

Galactic Guardian: Twenty-First Century Schizoid Man

As MAP crossed the Square of the Dancing Cell, close to the building where he was completing his junior internship as a medico, he happened to glance up at one of the cameras. In the early days of the 'watchers-in-the-streets' campaign there'd been that mingling of fear and loathing on the faces of people brought up in the shadow of the prophecy of 'Big Brother', but MAP's look was rather one of affectionate tolerance than hatred. As a deterrent the 'eyes-in-the-sky' had worked perfectly; street criminals couldn't operate beneath them and, after a while, no one even bothered to monitor what they recorded. Consequently, when the Bureau of Psychology wanted to study crowd dynamics, permission was secretly granted for them to view the tapes.

The idea had been around for a long time, but careful analysis had proved that there were certain individuals which society - behaving much in the same way as a living organism defending itself against cancer - persecuted. MAP had been given the task of identifying, locating, and interviewing these pariahs. He smiled as he remembered how one of his first subjects had turned out to be the chief of a sub-department within the Bureau itself; the Music Therapy section. His smile widened as he recalled how, 'phones tuned in to the newest music-satellite, Leslie Rusher had been totally oblivious of the hostile reactions he'd been getting from the shoppers in what was now, thanks to the success of their work, Micheal Jackson Prospect.

Leslie's psychological profile had turned out to be fairly representative. Some of the other interviewees had 'confessed' to schizophrenia, but most admitted suffering a 'nervous breakdown' from which, as was the case with Leslie, they'd never fully recovered. In fact, when MAP asked him about it, he'd said he didn't *want* to recover. He'd spoken in somewhat mystical terms of the disease *being* the cure but, when pressed, hadn't been able to provide a more concrete formulation. However, when he'd gone on to say that he believed 'other people' to be the 'real' problem (apparently he tuned into the music satellites in order to tune *them* out), MAP had decided that the intuitions of paranoid schizophrenics might be worth investigating.

Chief Robins had listened patiently enough, but he'd taken the line that a disease was an illness and the Bureau was looking for an antidote to it. MAP's response had been to implement Plan 'B'. He'd been careful not to mention Leslie by name; consequently there'd been no suspicion when he'd requested a transfer to Music Therapy. Officially he'd become Leslie's underling; unofficially Leslie had become his 'patient'.

He'd managed to appropriate a lot of the tapes and they'd begun by viewing Leslie's stroll through the Prospect. It had already been established that, whereas most people were unperturbed by the presence of individuals like Leslie, some functioned in a fashion similar to that of the white cells in the body's immune system, that is, they seemed 'programmed' to attack 'disease carriers'. The 'attacks' took many forms: in Leslie's case people tended to be deliberately obstructive; anything was, it seemed, permissible, just so long as Leslie's self-impelled course through the Prospect could be disrupted and made to break down.

He'd found that he wasn't showing Leslie anything he hadn't already seen. Moreover, whatever it was Leslie did to provoke society's defense mechanism, he'd claimed it was premeditated. At first he'd been unconscious of the reason for certain people's adverse reaction to him, later he'd observed that there were particular *modes* of movement and progression which were taboo: intrigued, he'd adopted them all. The result had been an increase in the number of 'white cells' and the frequency of the 'attacks'. It was at this point that Leslie had opted to 'tune in and tune out'; anything short of physical violence hadn't been able to affect him then, and he'd grooved along happily ever after.

MAP had concluded that, in his unconscious phase, Leslie had been paranoid, or, in other words, he hadn't been able to reconcile what his emotions were telling him, that is, *they* were out to get him, with what his intellect told him, that is, they *couldn't* be; a 'mind-split' which ultimately led to the condition psychologists knew as schizophrenia. Fortunately Leslie had judged in favour of his emotions, if he hadn't, he'd have gone under. As it was, there'd still been a glitch in his system - music addiction.

The breakthrough had come when, in an idle moment, they'd discussed the respective merits of various twentieth-century musicians. Leslie had mentioned that an artist whom he particularly liked had been painted as 'wacko'; he'd then produced a tape of the star dancing to tracks from something called *Chiller*. Recognition had been almost instant, many of the moves were exaggerated versions of those Leslie had employed in his progress through the Prospect. However, when MAP had drawn his attention to this fact, Leslie had denied his was a 'copy-cat' performance. Apparently the moves were 'natural' to carriers of the

'disease'. The next question had been obvious: was it infectious?

MAP had gone back to the tapes. He'd supposed that the larger organism *did* fear infection. However, on closer inspection, it had become clear that the people who constituted society's 'white cells' were, insofar as they were conscious of their role at all, actually concerned with *self*-protection. They attacked 'rogue cells' like Leslie because his presence triggered in them a similar need to behave 'abnormally'.

He'd come up with a simple equation: abnormal behaviour = abnormal cell behaviour = cancer.

However, although Leslie had admitted to having contracted *that* disease, after what he'd described as his 'conversion' he'd experienced a remission so total that his doctors had said *they'd* never recover from it. MAP's revised hypothesis had posited that society's 'white cells' were making the error of confusing the body's *reaction* to cancer, that is, the activation of a self-healing code which necessitated a sort of mobile yoga, with the disease itself. He'd been wide of the mark again, but he hadn't missed by much. Subsequent tests had shown that the *suppressors* of 'abnormality' were more likely to *cause* illness - in both themselves and others - than prevent it; or, in other words, because cancer *resulted* from interference with the processes it triggered, MAP's 'self-healing code' was obviously no such thing. So what was it?

The only way to find out had been for Leslie to perform the yogic dance. He'd started by copying Jackson's routine in *Chiller* (they'd known they were getting warm because Leslie had seemed to *gain* energy with each step), but that had ended in frustration. All MAP had been able to get out of him was that, after a while, the music *got in the way*. He'd suggested doing it without the music, but Leslie had still felt imprisoned by *rhythm*. He'd clearly wanted to go 'freestyle' and MAP hadn't had any better ideas, so...

His reverie was broken by a white-blue pulse of light above the camera in the tree. Leslie, it appeared, had come to meet him. In his new form he was happy, healthy and, so far as anyone had been able to determine, immortal. Could one ask for more? Today MAP was being honoured by the Bureau as the liberator of the 'dancing cell'. Before Leslie had shown the way, its attempts at transforming the human organism had failed. As head of the relatively new Silent Dance department, MAP had changed all that. Could he ask for more? Yes, he decided as the ball of pulsating energy detached itself from the tree to bob along in the air beside him, he'd like to be a full-blown schizophrenic too.