premise that universal telekinesis is a possibility? Killing the Teleks seems to be easier than persuading them to share their power; we've got to do one or the other."

Shorn shook his head. "There are at least two methods to create Teleks. The first is slow and a long-range job: that is, duplicating the conditions which produced the first Teleks. The second is much easier, quicker, and, I believe, safer. I have good reason for—" he stopped short. A faint buzzing, a vibration in his pocket.

The detector.

He turned to Luby, who stood by the door. "Turn out the lights! There's a Telek spy cell nearby! Out with the lights, or we're all done for."

Luby hesitated. Shorn cursed under his breath. Thursby rose to his feet, startled and tense. "What's going on?"

There was a pounding at the door. "Open up, in the name of the law."

Shorn looked at the windows; the tough vitripane burst out; the windows were wide open. "Quick, out the window!"

Circumbright said in a voice of deadly passion, "Somewhere there's a traitor—"

A man in black and gold appeared at the window with a heat gun. "Out the door," he bellowed. "You can't get away, the place is surrounded. Move out the door in an orderly fashion; move out the door. You're all under arrest. Don't try to break for it, our orders are shoot to kill."

Circumbright sidled close to Shorn. "Can't you do something?"

"Not here. Wait till we're all outside; we don't want anyone shot."

Two burly troopers appeared in the doorway, gestured with pistols. "Outside, everybody. Keep your hands up."

Thursby led the way, his face thoughtful. Shorn followed; behind came the others. They marched into the parking area, now flooded with light from police lamps.

"Stop right there," barked a new voice.

Thursby halted. Shorn squinted against the searchlight; he saw a dozen men standing in a circle around them.

"This is a catch and no mistake," muttered Thursby. "Quiet! No talking."

"Better search them for weapons," came another new voice. Shorn recognized the dry phrasing, the overtones of careless contempt. Adlari Dominion.

Two Black and Golds walked through the group, making a quick search.

A mocking voice came from behind the searchlights. "Isn't that Colonel Thursby, the people's hero? What's he doing in this nasty little conspiracy?"

Thursby stared ahead with an immobile face. The red-haired man who had challenged Shorn cried, "You Telek boot-licker, may the money they pay rot the hands off your wrists!"

"Easy, Walter," said Circumbright.

Thursby spoke toward the lights. "Are we under arrest?"

There was no answer—a contemptuous silence.

Thursby repeated in a sharper tone. "Are we under arrest? I want to see your warrant; I want to know what we're charged with."

"You're being taken to headquarters for questioning," came the reply. "Behave yourselves; if you've committed no crime, there'll be no charge."

"We'll never reach headquarters," Circumbright muttered to Shorn. Shorn nodded grimly, staring into the lights, seeking Dominion. Would he recognize the Cluche Kurgill whom he had invested with Telek power?

The voice called out, "Were you contemplating resistance to arrest? Go ahead. Make it easy on us—"

There was motion in the group, a swaying as if from the wind which moved the tops of the dark pine trees.

The voice said, "Very well then, march forward, one at a time. You first, Thursby."

Thursby turned slowly, like a bull, followed the trooper who walked ahead waving a flashlight.

Circumbright muttered to Shorn, "Can't you do something?"

"Not while Dominion is out there—"

"Silence!"

One by one, the group followed Thursby. An air barge loomed ahead, the rear hatch gaping like the mouth of a cave.

"Up the ramp; inside."

The hold was a bare, metal-walled cargo space. The door clanged shut, and the fifty captives stood in sweating silence.

Thursby's voice came from near the wall. "A clean sweep. Did they get everybody?"

Circumbright answered in a carefully toneless voice. "So far as I know."

"This will set the movement back ten years," said another voice, controlled but tremulous.

"More likely destroy it entirely."

"But—what can they convict us of? We're guilty of nothing they can prove."

Thursby snorted. "We'll never get to Tran. My guess is gas."

"Gas?"—a horrified whisper.

"Poison gas pumped through the ventilator. Then out to sea, drop us, and no one's the wiser. Not even `killed while escaping.' Nothing."

The aircraft vibrated, rose into the air; under their feet was the soft feeling of air-borne flight.

Shorn called out softly. "Circumbright?"

"Right here."

"Make a light."

A paper torch ignited by a cigarette lighter cast a yellow flicker around the hold; faces glowed pale and damp as toad-bellies; eyes glared and reflected, in the flare of the torch.

The row of ports was well shuttered, the hand-keys were replaced by bolts. Shorn turned his attention to the door. He had moved the planet Jupiter; he should be able to break open a door. But the problem was different; in a sense this bulging open of a door was a concept several times more advanced than movement of a single object, no matter how large. There was also a psychological deterrent in the fact that the door was locked. What would happen if he attempted to telekinecize and nothing happened? Would he retain his power?

Thursby was standing with his ear to the ventilator. He turned, nodded. "Here it comes. I can hear the hiss—"

The paper torch was guttering; in darkness Shorn was as helpless as the others. Desperately he plunged his mind at the door; the door burst open, out into the night. Shorn caught it before it fluttered away into the dark air, brought it edgewise back through the door opening.

The wind had blown out the torch; Shorn could only vaguely feel the black bulk of the door. He yelled, to be heard over the roar of the wind rushing past the door, "Stand back, stand back—" He could wait no longer; he felt reality slipping in the darkness; the door was only a vague blot. He concentrated on it, strained his eyes to see, hurled it against the metal hull, stove out a great rent. Air swept through the hold, whisked out any gas which might have entered.

Shorn took himself out the door, rose above the cabin, looked through the sky dome. A dozen Black and Gold troopers sat in the forward compartment looking uneasily back toward the cargo hold whence had come the rending jar. Adlari Dominion was not visible. Luby, the bronze-haired courier with the medallion face, sat statue-quiet in a corner. Luby was to be preserved, thought Shorn. Luby was the traitor.

He had neither time nor inclination for half-measures. He tore a strip off the top of the ship; the troopers and Luby looked up in terror. If they saw him at all, he was a white-faced demon of the night, riding the wind above them. They were shucked out of the cabin like peas from a pod, flung out into the night, and their cries came thinly back to Shorn over the roar of the wind.

He jumped down into the cabin, cut off the motors, jerked the cylinder of gas away from the ventilation system, then whisked the craft east, toward the Monaghill Mountains.

Clouds fell away from the moon; he saw a field below. Here was as good a spot as any to land and reorganize.

The aircraft settled to the field. Dazed, trembling, buffeted, fifty men and women crept from the hold.

Shorn found Thursby leaning against the hull. Thursby looked at him through the moonlight as a child might watch a unicorn. Shorn grinned. "I know you must be puzzled; I'll tell you all about it as soon as we're settled. But now—"

Thursby squinted. "It's hardly practical our going home, acting as if nothing had happened. The Black and Golds took photographs; and there's a number of us that—are not unknown to them."

Circumbright appeared out of the darkness like a pink and brown owl. "There'll be a great deal of excitement at the Black and Gold headquarters when there's no news of this hulk."

"There'll be a great deal of irritation at Glarietta Pavilion."

Shorn counted the days on his fingers. "Today is the twenty-third. Nine days to the first of the month."

"What happens on the first of the month?"

"The First Annual Telekinetic Olympiad, at the new stadium in Swanscomba Valley. In the meantime, there's an old mine back of Mount Mathias. The bunkhouses should hold two or three hundred."

"But there're only fifty of us,"

"We'll want others. Two hundred more. Two hundred good people. And to avoid any confusion"—he looked around to find the red-haired man who thought that sanity was no more than a function of individual outlook—"we will equate goodness to will to survival for self, the family group,

human culture and tradition."

"That's broad enough," said Thursby equably, "to suit almost anyone. As a practical standard—" In the moonlight Shorn saw him cock his eyebrows humorously.

"Practically," said Shorn, "we'll pick out people we like."

VIII.

Sunday morning, June the first, was dull and overcast. Mist hung along the banks of the Swanscomba River as it wound in its new looping course down the verdant valley; the trees dripped with clammy condensations.

At eight o'clock a man in rich garments of purple, black and white dropped from the sky to the rim of the stadium. He glanced up at the overcast, the cloud-rack broke open like a scum, slid across the sky.

Horizon to horizon the heavens showed pure and serene blue; the sun poured warmth into Swanscomba Valley.

The man looked carefully around the stadium, his black eyes keen, restless. At the far end stood a man in a black and gold police uniform; he brought the man through the air to the rim of the stadium beside him. "Good morning, sergeant. Any disturbance?"

"None at all, Mr. Dominion."

"How about below?"

"I couldn't say, sir. I'm only responsible for the interior, and I've had the lights on all night. Not a fly has showed itself."

"Good." Dominion glanced around the great bowl. "If there are no trespassers now, there won't be any, since there's no ground-level entrance."

He took himself and the trooper to the ground. Two other men in uniform appeared.

"Good morning," said Dominion. "Any disturbance?"

"No sir. Not a sound."

"Curious." Dominion rubbed his pale peaked chin. "Nothing below the stadium?"

"Nothing, sir. Not a nail. We've searched every nook and cranny, down to bedrock, inch by inch."

"Nothing on the detectors?"

"No, sir. If a gopher had tunneled under the stadium, we'd have known it."

Dominion nodded. "Perhaps there won't be any demonstration after all." He stroked his chin. "My intuition is seldom at fault. But never mind. Take all your men, station them at the upper and lower ends of the valley. Allow no one to enter. No one, on any pretext whatever. Understand me?"

"Yes, sir."

Dominion returned to the rim of the stadium, gazed around the sunny bowl. The grass was green and well-cropped; the colored upholstery of the chairs made circular bands of pastel around the stadium.

He took himself through the air to the director's cupola, an enclosed booth hanging in a vantage point over the field on a long transparent spar. He entered, seated himself at the table, switched on the microphone. "One—two—three." He stopped, listened. His voice, channeled to speakers in the arms of each of the seats, came back to him as a husky murmur.

Other Teleks began to arrive, dropping like brilliant birds from the sky, settling to bask in the sunlight. Refreshment trays floated past; they sipped fruit juice, tea, and ate mintcakes.

Dominion left the high cupola, drifted low over the stadium. There was no expectation of filling it; thirty thousand seats would allow room for future increase. Thirty thousand Teleks was the theoretical limit that the economy of Earth could maintain at the present standard of living. And after thirty thousand? Dominion shrugged aside the question; the problem had no contemporary meaning. The solution should prove simple enough; there had been talk of swinging Venus out into a cooler orbit, moving in Neptune, and creating two habitable worlds by transferring half of Neptune's mantle of ice to dusty Venus. A problem for tomorrow. Today's concern was the creation of the Telek Earth State, the inculcation of religious awe into the common folk of Earth—the only means, as it had been decided, to protect Teleks

from witless assassination.

He dropped into a group of friends, seated himself. His work was done for the day; now, with security achieved, he could relax, enjoy himself.

Teleks came in greater numbers. Here was a large group—fifty together. They settled into a section rather high up on the shady side, somewhat apart from the others. A few minutes later another group of fifty joined them, and later there were other similar groups.

At nine o'clock the program of events got under way. A whirlpool of jewel colors glinted high in the sky. A dozen great ice prisms appeared, each frozen from water of a different color.

They commenced to revolve in a circle, rotating at the same time; shafts of colored light—red, gold-yellow, emerald, blue—played around the stadium. Then each of the prisms broke into twenty sections, and the pieces swung, swirled like a swarm of polychrome fireflies. With a great swoop, they disappeared into the sky.

The voice of Lemand De Troller, Program Director, sounded from the speakers:

"Sixty years ago, at the original Telekinetic Congress, our race was born. Today is the first annual convention of the issue of these early giants, and I hope the custom will persist down the stream of history, down the million years that is our destined future, ten million times a million years.

"Now—the program for the day. Immediately following will be a game of bump-ball, for the world championship, between the Crimean Blues and the Oslandic Vikings. Then there will be a water-sculpture contest and display, and next—arrow dueling, followed by an address by Miss Gloriana Hallen, on the Future of Telekinesis, and then lunch will be served on the turf—"

Circumbright and Shorn listened with mounting dissatisfaction. The program director finished. "—the final valediction by Graycham Gray, our chairman for the year."

Circumbright said to Shorn, "There's nothing there, no mass telekinesis in the entire program."

Shorn said nothing. He leaned back in his seat, looked up to the director's cupola.

"Ample opportunity for mass exercise," complained Circumbright "and they overlook it entirely."

Shorn brought his attention back down from the cupola. "It's an obvious stunt—perhaps too obvious for such a sophisticated people."

Circumbright scanned the two hundred and sixty-five men and women in radiant Telek costumes that Shorn had brought into the stadium, fifty at a time. "Do you suppose that the program as it stands will do the trick?"

Shorn shook his head fretfully. "Doesn't seem possible. Not enough mass participation." He looked over his shoulder to Thursby, in the seat behind him. "Any ideas?"

Thursby in brown and yellow said tentatively, "We can't very well force them to indoctrinate us."

Laurie, beside Shorn, laughed nervously. "Let's send Circumbright out to plead with them."

Shorn moved restlessly in his seat. Two hundred and sixty-five precious lives, dependent for continued existence on his skill and vigilance. "Maybe something will turn up."

The game of bump-ball was under way. Five men lying prone in eight-foot red torpedoes competed against five men in blue torpedoes, each team trying to bump a floating three-foot ball into the opposition goal. The game was lightning swift, apparently dangerous. The ten little boats moved so fast as to be mere flickers; the ball slammed back and forth like a ping-pong ball.

Shorn began to notice curious glances cast up toward his group. There was no suspicion, only interest; somehow they were attracting attention. He looked around, and saw his group sitting straight and tense as vestrymen at a funeral—obviously, uneasy and uncomfortable. He rose to his feet, spoke in an angry undertone, "Show a little life; act as if you're enjoying yourselves!"

He turned back to the field, noticed a service wagon not in use, pulled it up, moved it past his charges. Gingerly they took tea, rum punch, cakes, fruit. Shorn set the case back on the turf.

The bump-bail game ended; now began the water sculpture. Columns of water reared into the air: thousands of gallons, working into glistening soft forms. Quivering pliant water caught the sunlight, glowed deep from within the nonobjectives, the human figures, the heads, the interlocking geometric patterns.

Event followed event: competitions and displays in color, skill, ingenuity, swift reaction; arrows were

pitted against arrows each trying to pierce the bladder trailed by the other. Colored spheres were raced through an obstacle course; there was an exhibition in which sparrows were released and after an interval herded into a basket by a small white tambourine.

The air over the stadium swam with fascinating colors, shapes, tapes, screens, and so passed the morning. At twelve laden buffet tables dropped from sky to the stadium turf. And now Shorn found himself on the horns of a dilemma. By remaining aloof from the tables his group made themselves conspicuous; but they risked quick detection by mingling with the Teleks.

Thursby resolved the problem. He leaned forward. "Don't you think we'd better go down to lunch? Maybe a few at a time. We stick out like a sore thumb sitting up here hungry."

Shorn nodded acquiescently. By ones and twos he sent the members of his company down to the sward. Laurie nudged him. "Look. There's Dominion. He's talking to old Poole."

Circumbright in unusual agitation said: "I hope Poole keeps his wits about him."

Shorn smiled grimly. "If Dominion makes one move—" Circumbright saw one of the dueling arrows lift easily into the air. Dominion turned away. Shorn sighed. The arrow returned to the turf.

A moment later he brought Poole back to his seat. "What did Dominion want?"

Poole was a scholarly-looking man of middle age, mild and myopic. "Dominion? Oh, the gentleman who spoke to me. He was very pleasant. Asked if I were enjoying the spectacles, and said that he didn't think he recognized me."

"And what did you say?"

"I said I didn't get out very much, and that there were many here I hardly knew."

"And then?"

"He just moved away."

Shorn sighed. "Dominion is very sharp."

Thursby wore a worried frown.

"Things haven't gone so well this morning."

"No. But there's still the afternoon."

The afternoon program began with a score of young Telek girls performing an air ballet.

IX.

Three o'clock.

"There's not much more," said Circumbright. Shorn sat hunched forward. "No."

Circumbright clenched the arms of his seat. "We've got to do something—and I know what to do."

"What?"

"Drop me down to the field. I'll pick up the arrows, and you start picking off Teleks. Dominion first. Then they'll all—"

Shorn shook his head. "It wouldn't work. You'd be throwing away your life for nothing."

"Why wouldn't it work?" Circumbright demanded belligerently.

Shorn gestured to the two hundred and sixty-five. "Do you think we could arouse a real rapport in the business of pulverizing you? No." He looked up to the director's cupola. "It's got to come from there. And I've got to arrange it." He reached over, clasped Laurie's hand, nodded to Thursby, rose to his feet, took himself by an inconspicuous route along the back wall, up to the transparent spar supporting the cupola. Inside he glimpsed the shapes of two men.

He slid back the door, entered quietly, froze in his footprints. Adlari Dominion, lounging back in an elastic chair, smiled up at him, ominous as a cobra. "Come in. I've been expecting you."

Shorn looked quickly to Lemand De Troller, the program director, a bulky blond man with lines of self-indulgence clamping his mouth.

"How so?"

"I have a pretty fair idea of your intentions, and I admit their ingenuity. Unluckily for you, I inspected the body of Cluche Kurgill, assassinated a short time ago, and it occurred to me that this was not the man

whom I entertained at Glarietta; I have since reprimanded myself for not scrutinizing the catch at Portinari Gate more carefully. In any event, today will be a complete debacle, from your standpoint. I have excised from the program any sort of business which might have helped you."

Shorn said thickly, "You showed a great deal of forbearance in allowing us to enjoy your program."

Dominion made a lazy gesture. "It is as well not to bring our problems too sharply to the attention of the spectators; it might lay a macabre overtone upon the festival, for them to observe at close hand two hundred and sixty-five condemned anarchists and provocateurs."

"You should have been made very uncomfortable if I had not come up here to the cupola."

Dominion shook his head indulgently. "I asked myself, what would I do in your position? I answered, I would proceed to the cupola and myself direct such an event to suit my purposes. So—I preceded you." He smiled. "And now—the sorry rebellion is at its end. The entire nucleus of your gang is within reach, helpless; if you recall, there is no exit, they have no means to scale the walls."

Shorn felt thick bile rising in his throat; his voice sounded strange to his ears. "It's not necessary to revenge yourself on all these people; they're merely decent individuals, trying to cope with—" He spoke on, pleading half-angrily for the two hundred and sixty-five. Meanwhile his mind worked at a survival sub-level. Dominion, no matter how lazy-seeming and catlike, was keyed up, on his guard; there would be no surprising him. In any struggle Lemand De Troller, the program director, would supply the decisive force. Shorn might be able to parry the weapons of one man, but two cores of thought would be too much for him.

Decision and action came to him simultaneously. He gave the cupola a great shake; startled, De Troller seized the desk. Shorn threw a coffee mug at his head. Instantly, before the mug had even struck, he flung himself to the floor. Dominion, seizing the instant of Shorn's distraction, had aimed a gun at him, fired an explosive pellet. Shorn hit the floor, saw De Troller slump, snatched the weapon from Dominion's hand, all at once.

The gun clattered to the deck, and Shorn found himself looking into Dominion's pale glowing eyes.

Dominion spoke in a low voice. "You're very quick. You've effectively reduced the odds against yourself."

Shorn smiled tightly. "What odds do you give me now?"

"Roughly, a thousand to one."

"Seems to me they're even. You against me."

"No. I can hold you helpless, at the very least, until the program property man returns."

Shorn slowly rose to his feet. Careful. Let no movement escape his eye. Without moving his eyes from Dominion's, he lifted the coffee mug, hurled it at Dominion's head. Dominion diverted it, accelerated it, toward Shorn. Shorn bounced it back, into Dominion's face. It stopped only an inch short, then sprang back at Shorn's head with tremendous speed. Shorn flicked it with a thought, he felt the breath of its passage and it shattered against the wall.

"You're fast," said Dominion lightly. "Very fast indeed. In theory, your reactions should have missed that."

Shorn stared at him thoughtfully. "I've got a theory of my own."

"I'd like to hear it."

"What happens when two minds try to teleport an object in opposing directions?"

Dominion frowned slightly. "A very exhausting matter, if carried to the limit. The mind with the greater certainty wins, the other mind—sometimes—lapses." Shorn stared at Dominion. "My mind is stronger than yours."

Dominion's eyes lit up with a peculiar inner glow, then filmed over. "Very well, suppose it is? What do I gain in proving otherwise?"

Shorn said, "If you want to save your life—you'll have to." With his eyes still on Dominion, he took a knife from his pocket, flicked open the blade.

It leaped from his hand at his eyes. He frantically diverted it, and in the instant his defense was distracted, the gun darted to Dominion's hand. Shorn twisted up the muzzle by a hair's-breath; the pellet sang past his ear.

Fragments of the coffee mug pelted the back of his head, blinding him with pain. Dominion, smiling and easy, raised the gun. It was all over, Shorn thought. His mind, wilted and spent, stood naked and bare of defense—for the flash of an instant. Before Dominion could pull the trigger, Shorn flung the knife at his throat. Dominion turned his attention away from the gun to divert the knife; Shorn reached out, grabbed the gun with his bare hands, tossed it under the table out of sight.

Dominion and Shorn glared eye to eye. Both of them thought of the knife. It lay on the table, and now under the impulse of both minds, slowly trembled, rose quivering into the air, hilt up, blade down, swinging as if hung by a short string. Gradually it drifted to a position midway between their eyes.

The issue was joined. Sweating, breathing hard, they glared at the knife, and it vibrated, sang to the induced quiver from the opposing efforts. Eye to eye stared Dominion and Shorn, faces red, mouths open, distorted. No opportunity now for diversionary tactics; relax an instant and the knife would stab; blunt force strained against force.

Dominion said slowly, "You can't win, you who have only known telekinesis a few days; your certainty is as nothing compared to mine. I've lived my lifetime in certainty; it's part of my living will, and now see—your reality is weakening, the knife is aiming at you, to slash your neck."

Shorn watched the knife in fascination, and indeed it slowly turned toward him like the clock-hand of Fate. Sweat streamed into his eyes; he was aware of Dominion's grimace of triumph.

No. Allow no words to distract you; permit no suggestion; bend down Dominion's own resolution. His vocal chords were like rusty wire, his voice was a croak. "My certainty is stronger than yours, because"—as he said the words the knife halted its sinister motion toward his throat—"time has no effect upon telekinesis! Because I've got the will of all humanity behind me, and you've got only yourself!"

The knife trembled, twisted, as if it were a live thing, tortured by indecision.

"I'm stronger than you are, because—I've *got to be!"* He sank the words into Dominion's mind.

Dominion said quickly, "Your neck hurts, your mind hurts, you cannot see."

Shorn's neck hurt indeed, his head ached, sweat stung his eyes, and the knife made a sudden lurch toward him. This can't go on, thought Shorn. "I don't need tricks, Dominion; you need them only because your confidence is going and you're desperate." He took a deep breath, reached out, seized the knife, plunged it into Dominion's breast.

Shorn stood looking down at the body. "I won—and by a trick. He was so obsessed by the need for defeating me mentally that he forgot the knife had a handle."

Panting he looked out over the stadium. Events had come to a halt. The spectators restively waited for word from the program director.

Shorn picked up the microphone.

"Men and women of the future—" as he spoke he watched the little huddle of two hundred and sixty-five. He saw Laurie stir, look up; he saw Circumbright turn, clap Thursby's knee. He felt the wave of thankfulness, of hero-worship, almost insane in its fervor that welled up from their minds. At that moment he could have commanded any of them to their death.

An intoxicated elation came to him; he fought to control his voice. "This is an event improvised to thank Lemand De Troller, our program director, for his work in arranging the events. All of us will join our telekinetic powers together; we will act as one mind. I will guide this little white ball"—he lifted a small ball used in the obstacle race—"through the words 'Thank you, Lemand De Troller.' You, with your united wills, will follow with the large bump-ball." He rolled it out into the center of the stadium. "With more preparation we would have achieved something more elaborate, but I know Lemand will be just as pleased if he feels all of us are concentrating on the big ball, putting our hearts into the thanks. So—now. Follow the little white ball."

Slowly he guided the white ball along imaginary block letters in the air; faithfully the big bump-ball followed.

It was finished.

Shorn looked anxiously toward Circumbright. No signal.

Once again.

"Now—there is one other to whom we owe a vote of thanks: Adlari Dominion, the capable liaison officer. This time we will spell out, 'Thank you and good luck, Adlari Dominion.' "

The white ball moved. The big ball followed. Four thousand minds impelled, two hundred and sixty-five minds sought to merge into the pattern: each a new prometheus trying to steal a secret more precious than fire from a race more potent than the Titans.

Shorn finished the last N, glanced toward Circumbright. Still no signal. Anxiety beset him; was this the right indoctrination technique? Suppose it was only effective under special conditions, suppose he had been operating on a misapprehension the entire time?

"Well," said Shorn doggedly, "once again." But the spectators would be growing restless. Who to thank this time?

The ball was moving of its own volition. Shorn, fascinated, followed its path. It was spelling a word. W-I-L-L—then a space—S-H-O-R-N—another space—T-H-A-N-K-S.

Shorn sank back into the elastic seat, his eyes brimming with tears of release and thankfulness. "Someone is thanking Will Shorn," he said into the microphone. "It's time for them to leave." He paused. Two hundred and sixty-five new telekinetics lifted themselves from the stadium, flew west toward Tran, disappeared into the afternoon.

Shorn returned to the microphone. "There're a few more words I want to say; please be patient a moment or two longer.

"You have just been witnesses—unwitting witnesses —to an event as important as Joffrey's original congress. The future will consider the sixty-year interval only a transition, humanity's final separation from the beast.

"We have completely subdued the material world; we know the laws governing all the phenomena that our senses can detect. Now we turn ourselves Ito a new direction; humanity enters a new stage, and wonderful things lie before us." He noticed a ripple of uneasiness running along the ranks of the Teleks. "This new world is on us, we can't evade it. For sixty years the Teleks have rejoiced in a state of special privilege, and this is the last shackle humanity throws off: the idea that one man may dominate or control another man."

He paused; the uneasiness was ever more marked.

"There are trying times to come—a period of severe readjustment. At the moment you are not quite certain to what I am referring, and that is just as well. Thank you for your attention and good-by. I hope you enjoyed the program as much as I did."

He rose to his feet, stepped over Dominion's body, slid back the door, stepped out of the cupola.

Teleks leaving the stadium rose up past him like mayflies, some turning him curious glances as they flew. Shorn, smiling, watched them flit past, toward their glittering pavilions, their cloud-castles, their sea-bubbles. The last one was gone; he waved an arm after them as if in valediction.

Then he himself rose, plunged westward toward the sword-shaped towers of Tran, where two hundred and sixty-five men and women were already starting to spread telekinesis through all of mankind.