

# fantastic

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# TRANQUILITY, OR ELSE!

**Beware of too much peace and quiet! It might turn out that going off your rocker is the only thing worth doing when self-expression is taboo and depersonalization becomes the current rage.**

*My strangest case, bar none, from the Psychotic Years was the Green Demon of New Angeles.*

—from the notebooks of  
Andreas Snowden

IT WOULD be hard to imagine a more peaceful and reassuring spot, a spot less likely to harbor or attract horrors, even in America of the tranquil Early Twenty-first Century, than the suburb-exurb—rather—of Civil Service Knolls. Cozy was the word for the place—a loose assembly of a half thousand homes snuggling down in the warm moonlight a mountain ridge away from the metropolis of New Angeles. With their fashionably rounded roofs the individual houses looked rather like giant mush-

rooms among the noble trees. They were like mushrooms too in the way they grew with the families they housed—one storey for the newlyweds, two for the properly childrenged and community - seasoned, three for those punchdrunk with reproduction and happy living. From under their eaves spilled soft yellow light of the exact shade that color analysts had pronounced most home-like.

There were no streets or roads, only the dark pine-scented asphalt disks of side-yard landing spots now holding the strange-vaned shapes of copters and flutteryplanes locked for the night, like sleeping dragonflies and moths. While for the ground-minded there was the unobtrusive subway entrance. Even the gro-

ceries came by underground tube straight to the kitchen in response to the housewife's morning dialing, delivery having at last gone underground with the other utilities. Well-chewed garbage vanished down rust-proof ducts in the close company of well-bred bacteria. There were not even any unsightly dirt paths worn in the thick springy lawns—the family hypnotherapist had implanted in the mind of every resident, each last baldie and toddler, the suggestion that pedestrians vary their routes and keep their steps light and rather few.

No nightclubs, no bars, no feelie pads, no mess parlors, no bongo haunts, no jukebox joints, no hamburg havens, no newsstands, no comic books, no smellorama, no hot-rods, no weed, no jazz, no gin.

Yes, tranquil, secure and cosy were all good words for Civil Service Knolls—a sylvan monument to sane, civilized, progressive attitudes.

Yet fear was about to swoop there just the same. Not fear of war, missile-atomic or otherwise—the Cold Truce with Communism was a good fifty years old. Not fear of physical disease or any crippling organic infirmity—such ills were close to the vanishing

point and even funerals and deaths—again with the vital aid of the family hypnotherapist—were rather pleasant or at least reassuring occasions for the survivors. No, the fear that was about to infiltrate Civil Service Knolls was of the sort that must be called nameless.

A householder crossing a stretch of open turf as he strolled home from the subway thought he heard a *whish* directly overhead. There was nothing whatever blackly silhouetted against the wide stretch of moon-pale sky, yet it seemed to him that one of the moon-dimmed stars near the zenith quivered and shifted, as if there were an *eddy* in the air or sky. Heaven had wavered. And weren't there two extra stars there now?—two new stars in the center of the *eddy*—two dim red stars close-placed like eyes?

No, that was impossible, he must be seeing things—his own blasted fault for missing his regular soothe-session with the hypnotherapist! Just the same, he hurried his steps.

The *eddy* in the darkness overhead floated in pace with him a while, then swooped. He heard a louder *whish*, then something brushed his shoulder and claws seemed to fasten there for an instant.



**It was a rude awakening for Judistrator Wisant—  
his daughter had flipped.**

He gasped like someone about to vomit and leaped forward frantically.

From the empty moon-glowing darkness behind him came a cackle of grim laughter.

While the householder desperately pounded upon his own front door, the eddy in the darkness shot up to the height of a sequoia, then swooped on another section of Civil Service Knolls. It hovered for a while above the imposing two-story residence of Judistrator Wisant, took a swing around the three-story one of Securitor Harker, but in the end drifted down to investigate a faintly glowing upstairs window in another three-storey house.

Inside the window an athletically - handsome matron, mother of five, was leisurely preparing for bed. She was thinking, rather self-satisfiedly, that (1) she had completed all preparations for her family's participation in the Twilight Tranquility Festival tomorrow, high point of the community year; (2) she had thrown just the right amount of cold water on her eldest daughter's infatuation for the unsuitable boy visiting next door (and a hint to the hypnotherapist before her daughter's next session would do the

rest); and (3) she truly didn't look five years older than her eldest daughter.

There was a tap at the window.

The matron started, pulling her robe around her, then craftily waved off the light. It had instantly occurred to her that the unsuitable boy might have had the audacity to try to visit her daughter illicitly and have mistaken bedroom windows—she had read in magazine articles that such wild lascivious young men actually existed in parts of America, though—thank Placidity!—not as regular residents of Civil Service Knolls.

She walked to the window and abruptly waved it to full transparency and then with a further series of quick side-wise waves brought the room's lights to photoflood brilliance.

At first she saw nothing but the thick foliage of the sycamore a few yards outside.

Then it seemed to her as if there were an *eddy* in the massed greenery. The leaves seemed to shift and swirl.

Then a face appeared in the eddy—a green face with the fanged grin of a devil and hotly glowing eyes that looked like twin peepholes into Hell.

The matron screamed, spun around, and sprinted into the hall, shouting the local secu-

rity number toward the phone which her scream triggered into ear-straining awareness.

From beyond the window came peals of cold maniacal laughter.

Yes, fear had come to Civil Service Knolls—in fact, horror would hardly be too strong a term.

*Some men lead perfect lives*

*—poor devils!*

—the notebooks of A.S.

Judistrator Wisant was awakened by a familiar insistent tingling in his left wrist. He reached out and thumbed a button. The tingling stopped. The screen beside the bed glowed into life with the handsome hatchet-face of his neighbor Securitor Harker. He touched another button, activating the tiny softspeaker and micromike relays at his ear and throat.

"Go ahead, Jack," he murmured.

Two seconds after his head had left the pillow a faint light had sprung from the walls of the room. It increased now by easy stages as he listened to a terse second-hand account of the two most startling incidents to disturb Civil Service Knolls since that tragic episode ten years ago when the kindergarten hypnothera-

pist went crazy and called attention to her psychosis only by the shocking posthypnotic suggestions she implanted in the toddlers' minds.

Judistrator Wisant was a large, well-built, shaven-headed man. His body, half covered now by the lapping sheet, gave the impression of controlled strength held well in reserve. His hands were big and quiet. His face was a compassionate yet disciplined mask of sanity. No one ever met him and failed to be astounded when they learned afterwards that it was his wife Beth who had been the aberrating school hypnotherapist and who was now a permanent resident of the nearby mental hospital of Serenity Shoals.

The bedroom was as bare and impersonal as a gymnasium locker room. Screen, player, two short bedside shelves of which one was filled with books and tapes and neatly stacked papers, an uncurtained darkened window leading to a small outside balcony and now set a little ajar, the double bed itself exactly half slept in—that about completed the inventory, except for two 3-D photographs on the other bedside shelf of two smiling, tragic-eyed women who looked enough alike to be sisters of about 27 and 17. The photo-

graph of the elder bore the inscription, "To my Husband, With all my Witchy Love. Beth," and of the younger, "To her Dear Daddikins from Gabby."

The topmost of the stacked papers was a back cover cut from a magazine demurely labeled *Individuality Unlimited: Monthly Bulletin*. The background was a cluster of shadowy images of weird and grim beings: vampires, werewolves, humanoid robots, witches, murderesses, "Martians," mask-wearers, naked brains with legs. A central banner shouted: *Next Month: Accent the Monster in You!* In the lower lefthand corner was a small sharp photo of a personable young man looking mysterious, with the legend *David Cruxon: Your Monster Mentor*. Clipped to the page was a things-to-do-tomorrow memo in Joel Wisant's angular script: "10 ack emma: Individuality Unlimited hearing. Warn them on injunction."

Wisant's gaze shifted more than once to this item and to the two photographs as he patiently heard out Harker's account. Finally he said, "Thanks, Jack. No, I don't think it's a prankster—what Mr. Fredericks and Mrs. Ames report seeing is no joke-shop

scare - your - friends illusion. And I don't think it's anything that comes in any way from Serenity Shoals, though the overcrowding there is a problem and we're going to have to do something about it. What's that? No, it's nobody fooling around in an antigravity harness—they're too restricted. And we know it's nothing from *outside*—that's impossible. No, the real trouble, I'm afraid, is that it's nothing at all—nothing material. Does the name Mattoon mean anything to you?

"I'm not surprised, it was a hundred years ago. But a town went mad because of an imaginary prowler, there was an epidemic of insane fear. That sort of thing happening today could be much worse. Are you familiar with Report K?

"No matter, I can give you the gist of it. You're cleared for it and ought to have it. But you are calling on our private line, aren't you?—this stuff is top restricted.

"Report K is simply the true annual statistics on mental health in America. Adjusted ones showing no significant change have been issued through the usual channels. Jack, the real incidence of new psychoses is up 15 percent in the last eight months. Yes, it

is pretty staggering and I am a close-mouthed old dog. No, it's been pretty well proved that it isn't nerve-viruses or mind-war, much as the Kremlin boys would like to see us flip and despite those irrational but persistent rumors of a Mind Bomb. Analysis is not complete, but the insanity-surge seems to be due to a variety of causes—things that we've let get out of hand and must deal with drastically."

As Wisant said those last words he was looking at the Accent-the-Monster banner on the Individuality Unlimited bulletin. His hand took a stylus, crossed out the "Warn them on" in his memo, underlined "injunction" three times and added an exclamation point.

Meanwhile he continued, "As far as Mr. Fredericks and Mrs. Ames are concerned, here's your procedure. First, instruct them to tell no one about what they thought they saw—tell them it's for the public safety—and direct them to see their hypnotherapists. Same instructions to family members and anyone to whom they may have talked. Second, find the names of their hypnotherapists, call them and tell them to get in touch with Dr. Andreas Snowden at Serenity Shoals—he's up on

Report K and will know what reassurance - techniques or memory-wiping to advise. I depend on Snowden a lot—for that matter he's going to be with us tomorrow when we go up against Individuality Unlimited. Third, don't let anything leak to the press—that's *vital*. We must confine this outbreak of delusions before any others are infected. I don't have to tell you, Jack, that I have reason to feel very deeply about a thing like this." (His gaze went to the photo of his wife.) "That's right, Jack, we're sanitary engineers of the mind, you and I—we hose out mental garbage!"

A rather frosty smile came into his face and stayed there while he listened again to Harker.

After a bit he said, "No, I wouldn't think of missing the Tranquility Festival—in fact they've got me leading part of it. Always proud to—and these community occasions are very important in keeping people sane. Gabby?—she's looking forward to it, too, as only a pretty, sweet-minded girl of 17 can, who's been chosen Tranquility Princess. She really makes it for me. And now hop to it, Jack, while this old man grabs himself some more shut-eye. Remember that what you're up

against is delusions and hallucinations, *nothing real.*"

Wisant thumbed off the phone. As his head touched the pillow and the light in the room started to die, he nodded twice, as if to emphasize his last remark.

*Serenity Shoals, named with a happy unintended irony, is a sizable territory in America's newest frontier: the Mountains of Madness.*

—the notebooks of A.S.

While the scant light that filtered past the windoor died, the eddy in the darkness swung away from the house of Judistrator Wisant and sped with a kind of desperation toward the sea. The houses and lawns gave out. The wooded knolls became lower and sandier and soon gave way to a wide treeless expanse of sand holding a half dozen large institutional buildings and a tent-city besides. The buildings were mostly dark, but with stripes of dimly lit windows marking stairwells and corridors; the tent-city likewise had its dimly lit streets. Beyond them both the ghostly breakers of the Pacific were barely visible in the moonlight.

Serenity Shoals, which has been called a Sandbox for Grownups, was one of Twen-

ty-first Century America's largest mental hospitals and now it was clearly filled beyond any planned capacity. Here dwelt the garden-variety schizos, manics, paranoid, brain-damageds, a few exotic sufferers from radiation-induced nerve sickness and spaceflight-gendered gravitational dementia and cosmic shock, and a variety of other special cases—but really all of them were simply the people who for one reason or another found it a better or at least more bearable bargain to live with their imaginings rather than even pretend to live with what society called reality.

Tonight Serenity Shoals was restless. There was more noise, more laughter and chatter and weeping, more movement of small lights along the corridors and streets, more shouts and whistles, more unscheduled night-parties and night-wanderings of patients and night-expeditions of aides, more beetle-like scurryings of sand-cars with blinking headlights, more emergencies of all sorts. It may have been the general overcrowding, or the new batch of untrained nurses and aides, or the rumor that lobotomies were being performed again, or the two new snackbars. It may even have been the moonlight—Luna dis-

turbing the "loonies" in the best superstitious tradition.

For that matter, it may have been the eddy in the darkness that was the cause of it all.

Along the landward side of Serenity Shoals, between it and the wasteland bordering Civil Service Knolls, stretched a bright new wire fence, unpleasantly but not lethally electrified—one more evidence that Serenity Shoals was having to cope with more than its quota.

Back and forth along the line of the fence, though a hundred yards above, the eddy in the darkness beat and whirled, disturbing the starlight. There was an impression of hopeless yearning about its behavior, as if it wanted to reach its people but could not pass over the boundary.

From the mangy terrace between the permanent buildings and the nominally temporary tents, Director Andreas Snowden surveyed his schizo-manic domain. He was an elderly man with sleepy eyes and unruly white hair. He frowned, sensing an extra element in the restlessness tonight. Then his brow cleared, and smiling with tender cynicism, he recited to himself:

"Give me your tired, your poor,

Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,  
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.

Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me."

*Apply a lot more to Serenity Shoals, he thought than to America these days. Though I ain't no bloody copper goddess bearing a lamp to dazzle the Dagos and I ain't got no keys to no golden doors.* (Dr. Snowden was always resolutely crude and ungrammatical in his private thoughts, perhaps in reaction to the relative gentility of his spoken utterances. He was also very sentimental.)

"Oh, hello, Doctor!" The woman darting across the corner of the terrace had stopped suddenly. It was hard to see anything about her except that she was thin.

Dr. Snowden walked toward her. "Good evening, Mrs. Wisant," he said. "Rather late for you to be up and around, isn't it?"

"I know, Doctor, but the thought-rays are very thick tonight and they sting worse than the mosquitoes. Besides I'm too excited I couldn't sleep anyhow. My daughter is coming here tomorrow."

"Is she?" Dr. Snowden asked gently. "Odd that Joel hasn't mentioned it to me—as it happens, I'm to see your husband tomorrow on a legal matter."

"Oh, Joel doesn't know she's coming," the lady assured him. "He'd never let her if he did. He doesn't think I'm good for her ever since I started blacking out on my visits home and . . . doing things. But it isn't a plot between me and Gabby, either—she doesn't know she's coming."

"So? Then how are you going to manage it, Mrs. Wisant?"

"Don't try to sound so normal, Doctor!—especially when you know very well *I'm not*. I suppose you think that *I* think I will summon her by sending a thought-ray. Not at all. I've practically given up using thought-rays. They're not reliable and they carry yellow fever. No, Doctor, I got Gabby to come here tomorrow ten years ago."

"Now how did you do that, Mrs. Wisant? Time travel?"

"Don't be so patronizing! I merely impressed it on Gabby's mind ten years ago—after all, I *am* a trained hypnotherapist—that she should come to me when she became a princess. Now Joel writes me she's been chosen Tranquil-

ity Princess for the festival tomorrow. You see?"

"Very interesting. But don't be disappointed if—"

"Stop being a wet blanket, Doctor! Don't you have any trust in psychological techniques? I *know* she's coming. Oh the daisies, the beautiful daisies . . ."

"Then that settles it. How are they treating you here these days?"

"I have no complaints, Doctor—except I must say I don't like all these new nurses and aides. They're callow. They seem to think it's very queer of us to be crazy."

Dr. Snowden chuckled. "Some people are narrow-minded," he agreed.

"Yes, and so gullible, Doctor. Just this afternoon two of the new nurses were goggling over a magazine ad about how people should improve their personalities by becoming monsters. I ask you!"

Dr. Snowden shrugged. "I doubt whether all of us are monster material. And now perhaps you'd better . . ."

"I suppose so. Good night, Doctor."

As she was turning to go, Mrs. Wisant paused to slap her left forearm viciously.

"Thought-ray?" Dr. Snowden asked.

Mrs. Wisant looked at him

sardonically. "No," she said.  
"Mosquito!"

*Dull security and the dead weight of perfection breed aberration even more surely than disorder and fear.*

—the notebooks of A.S.

Gabrielle Wisant, commonly called Gabby though she was anything but that, was sleeping on her back in long pink pajamas, stretched out very straight and with her arms folded across her breasts, looking more like the stone funeral effigy of a girl than a living one—an effect which the unruffled bedclothes heightened.

The unocculted windoor let in the first cold granular light of dawn. The room was feminine, but without any special character—it seemed secretive. It had one item in common with her father's: on a low bedside stand and next to a pad of pink notepaper was another sliced-off back cover of the Individuality Unlimited bulletin. Close beside the "David Cruxon: Your Monster Mentor" photo there was a note scrawled in green ink.

Gabs— How's this for kicks? Cruxon's Carny! or corny? Lunch with your MM same place but 130 pip emma. Big legal morning.

Tell you then, Dave. (Signed and Sealed in the Monsterarium, 4 pip emma, 15 June)

The page was bowed up as if something about ten inches long were lying under it.

Gabrielle Wisant's eyes opened, though not another muscle of her moved, and they stayed that way, directed at the ceiling.

And then . . . then nothing overt happened, but it was as if the mind of Gabrielle Wisant—or the soul or spirit, call it what you will—rose from unimaginable depths to the surface of her eyes to take a long look around, like a small furtive animal that silently mounts to the mouth of its burrow to sniff the weather, ready to duck back at the slightest sudden noise or apprehension of danger—in fact, rather like the ground-hog come up to see or not to see its shadow on Candlemas Day.

With a faculty profounder than physical sight, the mind of Gabby Wisant took a long questioning look around at her world—the world of a "pretty, sweet-minded girl of 17"—to decide if it were worth living in.

Sniffing the weather of America, she became aware of a country of suntanned, slimmed-down people with smooth-

ed-out minds, who fed contentedly on decontaminated news and ads and inspiration pieces, like hamsters on a laboratory diet. *But what were they after? What did they do for kicks? What happened to the ones whose minds wouldn't smooth, or smoothed too utterly?*

She saw the sane, civilized, secure, superior community of Civil Service Knolls, a homestead without screeching traffic or other violence, without jukeboxes or juvenile delinquency, a place of sensible adults and proper children, a place so tranquil it was going to have a Tranquility Festival tonight. *But just beyond it she saw Serenity Shoals with its lost thousands living in brighter darker worlds, including one who had planted posthypnotic suggestions in children's minds like time-bombs.*

She saw a father so sane, so just, so strong, so perfectly controlled, so always right that he was not so much a man as a living statue—the statue she too tried to be every night while she slept. *And what was the statue really like under the marble? What were the heat and color of its blood?*

She saw a witty man named David Cruxon who per-

haps loved her, but who was so mixed up between his cynicism and his idealism that you might say he cancelled out. A knight without armor . . . and armor without a knight.

She saw no conventional monsters, no eddies in darkness—her mind had been hiding deep down below all night.

She saw the surface of her own mind, so sweetly smoothed by a succession of kindly hypnotherapists (and one beloved traitor who must not be named) that it was positively frightening, like a book of horrors bound in pink velvet with silk rosebuds, or the sluggish sea before a hurricane or night softly silent before a scream. She wished she had the kind of glass-bottomed boat that would let her peer below, but that was the thing above all else she must not do.

She saw herself as Tranquility Princess some twelve hours hence, receiving the muted ovation under the arching trees, candlelight twinkling back from her flared and sequinned skirt and just one leaf drifted down and caught in her fine-spun hair.

Princess . . . Princess . . . As if that word were some-

how a signal, the mind of Gabby Wisant made its decision about the worth of the upper world and dove back inside, dove deep deep down. The ground-hog saw its shadow black as ink and decided to dodge the dirty weather ahead.

The *thing* that instantly took control of Gabby Wisant's body when her mind went into hiding treated that body with a savage familiarity, certainly not as if it were a statue. It sprang to its haunches in the center of the bed, snuffing the air loudly. It ripped off the pink pajamas with a complete impatience or ignorance of magnetic clasps. It switched on the lights and occulted the windoor, making it a mirror, and leered approvingly at itself and ran its hands over its torso in fierce caresses. It snatched a knife with a six-inch blade from under the bulletin cover and tried its edge on its thumb and smiled at the blood it drew and sucked it. Then it went through the inner door, utterly silent as to footsteps but breathing in loud, measured gasps like a careless tiger.

When Judistrator Wisant woke, his daughter was squatting beside him on the permanently undisturbed half of his

bed, crooning to his scoutmaster's knife. She wasn't looking at him quite, or else she was looking at him sideways—he couldn't tell through the eyelash-blur of his slitted eyes.

He didn't move. He wasn't at all sure he could. He humped the back of his tongue to say "Gabby," but he knew it would come out as a croak and he wasn't even sure he could manage that. He listened to his daughter—the crooning had changed back to faintly gargling tiger-gasps—and he felt the cold sweat trickling down the sides of his face and over his naked scalp and stinkingly into his eyes.

Suddenly his daughter lifted the knife high above her head, both hands locked around the hilt, and drove it down into the center of the empty, perfectly mounded pillow beside him. As it thudded home he realized with faint surprise that he hadn't moved although he'd tried to. It was as though he had contracted his muscles convulsively, but discovered that all the tendons had been cut without his knowing.

He lay there quite flaccid, watching his daughter through barely parted eyelids as she mutilated the pillow with slow savage slashes, digging in the point with a

twist, and sawing off a corner. She must be sweating too—strands of her fine-spun pale gold hair clung wetly to her neck and slim shoulders. She was crooning once more, with a rippling low laugh and a soft growl for variety, and she was drooling a little. The hospital smell of the fresh-cut plastic came to him faintly.

Young male voices were singing in the distance. Judistrator Wisant's daughter seemed to hear them as soon as he did, for she stopped chopping at the pillow and held still, and then she started to sway her head and she smiled and she got off the bed with long easy movements and went to the windoor and thumbed it wide open and stood on the balcony, the knife trailing laxly from her left hand.

The singing was louder now—young male voices rather dutifully joyous in a slow marching rhythm—and now he recognized the tune. It was "America the Beautiful" but the words were different. This verse began,

*"Oh beautiful for peaceful  
minds,  
Secure families . . ."*

It occurred to Wisant that it must be the youths going

out at dawn to gather the boughs and deck the Great Bower, a traditional preparatory step to the Twilight Tranquility Festival. He'd have deduced it instantly if his tendons hadn't been cut...

But then he found that he had turned his head toward the balcony and even turned his shoulders and lifted up on one elbow a little and opened his eyes wide.

His daughter put her knife between her teeth and clambered sure-footedly onto the railing and jumped to the nearest sycamore branch and hung there swinging, like a golden-haired, long-legged, naked ape.

*"And bring with thee  
Tranquility  
To Civil Service Knolls."*

She swung in along the branch to the trunk and laid her knife in a crotch and braced one foot there and started to swing the other and her free arm too in monkey circles.

He reached out and tried to thumb the phone button, but his hand was shaking in a four-inch arc.

He heard his daughter yell, "Yoohoo! Yoohoo, boys!"

The singing stopped. Judistrator Wisant half

scrabbled, half rolled out of bed and hurried shakily—and he hoped noiselessly—through the door and down the hall and into his daughter's bedroom, shut the door behind him—and locked it, as he only discovered later—and grabbed her phone and punched out Securitor Harker's number.

The man he wanted answered almost immediately, a little cross with sleep.

Wisant was afraid he'd have trouble being coherent at all. He was startled to find himself talking with practically his normal confident authority and winningness.

"Wisant, Jack. Calling from home. Emergency. I need you and your squad on the double. Yes. Pick up Dr. Sims or Armstrong on the way but don't waste time. Oh—and have your men bring ladders. Yes, and put in a quick call to Serenity Shoals for a 'copter. What? *My* authority. What? Jack, I don't want to say it now, I'm not using our private line. Well, all right, just let me think for a minute . . ."

Judistrator Wisant ordinarily never had trouble in talking his way around stark facts. And he wouldn't have had even this time, perhaps, if he hadn't just the moment

before seen something that distracted him.

Then the proper twist of phrase came to him.

"Look, Jack," he said, "it's this way: Gabby has gone to join her mother. Get here fast."

He turned off the phone and picked up the disturbing item: the bulletin cover beside his daughter's bed. He read the note from Cruxon twice and his eyes widened and his jaw tightened.

His fear was all gone away somewhere. For the moment *all* his concerns were gone except this young man and his stupid smirking face and stupider title and his green ink.

He saw the pink pad and he picked up a dark crimson stylus and began to write rapidly in a script that was a shade larger and more angular than usual.

*For 100 years even breakfast foods have been promoting delirious happiness and glorious peace of mind. To what end?*

—the notebooks of A.S.

"Suppose you begin by backgrounding us in on what Individuality Unlimited is and how it came to be? I'm sure we all have a general idea and may know some aspects in de-

tail, but the bold outline, from management's point of view, should be firmed. At the least it will get us talking."

This suggestion, coming from the judistrator himself, reflected the surface informality of the conference taking place in Wisant's airy chambers in central New LA. Dr. Andreas Snowden sat on the judistrator's right, doodling industriously. Securitor Harker sat on Wisant's left, while flanking the trio were two female secretaries in dark business suits similar to those men wore a century before, though of somewhat shapelier cut and lighter material.

Like all the other men in the room, Wisant was sensibly clad in singlet, business jerkin, Bermuda shorts, and sandals. A folded pink paper sticking up a little from his breast pocket provided the only faintly incongruous detail. He had been just seven minutes late to the conference, perhaps a record for fathers who have seen their daughters 'coptered off to a mental hospital two hours earlier—though only Harker knew of and so could appreciate this iron-man achievement.

A stocky man with shaggy pepper-and-salt hair and pug-

nacious brows stood up across the table from Wisant.

"Good idea," he said gruffly. "If we're going to be hanged, let's get the ropes around our necks. First I'd better identify us shifty-eyed miscreants. I'm Bob Diskrow, president and general manager." He then indicated the two men on his left: "Mr. Sobody, our vice president in charge of research, and Dr. Gline, IU's chief psychiatrist." He turned to the right: "Miss Rawvetch, vp in charge of presentation—" (A big-boned blonde flashed her eyes. She was wearing a lavender business suit with pearl buttons, wing collar and Ascot tie) "—and Mr. Cruxon, junior vp in charge of the . . . Monster Program." David Cruxon was identifiably the young man of the photograph with the same very dark, crewcut hair and sharply watchful eyes, but now he looked simply haggard rather than mysterious. At the momentary hesitation in Diskrow's voice he quirked a smile as rapid and almost as convulsive as a tic.

"I happen already to be acquainted with Mr. Cruxon," Wisant said with a smile, "though in no fashion prejudicial to my conducting this conference. He and my daughter know each other socially."

Diskrow cocked an eyebrow at him. Cruxon nodded sharply.

Diskrow stuck his hands in his pockets and rocked back on his heels reflectively.

Wisant lifted a hand. "One moment," he said. "There are some general considerations governing any judistrative conference of which I should remind us. They are in line with the general principle of government by Commission, Committee and Conference which has done so much to simplify legal problems in our times. This meeting is *private*. Press is excluded, politics are taboo. Any information you furnish about IU will be treated by us as strictly confidential and we trust you will return the courtesy regarding matters we may divulge. And this is a democratic conference. *Any* of us may speak freely.

"The suggestion has been made," Wisant continued smoothly, "that some practices of IU are against the public health and safety. After you have presented your case and made your defense—pardon my putting it that way—I may in my judicial capacity issue certain advisement. If you comply with those, the matter is settled. If you do not, the advisements

immediately become injunctions and I, in my administrative capacity, enforce them—though you may work for their removal through the regular legal channels. Understood?"

Diskrow nodded with a wry grimace. "Understood — you got us in a combined hammerlock and body scissors. (Just don't sprinkle us with fire ants!) And now I'll give you that bold outline you asked for—and try to be bold about it."

He made a fist and stuck out a finger from it. "Let's get one thing straight at the start: Individuality Unlimited is no idealistic or mystical outfit with its head in orbit around the moon, and it doesn't pretend to be. We just manufacture and market a product the public is willing to fork out money for. That product is individuality." He rolled the word on his tongue.

"Over one hundred years ago people started to get seriously afraid that the Machine Age would turn them into a race of robots. That mass production and consumption, the mass media of a now instantaneous communication, the subtle and often subliminal techniques of advertising and propaganda, plus the growing

use of group—and hypnotherapy would turn them into a bunch of identical puppets. That wearing the same clothes, driving the same cars, living in look-alike suburban homes, reading the same pop books and listening to the same pop programs, they'd start thinking the same thoughts and having the same feelings and urges and end up with rubber-stamp personalities.

"Make no mistake, this fear was very real," Diskrow went on, leaning his weight on the table and scowling. "It was just about the keynote of the whole Twentieth Century (and of course to some degree it's still with us). The world was getting too big for any one man to comprehend, yet people were deeply afraid of groupthink, teamlife, hive-living, hypoconformity, passive adjustment, and all the rest of it. The sociologist and analyst told them they had to play 'roles' in their family life and that didn't help much, because a role is one more rubber stamp. Other cultures like Russia offered us no hope—they seemed further along the road to robot life than we were.

"In short, people were deathly afraid of loss of identity, loss of the sense of being

unique human beings. First and always they dreaded de-personalization, to give it its right name.

"Now that's where Individuality Unlimited, operating under its time-honored slogan 'Different Ways to Be Different,' got its start," Diskrow continued, making a scooping gesture, as if his right hand were IU gathering up the loose ends of existence. "At first our methods were pretty primitive or at least modest—we sold people individualized doodads to put on their cars and clothes and houses, we offered conversation kits and hobby guides, we featured Monthly Convention-Crushers and Taboo-Breakers that sounded very daring but really weren't—" (Diskrow grinned and gave a little shrug) "—and incidentally we came in for a lot of ribbing on the score that we were trying to mass-produce individuality and turn out uniqueness on an assembly line. Actually a lot of our work still involves randomizing pattern-details and introducing automatic unpredictable variety into items as diverse as manufactured objects and philosophies of life.

"But in spite of the ribbing we kept going because we knew we had hold of a sound

idea: that if a person can be made to *feel* he's different, if he is encouraged to take the initiative in expressing himself in even a rather trivial way, then his inner man wakes up and takes over and starts to operate under his own steam. What people basically need is a periodic shot in the arm. I bunk you not when I tell you that here IU has always done and is still doing a real public service. We don't necessarily give folks new personalities, but we renew the glow of those they have. As a result they become happier workers, better citizens. We make people individuality-certain."

"Uniqueness - convinced," Miss Rawvetch put in brightly.

"Depersonalization - secure," Dr. Gline chimed. He was a small man with a large forehead and a permanent hunch to his shoulders. He added: "Only a man who is secure in his own individuality can be at one with the cosmos and really benefit from the tranquil awe-inspiring rhythms of the stars, the seasons, and the sea."

At that windy remark David Cruxon quirked a second grimace and scribbled something on the pad in front of him.

Diskrow nodded approvingly—at Gline. "Now as IU began to see the thing bigger, it had to enter new fields and accept new responsibilities. Adult education, for example—one very genuine way of making yourself more of an individual is to acquire new knowledge and skills. Three-D shows—we needed them to advertise and dramatize our techniques. Art—self-expression and a style of one's own are master keys to individuality, though they don't unlock everybody's inner doors. Philosophy—it was a big step forward for us when we were able to offer people 'A Philosophy of Life That's Yours Alone.' Religion—that too, of course, though only indirectly . . . strictly non-sectarian. Childhood lifeways—it's surprising what you can do in an individualizing way with personalized games, adult toys, imaginary companions, and secret languages—and by recapturing and adapting something of the child's vivid sense of uniqueness. Psychology—indeed yes, for a person's individuality clearly depends on how his mind is organized and how fully its resources are used. Psychiatry too—it's amazing how a knowledge of the workings of abnormal minds can be used

to suggest interesting patterns for the normal mind. Why—"

Dr. Snowden cleared his throat. The noise was slight but the effect was ominous. Diskrow hurried on to say, "Of course we were well aware of the serious step we were taking in entering this field, so we added to our staff a large psychology department of which Dr. Gline is the distinguished current chief."

Dr. Snowden nodded thoughtfully at his professional colleague across the table. Dr. Gline blinked and hastily nodded back. Unnoticed, David Cruxon got off a third derisive grin.

Diskrow continued: "But I do want to emphasize the psychological aspect of our work—yes, and the psychiatric too—because they've led us to such fruitful ideas as our program of 'Soft-Sell Your Superiority,' which last year won a Lasker Group Award of the American Public Health Association."

Miss Rawvetch broke in eagerly: "And which was dramatized to the public by that still-popular 3-D show, The Useless Five, featuring the beloved characters of the Inferior Superman, the Mediocre Mutant, the Mixed-up

Martian, the Clouded Esper and Ricketty Robot."

Diskrow nodded. "And which also has led, by our usual reverse-twist technique, to our latest program of 'Accent the Monster in You.' Might as well call it our Monster Program." He gave Wissant a frank smile. "I guess that's the item that's been bothering you gentlemen and so I'm going to let you hear about it from the young man who created it—under Dr. Gline's close supervision. Dave, it's all yours."

Dave Cruxon stood up. He wasn't as tall as one would have expected. He nodded around rapidly.

"Gentlemen," he said in a deep but stridently annoying voice, "I had a soothing little presentation worked up for you. It was designed to show that IU's Monster Program is completely trivial and one hundred percent innocuous." He let that sink in, looked around sardonically, then went on with, "Well, I'm tossing that presentation in the junk-chewer! — because I don't think it does justice to the seriousness of the situation or to the great service IU is capable of rendering the cause of public health. I may step on some toes but I'll try

not to break any phalanges."

Diskrow shot him a hard look that might have started out to be warning but ended up enigmatic. Dave grinned back at his boss, then his expression became grave.

"Gentlemen," he said, "A spectre is haunting America—the spectre of Depersonalization. Mr. Diskrow and Dr. Gline mentioned it but they passed over it quickly. I won't. Because depersonalization kills the mind. It doesn't mean just a weary sense of sameness and of life getting dull, it means forgetting who you are and where you stand, it means that we laymen still persist in calling insanity."

Several pairs of eyes went sharply to him at that word. Gline's chair creaked as he turned in it. Diskrow laid a hand on the psychiatrist's sleeve as if to say, "Let him alone—maybe he's building toward a reverse angle."

"Why this very real and well-founded dread of depersonalization?" David Cruxon looked around. "I'll tell you why. It's not *primarily* the Machine Age, and it's not *primarily* because life is getting too complex to be easily grasped by any one person—though those are factors. No, it's because a lot of blinkered Americans, spoonfed a sick-

eningly sweet version of existence, are losing touch with the basic facts of life and death, hate and love, good and evil. In particular, due to a lot too much hypno-soothing and suggestion techniques aimed at easy tranquility, they're losing a conscious sense of the black depths in their own natures—and that's what's making them fear depersonalization and *actually making them flip*—and that's what IU's Monster-in-You Program is really designed to remedy!"

There was an eruption of comments at that, with Diskrow starting to say, "Dave doesn't mean—", Gline beginning, "I disagree. I would *not* say—", and Snowden commencing, "Now if you bring in depth psychology—" but Dave added decibels to his voice and overrode them.

"Oh yes, superficially our Monster Program just consists of hints to our customers on how to appear harmlessly and handsomely sinister, but fundamentally it's going to give people a glimpse of the real Mr. Hyde in themselves—the deviant, the cripple, the outsider, the potential rapist and torture-killer—under the sugary hypno-soothed consciousness of Dr. Jekyll. In a story or play, people always

love the villain best—though they'll seldom admit it—because the villain stands for the submerged, neglected, and unloved dark half of themselves. In the Monster Program we're going to awaken that half for their own good. We're going to give some expression, for a change, to the natural love of adventure, risk, melodrama, and sheer wickedness that's part of every man!"

"Dave, you're giving an unfair picture of your own program!" Diskrow was on his feet and almost bellowing at Cruxon. "I don't know why—maybe out of some twisted sense of self-criticism or some desire for martyrdom—but you are! Gentlemen, IU is not suggesting in its new program that people become real monsters in any way—"

"Oh, aren't we?"

"Dave, shut up and sit down! You've said too much already. I'll—"

"Gentlemen!" Wisant lifted a hand. "Let me remind you that this is a democratic conference. We can all speak freely. Any other course would be highly suspicious. So simmer down, gentlemen, simmer down." He turned toward Dave with a bland warm smile. "What Mr. Cruxon has

to say interests me very much."

"I'm sure it does!" Diskrow fumed bitterly.

Dave said smoothly, "What I'm trying to get over is that people can't be pampered and soothed and wrapped away from the ugly side of reality and stay sane in the long run. Half truth kills the mind just as surely as lies. People live by the shock of reality—especially the reality of the submerged sections of their own minds. It's only when a man knows the worst about himself and other men and the world that he can really take hold of the facts—brace himself against his atoms, you might say—and achieve true tranquility. People generally don't like tragedy and horror—not with the Sunday-School side of their minds, they don't—but deep down they have to have it. They have to break down the Pollyanna Partition and find what's really on the other side. An all-sugar diet is deadly. Life can be sweet, yes, but only when the contrast of horror brings out the taste. Especially the horror in a man's heart!"

"Very interesting indeed," Dr. Snowden put in quietly, even musingly, "and most lavishly expressed, if I may say so. What Mr. Cruxon has to

tell us about the dark side of the human mind—the Id, the Shadow, the Death Wish, the Sick Negative, there have been many names—is of course an elementary truth. However . . ." He paused. Diskrow, still on his feet, looked at him with suspicious incredulity, as if to say, "Whose side are *you* pretending to be on?"

The smile faded from Snowden's face. "However," he continued, "it is an equally elementary truth that it is dangerous to unlock the dark side of the mind. Not every psychotherapist — not even every analyst—" (Here his gaze flickered toward Dr. Gline) "—is really competent to handle that ticklish operation. The untrained person who attempts it can easily find himself in the position of the sorceror's apprentice. Nevertheless . . ."

"It's like the general question of human freedom," Wisant interrupted smoothly. "Most men are simply not qualified to use all the freedoms theoretically available to them." He looked at the IU people with a questioning smile. "For example, I imagine you all know something about the antigravity harness used by a few of our special military units?—at least you

know that such an item exists?"

Most of the people across the table nodded. Diskrow said, "Of course we do. We even had a demonstration model in our vaults until a few days ago." Seeing Wisant's eyebrows lift he added impressively, "IU is often asked to help introduce new devices and materials to the public. As soon as the harness was released, we were planning to have Inferior Supe use it on The Useless Five show. But then the directive came through restricting the item—largely on the grounds that it turned out to be extremely dangerous and difficult to operate — and we shipped back our model."

Wisant nodded. "Since you know that much, I can make my point about human freedom more easily. Actually (but I'll deny this if you mention it outside these chambers) the antigravity harness is not such a specialist's item. The average man can rather easily learn to operate one. In other words it is today technologically possible for us to put three billion humans in the air, flying like birds.

"But three billion humans in the air would add up to confusion, anarchy, an un-

imaginable aerial traffic jam. Hence — restriction and an emphasis on the dangers and extreme difficulties of using the harness. The freedom to swim through the air can't be given outright, it must be doled out gradually. The same applies to all freedoms—the freedom to love, the freedom to know the world, even the freedom to know yourself—especially your more explosive drives. Don't get me wrong now—such freedoms are fine if the person is conditioned for them." He smiled with frank pride. "That's our big job, you know: conditioning people for freedom. Using conditioning - for - freedom techniques we ended juvenile delinquency and beat the Beat Generation. We—"

"Yes, you beat them all right!" Dave, breaking in again suddenly, sounded raspingly angry. "You got all the impulses such movements expressed so well batten down, so well repressed and decontaminated, that now they're coming out as aberration, deep neurosis, mania. People are conforming and adjusting so well, they're such carbon copies of each other, that now they're even all starting to flip at the same time. They were over-protected mentally and emotion-

ally. They were shielded from the truth as if it were radioactive—and maybe in its way it is, because it can start chain reactions. They were treated like halfwits and that's what we're getting. Age of Tranquility! It's the Age of Psychosis! It's an open secret that the government and its Committee for Public Sanity have been doctoring the figures on mental disease for years. They're fifty, a hundred percent greater than the published ones—no one knows how much. What's this mysterious Report K we keep hearing about? Which of us hasn't had friends and family members flipping lately? Anyone can see the overcrowding at asylums, the bankruptcy of hypnotherapy. This is the year of the big payoff for generation of hysterical optimism, reassurance psychology and plain soft-soaping. It's the DTs after decades of soothing-syrup addiction!"

"That's enough, Dave!" Diskrow shouted. "You're fired! You no longer speak for IU. Get out!"

"Mr. Diskrow!" Wisant's voice was stern. "I must point out to you that you're interfering with free inquiry, not to mention individuality. What your young colleague has to say interests me more

and more. Pray continue, Mr. Cruxon." He smiled like a big fat cat.

Dave answered smile with glare. "What's the use?" he said harshly. "The Monster Program's dead. You got me to cut its throat and now you'd like me to finish severing the neck, but what I did or didn't do doesn't matter a bit—you were planning to kill the Monster Program in any case. You don't want to do anything to stop the march of depersonalization. You like depersonalized people. As long as they're tranquil and manageable, you don't care—it's even okay by you if you have to keep 'em in flip-factories and put the tranquility in with a needle. Government by the three Big Cs of Commission, Committee and Conference! There's a fourth C, the biggest, and that's the one you stand for—government by Censorship! So long, everybody, I hope you're happy when your wives and kids start flipping—when *you* start flipping. I'm getting out."

Wisant waited until Dave got his thumb on the door, then he called, "One moment, Mr. Cruxon!" Dave held still though he did not turn around. "Miss Sturges," Wi-

sant continued, "would you please give this to Mr. Cruxon?" He handed her the small folded sheet of pink paper from his breast pocket. Dave shoved it in his pocket and went out.

"A purely personal matter between Mr. Cruxon and myself," Wisant explained, looking around with a smile. He swiftly reached across the table and snagged the scratch-pad where Dave had been sitting. Diskrow seemed about to protest, then to think better of it.

"Very interesting," Wisant said after a moment, shaking his head. He looked up from the pad. "As you may recall, Mr. Cruxon only used his stylus once—just after Dr. Gline had said something about the awe-inspiring rhythms of the sea. Listen to what he wrote." He cleared his throat and read:

*"When the majestic ocean starts to sound like water slopping around in the bathtub, it's time to jump in."*

Wisant shook his head. "I must say I feel concerned about that young man's safety . . . his mental safety."

"I do too," Miss Rawvetch interjected, looking around with a helpless shrug. "My Lord, was there *anybody* that

screwball forgot to antagonize?"

Dr. Snowden looked up quickly at Wisant. Then his gaze shifted out and he seemed to become abstracted.

Wisant continued: "Mr. Diskrow, I had best tell you now that in addition to my advisement against the Monster Program, I am going to have to issue an advisement that there be a review of the mental stability of IU's entire personnel. No personal reflection on any of you, but you can clearly see why."

Diskrow flushed but said nothing. Dr. Gline held very still. Dr. Snowden began to doodle furiously.

*A monster is a master symbol of the secret and powerful, the dangerous and unknown, evoking the remotest mysteries of nature and human nature, the most dimly-sensed enigmas of space, time, and the hidden regions of the mind.*

--the notebooks of A.S.

Masks of monsters brooded down from all the walls—full - lipped raven - browed Dracula, the cavern - eyed dome - foreheaded Phantom, the mighty patchwork visage of Dr. Frankenstein's charnel-man with his filmy strangely compassionate eyes,

and many earlier and later fruitions of the dark half of man's imagination. Along with them were numerous stills from old horror movies (both 3-D and flat), blown-up book illustrations, monster costumes and disguises including an Ape Man's hairy hide, and several big hand-lettered slogans such as "Accent Your Monster!" "Watch Out, Normality!" "America, Beware!" "Be Yourself — in Spades!" "Your Lady in Black," and "Mount to Your Monster!"

But Dave Cruxon did not look up at the walls of his "Monsterarium." Instead he smoothed out the pink note he had crumpled in his hand and read the crimson script for the dozenth time.

*Please excuse my daughter for not attending lunch today, she being detained in consequence of a massive psychosis. (Signed and Sealed on the threshold of Serenity Shoals)*

The strangest thing about Dave Cruxon's reaction to the note was that he did not notice at all simply how weird it was, how strangely the central fact was stated, how queerly the irony was expressed, how like it was to an excuse sent by a pretentious

mother to her child's teacher. All he had mind for was the central fact.

Now his gaze did move to the walls. Meanwhile his hands automatically but gently smoothed the note, then opened a drawer, reached far in and took out a thick sheaf of sheets of pink note-paper with crimson script, and started to add the new note to it. As he did so a brown flattened flower slipped out of the sheaf and crawled across the back of his hand. He jerked back his hands and stood staring at the pink sheets scattered over a large black blotter and at the wholly inanimate flower.

The phone tingled his wrist. He lunged at it.

"Dave Cruxon," he identified himself hoarsely.

"Serenity Shoals, Reception. I find we do have a patient named Gabrielle Wisant. She was admitted this morning. She cannot come to the phone at present or receive visitors. I would suggest, Mr. Cruxon, that you call again in about a week or that you get in touch with—"

Dave put back the phone. His gaze went back to the walls. After a while it became fixed on one particular mask on the far wall. After another while he walked

slowly over to it and reached it down. As his fingers touched it, he smiled and his shoulders relaxed, as if it reassured him.

It was the face of a devil—a green devil.

He flipped a little smooth lever that could be operated by the tongue of the wearer and the eyes glowed brilliant red. Set unobtrusively in the cheeks just below the glowing eyes were the actual eyeholes of the mask—small, but each equipped with a fisheye lens so that the wearer would get a wide view.

He laid down the mask reluctantly and from a heap of costumes picked up what looked like a rather narrow silver breastplate or corselet, stiffly metallic but hinged at one side for the convenience of the person putting it on. To it were attached strong wide straps, rather like those of a parachute. A thin cable led from it to a small button-studded metal cylinder that fit in the hand. He smiled again and touched one of the buttons, and the hinged breastplate rose toward the ceiling, dangling its straps and dragging upward his other hand and arm. He took his finger off the button and the breastplate sagged toward the floor.

He set the whole assembly beside the mask.

Next he took up a wicked-looking pair of rather stiff gloves with horny claws set at the finger-ends. He also handled and set aside a loose one-piece suit.

What distinguished both the gloves and the coverall was that they glowed whitely even in the moderately bright light of the Monsterarium.

Finally he picked up from the piled costumes what looked at first like a large handful of nothing—or rather as if he had picked up a loose cluster of lenses and prisms made of so clear a material as to be almost invisible. In whatever direction he held it, the wall behind was distorted as if seen through a heat-shimmer or as reflected in a crazy-house mirror. Sometimes his hand holding it disappeared partly and when he thrust his other arm into it, that arm vanished.

Actually what he was holding was a robe made of a plastic textile called *light-flow fabric*. Rather like lucite, the individual threads of the light-flow fabric carried or “piped” the light entering them, but unlike lucite they spilled such light after carrying it roughly halfway around

a circular course. The result was that anything draped in light-flow fabric became roughly invisible, especially against a uniform background.

Dave laid down the light-flow fabric rather more reluctantly than he had put down the mask, breastplate and other items. It was as if he had laid down a twisting shadow.

Then Dave clasped his hands behind him and began to pace. From time to time his features worked unpleasantly. The tempo of his pacing quickened. A smile came to his lips, worked into his cheeks, became a fixed, hard, graveyard grin.

Suddenly he stopped by the pile of costumes, struck an attitude, commanded hoarsely, “My hauberk, knave!” and picked up the silver breastplate and belted it around him. He tightened the straps around his thighs and shoulders, his movements now sure and swift.

Next, still grinning, he growled, “My surcoat, sirrah!”—and donned the glowing coverall.

“Vizard!” “Gauntlets!” He put on the green mask and the clawed gloves.

Then he took up the robe of light-flow fabric and

started for the door, but he saw the scattered pink notes.

He brushed them off the black blotter, found a white stylus, and gripping it with two fingers and thumb extended from slits in the right-hand gauntlet, he wrote:

*Dear Bobbie, Dr. Gee, et al,*

*By the time you read this, you will probably be hearing about me on the news channels. I'm doing one last bang-up public relations job for dear old IU. You can call it *Cruson's Crusade—the One-Man Witchcraft*. I've tried out the equipment before, but only experimentally. Not this time! This time when I'm finished, no one will be able to bury the Monster Program. Wish me luck on my Big Experiment—you'll need it!—because the stench is going to be unendurable.*

*Your little apprentic demon, D.C.*

He threw the stylus away over his shoulder and slipped on the robe of light-flow fabric, looping part of it over his head like a cowl.

Some twenty minutes ago a depressed young man in business jerkin and shorts had entered the Monsterarium.

Now an exultant-hearted heat-shimmer, with a reserve glow under its robe of invisibility, exited from it.

**TRANQUILITY, OR ELSE!**

*There is a batable ground between madness and sanity, though few tread it: laughter.*

—the notebooks of A.S.

Andreas Snowden sat in Joel Wisant's bedroom trying to analyze his feelings of annoyance and uneasiness and dissatisfaction with himself—and also trying to decide if his duty lay here or back at Serenity Shoals.

The windoor was half open on fast-fading sunlight. Through it came a medley of hushed calls and commands, hurried footsteps, twittering female laughter, and the sounds of an amateur orchestra self-consciously tuning up—the Twilight Tranquility Festival was about to begin.

Joel Wisant sat on the edge of the bed looking toward the wall. He was dressed in green tights, jerkin, and peaked cap—a Robin Hood costume for the Festival. His face wore a grimly intent, distant expression. Snowden decided that here was a part of his reason for feeling annoyed—it is always irritating to be in the same room with someone who is communicating silently by micromike and softspeaker. He knew that Wisant was at the moment in touch with Security—not with Securitor Harker, who was downstairs

and probably likewise engaged in silent phoning, but with the Central Security Station in New Angeles—but that was all he did know.

Wisant's face relaxed somewhat, though it stayed grim, and he turned quickly toward Snowden, who seized the opportunity to say, "Joel, when I came here this afternoon, I didn't know anything about—" but Wisant cut him short with: "Hold it, Andy! —and listen to this. There have been at least a dozen new mass-hysteria outbreaks in the NLA area in the past two hours." He rapped it out tersely. "Traffic is snarled on two ground routes and swirled in three 'copter lanes. If safety devices hadn't worked perfectly there'd have been a hatful of deaths and serious injuries. There've been panics in department stores, restaurants, offices, and at least one church. The hallucinations are developing a certain amount of pattern, indicating case-to-case infection. People report something rushing invisibly through the air and buzzing them like a giant fly. I'm having the obvious lunatics held—those reporting hallucinations like green faces or devilish laughter. We can funnel 'em later to psychopathic or your place—I'll

want your advice on that. The thing that bothers me most is that a garbled account of the disturbances has leaked out to the press. 'Green Demon Jolts City,' one imbecile blatted! I've given orders to have the involved 'casters and commentators picked up—got to try to limit the infection. Can you suggest any other measures I should take?"

"Why, no, Joel—it's rather out of my sphere, you know," Snowden hedged. "And I'm not too sure about your theory of infectious psychosis, though I've run across a little *folie a deux* in my time. But what I did want to talk to you about—"

"Out of your sphere, Andy? What do you mean by that?" Wisant interrupted curtly. "You're a psychologist, a psychiatrist — mass hysteria's right up your alley."

"Perhaps, but security operations aren't. And how can you be so sure, Joel, that there isn't something real behind these scares?"

"Green faces, invisible fliers, Satanic laughter?—don't be ridiculous, Andy. Why, these are just the sort of outbreaks Report K predicts. They're like the two cases here last night. Wake up, man!—this is a major emergency."

"Well . . . perhaps it is. It still isn't up my alley. Get your loonies to Serenity Shoals and I'll handle them." Snowden raised his hand defensively. "Now wait a minute, Joel, there's something *I* want to say. I've had it on my mind ever since I heard about Gabby. I was shocked to hear about that, Joel—you should have told me about it earlier. Anyway, you had a big shock this morning. No, don't tell me differently—it's bound to shake a man to his roots when his daughter aberrates and does a symbolic murder on him or beside him. You simply shouldn't be driving yourself the way you are. You ought to have postponed the IU hearing this morning. It could have waited."

"What?—and have taken a chance of more of that Monster Material getting to the public?"

Snowden shrugged. "A day or two one way or the other could hardly have made any difference."

"I disagree," Wisant said sharply. "Even as it is, it's touched off this mass hysteria and—"

—if it is mass hysteria—"

Wisant shook his head impatiently. "—and we had to show Cruxon up as an irresponsible mischief maker.

You must admit that was a good thing."

"I suppose so," Snowden said slowly. "Though I'm rather sorry we stamped on him quite so hard—teased him into stamping on himself, really. He had hold of some very interesting ideas even if he was making bad use of them."

"How can you say that, Andy? Don't you psychologists ever take things seriously?" Wisant sounded deeply shocked. His face worked a little. "Look, Andy, I haven't told anybody this, but I think Cruxon was largely responsible for what happened to Gabby."

Snowden looked up sharply. "I keep forgetting you said they were acquainted. Joel, how deep did that go? Did they have dates? Do you think they were in love? Were they together much?"

"I don't know!" Wisant had started to pace. "Gabby didn't have dates. She wasn't old enough to be in love. She met Cruxon when he lectured to her communications class. After that she saw him in the daytime—only once or twice, I thought—to get material for her course. But there must have been more than that. There must have been things Gabby didn't tell me. I

don't know how far they went, Andy, I don't know!"

He broke off because a plump woman in flowing Greek robes of green silk had darted into the room.

"Mr. Wisant, you're 'on' in ten minutes!" she cried, hopping with excitement. Then she saw Snowden. "Oh excuse me."

"That's quite all right, Mrs. Potter," Wisant told her. "I'll be there on cue."

She nodded happily, made an odd pirouette, and darted out again. Simultaneously the orchestra outside, which sounded as if composed chiefly of flutes, clarinets and recorders, began warbling mysteriously.

Snowden took the opportunity to say quickly, "Listen to me, Joel. I'm worried about the way you're driving yourself after the shock you had this morning. I thought that when you came home here you'd quit, but now I find that it's just so you can participate in this community affair while keeping in touch at the same time with those NLA scares. Easy does it, Joel—Harker and Security Central can handle those things."

Wisant looked at Snowden. "A man must attend to *all* his duties," he said simply. "This

is *serious*, Andy, and any minute *you* may be involved whether you like it or not. What do you think the danger is of an outbreak at Serenity Shoals?"

"Outbreak?" Snowden said uneasily. "What do you mean?"

"I mean just that. You may think of your patients as children, Andy, but the cold fact is that you've got ten thousand dangerous maniacs not three miles from here under very inadequate guard. What if they are infected by the mass hysteria and stage an outbreak?"

Snowden frowned. "It's true we have some inadequately trained personnel these days. But you've got the wrong picture of the situation. Emotionally sick people don't stage mass outbreaks. They're not syndicate crooks with smuggled guns and dynamite."

"I'm not talking about plotted outbreaks. I'm talking about mass hysteria. If it can infect the sane, it can infect the insane. And I know the situation at Serenity Shoals has become very difficult—very difficult for you, Andy—with the overcrowding. I've been keeping in closer touch with that than you may know. I'm aware that you've peti-

tioned that lobotomy, long-series electroshock, and heavy narcotics be reintroduced in general treatment."

"You've got that wrong," Snowden said sharply. "A minority of doctors—a couple of them with political connections—have so petitioned. I'm dead set against it myself."

"But most families have given consent for lobotomies."

"Most families don't want to be bothered with the person who goes over the edge. They're willing to settle for anything that will 'soothe' him."

"Why do you headshrinkers always have to sneer at decent family feelings?" Wisant demanded stridently. "Now you're talking like Cruxon."

"I'm talking like myself! Cruxon was right about too much soothing syrup—especially the kind you put in with a needle or a knife."

Wisant looked at him puzzledly. "I don't understand you, Andy. You'll have to do something to control your patients as the overcrowding mounts. With this epidemic mass hysteria you'll have hundreds, maybe thousands of cases in the next few weeks. Serenity Shoals will become a . . . a Mind Bomb! I always thought of you as a realist, Andy."

TRANQUILITY, OR ELSE!

Snowden answered sharply, "And I think that when you talk of thousands of new cases, you're extrapolating from too little data. 'Dangerous maniacs' and 'mind bombs' are theater talk—propaganda jargon. You can't mean that, Joel."

Wisant's face was white, possibly with suppressed anger, and he was trembling very slightly. "You won't say that, Andy, if your patients erupt out of Serenity Shoals and come pouring over the countryside in a great gush of madness."

Snowden stared at him. "You're afraid of them," he said softly. "That's it—you're afraid of my loonies. At the back of your mind you've got some vision of a stampede of droolers with butcher knives." Then he winced at his own words and slumped a little. "Excuse me, Joel," he said, "but really, if you think Security Shoals is such a dangerous place, why did you let your daughter go there?"

"Because *she* is dangerous," Wisant answered coldly. "I'm a realist, Andy."

Snowden blinked and then nodded wearily, rubbing his eyes. "I'd forgotten about this morning." He looked

around. "Did it happen in this room?"

Wisant nodded.

"Where's the pillow she chopped up?" Snowden asked callously.

Wisant pointed across the room at a box that was not only wrapped and sealed as if it contained infectious material, but also corded and the cord tied in an elaborate bow. "I thought it should be carefully preserved," he said.

Snowden stared. "Did you wrap that box?"

"Yes. Why?"

Snowden said nothing.

Harker came in, asking, "Been in touch with the Station the last five minutes, Joel? Two new outbreaks. A meeting of the League for Total Peace Through Total Disarmament reports that naked daggers appeared from nowhere and leaped through the air, chasing members and pinning the speaker to his rostrum by his jerkin. One man kept yelling about poltergeists—we got *him*. And the naked body of a man weighing 300 pounds fell spang in the middle of the Congress of the SPECP—that's the Society for the Prevention of Emotional Cruelty to People. Turned out to be a week-old corpse stolen from City Hospital Morgue. Very fra-

grant. Joel, this mass-hysteria thing is broadening out."

Wisant nodded and opened a drawer beside his bed.

Snowden snorted. "A solid corpse is about as far from mass hysteria as you can get," he observed. "What do you want with that hot-rod, Joel?"

Wisant did not answer. Harker showed surprise.

"You stuck a heat-gun in your jerkin, Joel," Snowden persisted. "Why?"

Wisant did not look at him, but waved sharply for silence. Mrs. Potter had come scampering into the room, her green robes flying.

"You're on, Mr. Wisant, you're on!"

He nodded at her coolly and walked toward the door just as two unhappy-looking men in business jerkins and shorts appeared in it. One of them was carrying a rolled-up black blotter.

"Mr. Wisant, we want to talk to you," Mr. Diskrow began. "I should say we *have* to talk to you. Dr. Gline and I were making some investigations at the IU offices—Mr. Cruxon's in particular—and we found—"

"Later," Wisant told them loudly as he strode by.

"Joel!" Harker called urgently, but Wisant did not

pause or turn his head. He went out. The four men looked after him puzzledly.

The Twilight Tranquility Festival was approaching its muted climax. The Pixies and Fairies (girls) had danced their woodland ballet. The Leprechauns and Elves (boys) had made their Flash-light Parade. The Greenest Turf, the Growingest Garden, the Healthiest Tree, the Quietest 'Copter, the Friendliest House, the Rootedest Family, and many other silently superlative exurban items had been identified and duly admired. The orchestra had played all manner of forest, brook, and bird music. The Fauns and Pans (older boys) had sung "Tranquility So Masterful," "These Everlasting Knolls," the Safety Hymn, and "Come Let's Steal Quietly." The Sprites and Nymphs (older girls) had done their Candlelight Saraband. Representing religion, the local Zen Buddhist pastor (an old Caucasian Californian) had blessed the gathering with a sweet-sour wordlessness. And now the everpopular Pop Wisant was going to give his yearly talk and award trophies. ("It's tremendous of him to give of himself this way," one matron

said, "after what he went through this morning. Did you know that she was stark naked? They wrapped a blanket around her to put her aboard the 'copter but she kept pulling it off.")

Freshly cut boughs attached to slim magnesium scaffolding made, along with the real trees, a vast leafy bower out of what had this morning been an acre of lawn. Proud mothers in green robes and dutiful fathers in green jenkins lined the walls, shepherding their younger children. Before them stood a double line of Nymphs and Sprites in virginal white ballet costumes, each holding a tall white candle tipped with blue-hearted golden flame.

Up to now it had been a rather more nervously gay Tranquility Festival than most of the mothers approved. Even while the orchestra played there had been more than the usual quota of squeals, little shrieks, hysterical giggles, complaints of pinches and prods in the shadows, candles blown out, raids on the refreshment tables, small children darting into the bushes and having to be retrieved. But Pop Wisant's talk would smooth things out, the worriers told themselves.

And indeed as he strode be-

tween the ranked nymphs with an impassive smile and mounted the vine-wreathed podium, the children grew much quieter. In fact the hush that fell on the leafy Big Top was quite remarkable.

"Dear friends, charming neighbors, and fellow old coots," he began—and then noticed that most of the members of the audience were looking up at the green ceiling.

There had been no wind that evening, no breeze at all, but some of the boughs overhead were shaking violently. Suddenly the shaking died away. ("My, what a sudden gust that was," Mrs. Ames said to her husband. Mr. Ames nodded vaguely—he had somehow been thinking of the lines from Macbeth about Birnam Wood coming to Dunsinane.)

"Fellow householders and family members of Civil Service Knolls," Wisant began again, wiping his forehead, "in a few minutes several of you will be singled out for friendly recognition, but I think the biggest award ought to go to all of you collectively for one more year of working for tranquility . . ."

The shaking of the boughs had started up again and was

traveling down the far wall. At least half the eyes of the audience were traveling with it. ("George!" Mrs. Potter said to her husband, "it looks as if a lot of crumpled cellophane were being dragged through the branches. It all wiggles." He replied, "I forgot my glasses." Mr. Ames muttered to himself: "The wood began to move. Liar and slave!")

Wisant resolutely kept his eyes away from the traveling commotion and continued, ". . . and for one more year of keeping up the good fight against violence, delinquency, irrationality . . ."

A rush of wind (looking like "curdled air," some said afterwards) sped from the rear of the hall to the podium. Most of the candles were blown out, as if a giant had puffed at his giant birthday cake, and the Nymphs and Sprites squealed all the way down the double line.

The branches around Wisant shook wildly. ". . . emotionalism, superstition, and the evil powers of the imagination!" he finished with a shout, waving his arms as if to keep off bats or bees.

Twice after that he gathered himself to continue his talk, although his audience was in a considerable uproar,

but each time his attention went back to a point a little above their heads. No one else saw anything where he was looking (except some "curdled air"), but Wisant seemed to see something most horrible, for his face paled, he began to back off as if the something were approaching him, he waved out his arms wildly as one might at a wasp or a bat, and suddenly he began to scream, "Keep it off me! Can't you see it, you fools? Keep it off!"

As he stepped off the podium backwards he snatched something from inside his jerkin. There was a nasty *whish* in the air and those closest to him felt a wave of heat. There were a few shrill screams. Wisant fell heavily on the turf and did not move. A shining object skidded away from his hand. Mr. Ames picked it up. The pistol-shaped weapon was unfamiliar to him and he only later discovered it was a heat-gun.

The foliage of the Great Bower was still again, but a long streak of leaves in the ceiling had instantaneously turned brown. A few of these came floating down as if it were autumn.

*Sometimes I think of the whole world as one great mental hospital, its finest*

*people only inmates trying out as aides.*

The notebooks of A.S.

It is more fun than skin-diving to soar through the air in an antigravity harness. That is, after you have got the knack of balancing your field. It is deeply thrilling to tilt your field and swoop down at a slant, or cut it entirely and just drop—and then right it or gun it and go bounding up like a rubber ball. The positive field around your head and shoulders creates an air cushion against the buffeting of the wind and your own speed.

But after a while the harness begins to chafe, your sense of balance gets tired, your gut begins to resent the slight gripping effects of the field supporting you, and the solid ground which you first viewed with contempt comes to seem more and more inviting. David Cruxon discovered all of these things.

Also, it is great fun to scare people. It is fun to flash a green demon mask in their faces out of nowhere and see them blanch. Or to glow white in the dark and listen to them scream. It is fun to snarl traffic and panic pedestrians and break up solemn gatherings—the solemn the better—with rude or shocking

intrusions. It is fun to know that your fellow man is little and puffed up and easily terrified and as in love with security as a baby with his bottle, and to prove it on him again and again. Yes, it is fun to be a practicing monster.

But after a while the best of Halloween pranks becomes monotonous, fear reactions begin to seem stereotyped, you start to see yourself in your victims, and you get ashamed of winning with loaded dice. David Cruxon discovered this too.

He had thought after he broke up the Tranquility Festival that he had hours of mischief left in him. The searing near-miss of Wissant's hot-rod had left him exhilarated. (Only the light-flow fabric, diverting the infrared blast around him, had saved him from dangerous, perhaps fatal burns.) And now the idea of stampeding an insane asylum had an ironic attraction. And it had been good sport at first, especially when he invisibly buzzed two sand-cars of aides into a panic so that they went careening over the dunes on their fat tires, headlight beams swinging frantically, and finally burst through the light fence on the landward side (giving rise to a rumor

of an erupting horde of raving madmen). *That* had been very good fun indeed, rather like harmlessly strafing war refugees, and after it Dave had shucked off his robe and hood of invisibility and put on a Glowing Phantom aerobatic display, diving and soaring over the dark tiny hills, swooping on little groups with menacing phosphorescent claws and peals of Satanic laughter.

But that didn't prove to be nearly as good fun. True, his victims squealed and sometimes ran, but they didn't seem to panic permanently like the aides. They seemed to stop after a few steps and come back to be scared again, like happily hysterical children. He began to wonder what must be going on in the minds down there if a Glowing Phantom were merely a welcome diversion. Then the feeling got hold of him that those people down there saw through him and sympathized with him. It was a strange feeling—both deflating and heart-warming.

But what really finished Dave off as a practicing monster was when they started to cheer him—cheer him as if he were their champion returning in triumph. Cruxon's Crusade—was that what he'd

called it? And was this his Holy Land? As he asked himself that question he realized that he was drifting wearily down toward a hilltop on a long slow slant and he let his drift continue, landing with a long scuff.

Despite the cheers, he rather expected to be gibbered at and manhandled by the crowd that swiftly gathered around him. Instead he was patted on the back, congratulated for his exploits at New Angeles, and asked intelligent questions.

Gabby Wisant's mind had fully determined to stay underground a long time. But that had been on the assumptions that her body would stay near Daddikins at Civil Service Knolls and that the thing that had taken control of her body would stay hungry and eager. Now those assumptions seemed doubtful, so her mind decided to risk another look around.

She found herself one of a scattered crowd of people wandering over sandhills in the dark. Some memories came to her, even of the morning, but not painfully enough to drive her mind below. They lacked pressure.

There was an older woman beside her—a rather silly

and strangely affected woman by her talk, yet somehow likable—who seemed to be trying to look after her. By stages Gabby came to realize it must be her mother.

Most of the crowd were following the movements of something that glowed whitely as it swooped and whirled through the air, like a small demented comet far off course. After a bit she saw that the comet was a phosphorescent man. She laughed.

Some of the people started to cheer. She copied them. The glowing man landed on a little sand hill just ahead. Some of the crowd hurried forward. She followed them. She saw a young man stepping clumsily out of some glowing coveralls. The glow let her see his face.

"Dave, you idiot!" she squealed at him happily.

He smiled at her shame-facedly.

Doctor Snowden found Dave and Gabby and Beth Wisant on a dune just inside the break in the wire fence—the last of the debris from last night's storm. The sky was just getting light. The old man motioned back the aides with him and trudged up the sandy rise and sat down on a log.

"Oh, hello, Doctor," Beth Wisant said. "Have you met Gabrielle? She came to visit me just like I told you."

Dr. Snowden nodded tiredly. "Welcome to Serenity Shoals, Miss Wisant. Glad to have you here."

Gabby smiled at him timidly. "I'm glad to be here too—I think. Yesterday . . ." Her voice trailed off.

"Yesterday you were a wild animal," Beth Wisant said loudly, "and you killed a pillow instead of your father. The doctor will tell you that's very good sense."

Dr. Snowden said, "All of us have these somatic wild animals—" (He looked at Dave) "—these monsters."

Gabby said, "Doctor, do you think that Mama calling me so long ago can have had anything to do with what happened to me yesterday?"

"I see no reason why not," he replied, nodding. "Of course there's a lot more than that that's mixed up about you."

"When I implant a suggestion, it works," Beth Wisant asserted.

Gabby frowned. "Part of the mix-up is in the world, not me."

"The world is always mixed up," Dr. Snowden said. "It's a pretty crazy hodge-podge

with sensible strains running through it, if you look for them very closely. That's one of the things we have to accept." He rubbed his eyes and looked up. "And while we're on the general topic of unpleasant facts, here's something else. Serenity Shoals has got itself one more new patient besides yourselves—Joel Wisant."

"Hum," said Beth Wisant. "Maybe now that I don't have him to go home to, I can start getting better."

"Poor Daddikins," Gabby said dully.

"Yes," Snowden continued, looking at Dave, "that last little show you put on at the Tranquility Festival — and then on top of it the news that there was an outbreak here—really broke him up." He shook his head. "Iron perfectionist. At the end he was even demanding that we drop an atomic bomb on Serenity Shoals—that was what swung Harker around to my side."

"An atom bomb!" Beth Wisant said. "The idea!"

Dr. Snowden nodded. "It does seem a little extreme."

"So you class me as a psychotic too," Dave said, a shade argumentively. "Of course I'll admit that after what I did—"

Dr. Snowden looked at him

sourly. "I don't class you as psychotic at all—though a lot of my last-century colleagues would have taken great delight in tagging you as a psychopathic personality. I think you're just a spoiled and willful young man with no capacity to bear frustration. You're a self-dramatizer. You jumped into the ocean of aberration—that was the meaning of your note, wasn't it?—but the first waves tossed you back on the beach. Still, you got in here, which was your main object."

"How do you know that?" Dave asked.

"You'd be surprised," Dr. Snowden said wearily, "at how many more-or-less sane people want to get into mental hospitals these days—it's probably the main truth behind the Report K figures. They seem to think that insanity is the only great adventure left man in a rather depersonalizing age. They want to understand their fellow man at the depths, and here at least they get the opportunity." He looked at Dave meaningfully as he said that.

Then he went on, "At any rate, Serenity Shoals is the safest place for you right now, Mr. Cruxon. It gets you out from under a stack of damage suits and maybe a lynch-mob or two."

He stood up. "So come on then, all of you, down to Receiving," he directed, a bit grumpily. "Pick up that junk you've got there, Dave, and bring it along. We'll try to hang onto the harness—it might be useful in treating gravitational dementia. Come on, come on!—I've wasted all night on you. Don't expect such concessions in the future. Serenity Shoals is no vacation resort — and no honeymoon resort either!—though . . ." (He smiled flickeringly) ". . . though some couples do try."

They followed him down the sandy hill. The rising sun behind them struck gold from the drab buildings and faded tents ahead.

Dr. Snowden dropped back beside Dave. "Tell me one thing," he said quietly. "Was it fun being a green demon?"

Dave said, "That it was!"

