

Greenplace

by Tom Purdom

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On the outskirts of Greenplace, Nicholson seated himself in the wheelchair and took the drug injector out of his shirt pocket. Rolling up his sleeve, he uncovered the lower half of his biceps. For a moment the injector trembled above his flesh.

He put the injector down. Twisting around in the chair, he looked up at the sec standing behind him.

"Will you help me if I get into a fight?"

"I don't get paid to fight," the sec said.

"I thought you might do it for pleasure."

"I work for money."

Fear was a tingling nausea in his chest and stomach. A yes answer from a big, hulking man like the sec should have made him feel a lot better. From the look of him, he had thought the sec might enjoy a fight. The big man's face seemed to be set in a scowl of permanent disgust with a world which made such trivial use of muscles. Ever since the invention of the voicetyper, which had made the old trade of stenographer-typist obsolete, secs had been the lowest class of unskilled labor, status symbols hired on a temporary basis merely to carry their employer's files and dictating equipment. He turned around in the chair. Across the street the late afternoon sun fell on the lawns and houses of Greenplace. Children were yelling and he could smell the grass. What was pain like? He couldn't remember. He had been forced to endure it only once in his life, twenty-four years ago when he had been twelve and the doctors had given his left eye a new set of muscles. Could he take it? Would he beg them for mercy?

"Don't think they don't know you made that last survey," Bob Dazella had told him. "Never underestimate the Boyd organization. Every time a lawn gets mowed in that district, it goes in their computer. You'd better go armed. Believe me, you go into Greenplace unarmed and you may come out a cripple."

Glued to the middle finger of his left hand was a scrambler, a finger-length tube which fired a tight beam of light and sound in a pattern designed to disrupt the human nervous system. In his lower left shirt pocket he had a pair of bombs loaded with psycho-active gas and in the bottom of the wheelchair he had installed a scent generator and a sound generator. He didn't know what the two generators could do for him if he got into trouble, but they had been the only other portable weapons he could think of. He didn't think anything could help him very much. MST-- melasynchrotrinad-- had one bad side effect. It disrupted coordination. Once the drug hit his nervous system he would be a helpless lump of flesh for the next four hours.

Again the injector trembled above his biceps. He shook his head disgustedly. He pressed the release and two cc's of red liquid shot into his arm. Behind him the sec stiffened. He put the injector back in his pocket.

It was a beautiful Saturday afternoon in late summer. He was sitting in the shade of a tall apartment tower, the last one for several miles. In front of him Greenplace looked comfortable and pleasant. Lawn mowers hummed across the grass while their owners watched them with sleepy eyes. On every lawn there was at least one person sprawling in the sun. Greenplace had been built in the early 1970's and it was typical of its period. Every block had fewer than fifteen houses and every house had a lawn and a back yard.

He sat tensely in the chair. He could feel the chemistry of his fear mingling with the disturbing chemistry of the drug. He felt like a pygmy with a wooden harpoon waiting to go out and do battle with one of the giant creatures that swam in the oceans of Jupiter. Congressman Martin Boyd was probably the most powerful man in the United States. He had been the undisputed boss of the Eighth Congressional District since 1952. Now that medical science had conquered death, or had at least given most people an indefinite life span, his organization might very well control the district forever. In addition to his forty-eight years seniority, Boyd had accumulated wealth, a first-rate psych staff, and control of the House Rules Committee and the Sub-Committee on Culture and Recreation. Modern psych techniques were so powerful, politicians and social scientists unanimously considered Boyd unbeatable.

His head rolled to one side. He scanned the clouds and the blue sky and he estimated the wind velocity and what kind of weather they were having in Nigeria, where his wife was on a weekend shopping trip. His hand suddenly appeared between his eyes and the clouds. He tried to return it to the arm of the chair and instead slapped the bare skin below his shorts hard enough to sting.

He tried to lower his head and look at Greenplace. He found himself looking at the apartment tower on his right. He noted the number of floors and the number of windows per floor and developed a highly original theory about the effects of high rise apartment living, combined with current toilet training procedures, on the Oedipus complex of classic Freudian psychology. Before he could take his eyes off the tower, his drug-accelerated brain composed a witty paragraph about the theory for his popular column in Current Psychology.

"Let's... g... g... ooo..." His tongue and lips felt normal but his ears told him his coordination was already degenerating.

The sec plunged him forward. His head was swaying from side to side. He tried holding it steady and failed. The landscape swung across his vision.

MST was the most powerful psychic energizer on the market. It multiplied the powers of observation and the rate and quality of thought by a factor somewhere between three and seven. The user observed data he would never have observed in his normal condition, and his mind invented and discarded hypotheses at a dizzying rate. The drug was only eight years old but it had already been responsible for several breakthroughs in the sciences. Thanks to four brilliant insights by drugged experimenters, his own field of psycho-therapy had leapfrogged several decades. The black arts of social manipulation had also advanced.

He heard the wheels of the chair rumble on the street and he calculated how much heat they were generating and formulated two contradictory hypotheses about what the motion of all the wheeled vehicles on Earth was doing to the annual temperature and rainfall of the northeastern United States. Smoothly, without breaking his stride, the sec rolled him off the street onto the sidewalk.

On the first lawn two boys mounted on electric rhinos were engaging in a duel with stunner swords. A heavy man in dirty shorts and an unbuttoned shirt looked away from the combat and glanced at the wheelchair and its occupant. His eyes narrowed. His face hardened and he stuck a cigar butt in his mouth, and then Nicholson's head rolled again and he saw the people watching him from the other side of the street. Several people had actually gotten out of their lounging chairs and stood up. All the way down the block, every eye over twelve years old was looking at him.

He had seen the same kind of hostile looks last month when he had surveyed a neighborhood near here on a weekday morning. Fear of strangers and mind probers seemed to be part of the conditioning the Boyd organization imposed on the District. A big organization didn't have to psych the voters by riding around openly drugged. Boyd's psychers could use more subtle methods: surveyors disguised as salesmen and maintenance men; community carnivals at which the booths and amusements were concealed psych tests; even, when necessary, arresting people and releasing them with many apologies and no memory they had been psyched during their detention.

Nicholson's organization consisted of five men and at present he was the only trained psych man in the group. An MST survey was the only way a small organization could learn enough about the voters to fight a strong campaign.

Turbine engines whined in his ear. "Cop," the sec grunted.

An open police car swung past his bobbing eyes. In the front seat two policemen and a panting dog stared at him.

The policeman slid out of his vision. For a moment he and the fat man with the cigar eyed each other. The boys had stopped jousting and the man was standing, with his legs spread and his arms folded in his chest, in front of the exact center of his house. There was a comic resemblance between the human figure and the front of the house. Both were extremely broad for their height. The fat man had a fat house...

"Just a minute, mister. Hold on."

Fear erased everything but the policemen from his nervous system. Their exact appearance flashed into his consciousness and he formulated three hypothetical models of their personality structure. His right hand shot toward the sky and then dropped over the arm of the chair. He moved it again and this time it landed on the arm. Underneath his fingers he could feel the reassuring plastic of the buttons which controlled the generators.

"Sss... ttt... oooopp..."

The sec stopped. The cops got out of the car, one of them holding the dog on a U-shaped leash, and stepped in front of him. The one without the dog held out his hand.

"May I see your identification, please?"

"You making an arrest?" the sec asked.

"Just another routine check."

"We don't have to."

"Don't have to what?" the cop with the dog said.

"You have to arrest us for something. No arrest, no ID."

Nicholson wondered where the sec had learned that bit of law. The big man might not be bright enough to hold a regular job in a modern economy, but he seemed to have learned a few things about dealing with cops. He was certain the Boyd organization already knew who he was and most of his life history, but when you were fighting modern psych techniques you never knew what piece of information might be crucial. The best rule was to tell them as little as you could.

"What are you doing here? Who are you working for?"

The sec didn't answer. The grinning dog bobbed across Nicholson's vision and he felt a new stab of fear. The thick muscle in his mouth quivered.

"Aaaag... verrr... ggg..."

The cop scowled at the sec. "I asked you a question."

The sec remained silent. A bony hand jerked the leash. The dog growled.

"You want us to run you in for disturbing the peace?"

"We aren't making noise. You have to make a noise."

"You're a real lawyer, aren't you?"

The buttons controlling the generators were still under his fingers. In his condition it would be hard to punch out a particular code, but he could surprise them with a blast of almost anything, from the roar of a rocket to the smell of horse manure, and then get them with the scrambler and flee. But that would end the survey before it started.

"Get them out of here," a man yelled. "Don't take any back talk."

All over the block people started yelling at them.

"Send them back where they came from!"

"Sic the dog on 'em!"

The cop gestured at the excited people. "You aren't disturbing the peace?"

A little girl ran toward them across the nearest lawn. "Go away, bad man! Go away! Bad man! Bad man!" Her mother screamed at her but she kept on coming. At the edge of the lawn she stumbled over a drainage ditch and fell on the sidewalk.

"My baby!"

The girl lifted her face from the sidewalk and screamed at him through her tears. Her mother ran up and bent over her. "Poor baby. Poor little thing." Glaring at him, the mother lifted the sobbing child to her shoulder and carried her toward the house. "There, there. We'll give you something to eat. Stop crying

now. Stop crying. How about a nice piece of candy?"

The dog growled again. "Who are you working for?" the cop repeated.

The sec remained silent. The cops glanced at each other. The one holding the dog grinned. "Let him do what he wants." They trudged back to their car.

Nicholson waited. The car didn't leave. Ahead of him the people standing on the lawn looked like some kind of macabre gauntlet.

He was supposed to turn right at the corner and spend the next three or four hours cruising through the neighborhood. Everywhere he went people would be standing on the lawns yelling at him. How long would it be before they got violent?

"Gggg... goo... aaa... aann..."

The sec pushed him forward. The people might curse him, but whatever they did, even if they hid in their bedrooms, they would tell him something about themselves. Even the shape of their homes and the stuff scattered on their lawns was revealing.

"Snooper!"

"Go back to your garbage pit!"

The cops followed him down the block.

He was too scared to function. He observed everything but his brain refused to produce any theories. He took it all in, the people, the elaborate toys, the houses, the food and amusements scattered on blankets and lawn tables, and even as it flowed through his nervous system his brain obstinately planned escape routes and what to do if they attacked. He couldn't think about anything else.

He tried to get his cowardice under control. He wanted to tell the sec to turn around, but he valued his self respect too much. Nothing could justify running away. Too much depended on this. Always in the past men who had accumulated so much power and wealth they couldn't be removed from office by normal political means had eventually been removed by death; men with slightly more advanced ideas had taken their place and society had lagged only a generation or so behind technology. Now death had been abolished and the rate of technical change was accelerating. He was here because he was convinced the only alternative to what he was doing was social collapse.

He tried to get his mind back to work by making it review everything he knew about Boyd's political career. His thoughtflow couldn't be controlled. Every time a new voice screamed at him, he began thinking about self defense.

"Stop him! Don't let him go any further!"

A girl jumped in front of the wheelchair. "He's from that milk company. I saw it on television. They're trying to make us buy bad milk. He's trying to poison us!"

The sec tried to move around her. She threw out her arms and stepped back. She danced down the street in front of the chair.

"They're poisoning the milk! They're poisoning the milk!" She was black-haired and mercurial. A black dress swirled around her body. Flickering lights from two jewels in her collar, a popular type of cosmetic, played on her face and bathed her features in swiftly changing patterns of light and shadow.

Her name was Betty Delange. Her hair color had been changed and her body seemed more voluptuous, but he had examined enough pictures of Boyd's people to be sure it was her. She was the best psych technician in the Boyd organization. They were fielding their biggest guns right at the start of the war.

"He'll fix us so we have to buy it! He'll make us drink his poison! Stop him!" His voice rose to a panic-stricken scream. "Why don't you stop him?"

People moved toward them across the lawns. A few of them ran out but most of them walked. Even with a scream like that it was hard to get people excited nowadays. Life was comfortable and pleasant.

Faces swung past his eyes. Twenty or thirty people surrounded the chair. The sec tried to push through and then stopped.

"Is that the truth?" a man asked. "Who are you working for, mister?"

Most of the faces were young. There were a lot of teenagers in these older developments. The eyes of the men told him they had been attracted by lust as much as by violence. Some of them were looking at

the girl more than they were looking at him.

His tongue quivered. "Nnnnn...." His hands appeared before his eyes and he pulled them down. He was matched against a first-rate craftsman and he was helpless as a cripple.

Somewhere in the crowd he heard music with a strong rhythm and a loud, thumping bass beat. A young man was holding a gadget which looked like a radio but had to be a psych device. The rhythm was exactly the same as the rhythm of the lights moving over the girl's face.

"How do you know he's from that milk company?" an older man asked.

"I *know*. I saw it on television. It was on the news this morning." Boom, boom, boom. "They'll make us drink their poison." Boom. "*They'll make us drink their polluted milk!*" Boom, boom, boom.

The music was getting louder. The melody was fading out and the beat was coming in. Strong rhythms were one of the most effective techniques ever devised for breaking people down and making them more suggestible. They had been used in voodoo and in classic brainwashing and the current tribe of witch doctors still found them useful. The people crowding around him probably weren't even aware the beat was driving their emotions toward violence.

The faces looked at him. Violence wasn't natural to them. They hated him because he was a stranger and a spy, but if the girl hadn't appeared on the scene they would probably have stayed on their lawns and released their anger with their mouths.

His head was still swaying back and forth. His thoughts were still completely concentrated on saving his skin. They had him in a neat trap. If he used the scrambler or the psycho-active gases before they attacked, the cops would arrest him for assault with a dangerous weapon. If he waited until they attacked, he would only be able to eliminate one or two before the rest of them ripped him to pieces.

His right hand groped toward the arm chair and the buttons which controlled the generators. By making very small movements, he could almost control his muscles. Sound or scent might break up the steadily growing crowd long enough for he and the sec to break through and run for it, but he hadn't psyched the neighborhood long enough to know what would work on these people. Upsetting enough of a crowd to make a difference wasn't the same as temporarily surprising two policemen. Sound and scent had to be used with precision. They could be effective only when you knew your target. He might generate a stimulus which would actually fortify the girl's incitements. Even if he broke them up temporarily, what would keep them from chasing him?

The girl drew herself up and pointed her finger at him. Towering over him, she arched her back so her breasts stood up.

"He's a snoop," she yelled. "Who cares who he's working for? Do we want a snoop in our neighborhood?"

They looked at each other. They were still hesitating. Probably not one of them had ever before hit a human being.

He felt sick. He had come here fearing violence, but now that he was confronted with the reality, the ruthlessness of Boyd's staff disgusted him. Speeding off on a tangent, his brain tried to imagine the kind of personality this girl had to have. He couldn't figure out Boyd or any of Boyd's people. They were total mysteries to him. Didn't they understand? Mankind was living in a new age. If human life could last forever, then it was even more sacred than it had been in the past.

A boy slithered between two sets of bare legs. Standing in front of the wheelchair he looked at Nicholson with the cruel face of a child mocking the village idiot. He was carrying a huge ice cream cone, several red-streaked scoops of vanilla piled in a high, dripping tower.

"How do you eat, mister? Show me how you eat."

"Get him out of here," a girl said.

The boy thrust the ice cream across Nicholson's lap. Startled, Nicholson moved his left hand. The ice cream shot from the boy's fingers and splattered on the sidewalk. The boy stepped back and brought his hands up to his face as if he were warding off a blow.

"Teach him a lesson!" the girl screamed. "What are you waiting for? He's spying on our minds. He's poisoning our milk. Get him! Get him! Get him!"

Boom. Boom, boom, boom. Boom. Boom, boom, boom.

A hand grabbed his shirt collar. Faces moved toward him. Eyes stared at him over cigarettes and slowly chewing jaws.

More than half the people here were smoking.

A hard, masculine hand slapped his face hard enough to make his eyes water. He moaned and instantly felt ashamed. The hand drew back and balled into a fist and his right hand tightened its grip on the chair arm. Less than fifteen percent should have been smokers. His brain was psyching again. Most of the people here were young enough to have reached their teens after the big anti-smoking campaigns of the Seventies. Why would there be more smokers in Greenplace than in the almost identical neighborhood he had surveyed last month?

The fist dropped and the blow snapped his head back and then forward, past the blue sky, the working jaws, the lips sucking on cigarettes, the artificially voluptuous girl, the people edging toward the chair, the fat bodies-- the boy had deliberately moved his hand so he would knock the ice cream out of it!-- the lawns, the houses like big, soft, edible....

Orals!

They were all orals! Everyone in Greenplace was an oral!

"Give it to him! Teach him! Teach him!"

How could every person in a neighborhood this large belong to one psychological type? Could even Boyd's organization be that powerful? No wonder they had jumped him before he was a block in!

They were pulling him out of the chair. He could feel blood running down one side of his face. The hysterical beat of the music came to him through a ringing ear. He couldn't waste time with theories. They were going to hurt him. Compared to what he was about to suffer, the pain he had just experienced was trivial.

He gave the man who was pulling him out of the chair a blast of the scrambler. Confusion and disorientation distorted the man's face. Screaming and flailing his arms he stumbled backward into the people pressing behind him.

Behind his back the sec made a strange sound. His mind was racing ahead at full speed. It had only been a few seconds since the second blow had hit his face.

His fingers wiggled on the buttons of the control panel. Formula Eighty-two. Only two digits. Each button had a different texture, a scheme he had worked out to help him use the generators while he was drugged. Two tiny points picked his middle finger. Eight. He pushed.

He waved the scrambler in wide, sweeping arcs. It wouldn't hold them off forever but he only needed a few more seconds.

A rabbit punch sent pain shooting up his left arm. Hands grabbed his shoulders and shoved him forward and up. As he rose out of the chair, his forefinger slid across the smooth, hemispheric surface of the Two button.

He collided with the people standing in front of the chair and the crowd yelled with triumph. Their behavior was straight out of the textbooks.

A fist hit him in the stomach. He thrashed wildly and a hand grabbed his arm and spun him around. Pain made him close his eyes. Somebody kicked him in the ankle. He opened his eyes and through the brawling bodies he saw the sec fighting with a strange smile on his face.

The smell of human vomit filled the summer air.

All around him people gagged. The hands released him at once. He fell back and hit the ground waving his arms like a baby. He was gagging, too. The smell was enough to nauseate any normal human. On a crowd of orals the effect was terrifying proof of the fragility of the human personality. People pressed their hands against their faces and backed away from the chair with bent spines. A girl toppled over and blacked out. A man old enough to be his father stumbled away from the smell and then tripped and lay on the grass gagging and yelling for help. The stench permeated the air and clung to the inside of the nostrils and the mouth. It penetrated to the center of the oral personality and evoked terrors which had hidden in the psyche since infancy. It was the pungent, smothering antithesis of everything the oral personality needed and desired. Retching, hysterical, pursued by an odor they would never forget, the crowd stampeded.

The sec reacted fast. Strong arms picked Nicholson up and dropped him into the chair. Wheels rumbled on the sidewalk. The girl jumped in front of them and then jumped back when the sec nearly ran her down. Even she looked sick.

Fleeing backs swung across his vision. To an experienced therapist the agony tearing through all those psyches was as avid as anything he had ever suffered with his own consciousness. No cautious modern psychologist would have explained personality types with Freud's theories of infant development, but it was still true there were patterns of behavior which fitted Freud's terminology. People who got most of their pleasure and their psychological security from eating usually released their aggression with their mouths and made love with their mouths more than with their hands; tended to read certain kinds of literature and watch certain kinds of television programs; and could be manipulated by symbols and appeals involving food and the mouth and the emotions associated with the full, distended belly. There were at least ten such personality types in current psychological theory-- Freud had only described four, but the world had changed and Freud hadn't known four types never applied for psychoanalysis-- and theoreticians believed, or at least hoped, every personality on Earth could be classed in one of them.

He should have seen it from the first, but it was too fantastic to occur to anyone until the evidence became overwhelming. Imagine the power of an organization which could arrange for every person in a neighborhood to be one type! The Boyd organization had to be destroyed. This alone was enough to make him a fanatic.

The police vehicle tried to follow them but the sec took to the lawns and managed to evade it. In the process Nicholson did enough psyching to confirm his theory. That evening he called Bob Dazella in Washington and they both shook their heads over what he had learned.

"It must be great for them when they're campaigning," Dazella said. "Hundreds of voters, acres of territory, ten percent of Boyd's district, and they can manipulate every psyche in it with one tactic. I wonder how they set it up."

"Advertising's the best theory I've come up with. They could aim all their ads at orals. It still wouldn't be easy. Why don't you check around and see if Boyd ever had any kind of financial interest in Greenplace? Maybe he was in a position where he could control the ads for a few years."

"It's a good thing you worked it out. They could have killed you."

Dazella was a second term Congressman, an archaic political specimen these days. After he turned off the phone, Nicholson sat in his study and thought about the campaign three years ago which had first put Dazella in the House. That had been his first taste of modern politics. It hadn't been pleasant. That time Dazella had nearly gotten killed.

This campaign was going to be worse. He could imagine the efforts the Boyd organization would make to control the minds of himself and his friends. They would attack his psyche with every weapon in the modern arsenal. As plainly as if it were a drama projected on a screen, he could see the psych technicians maneuvering across the Eight Congressional District as both sides struggled to control the voters' minds and neutralize the work of their opponents. He could see violence, and danger, and all the dirty playing with the human mind he resented and wanted to eliminate forever from human society.

He had won the first battle, but that only meant he had to stay in the war and fight a hundred more battles. He almost wished he had lost.

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