

Poem

Terry Anderson

Who are they?
Those shadow covered faces
that walk past me on the sidewalk
never smiling, never seeing
just brushing by
Our raincoats have swished against each other
our feet have splattered the rainwater puddles
on our wingtips
We could have been friends
if our eyes looked up
Our reflections in the window touched
Why couldn't we?

COMPOUND 113

Chris Stewart

Dr. Morrison, the zoological chemist, shuffled through the paraphernalia on his desk. Running a large, prominently-veined hand through his thinning brown hair, he sighed deeply and with resignation as he thought of the Arthroicide project, and on compulsion he ferreted out his old blue notebook and turned to the appropriate page. Entitled, "Project Arthroicide, page one," it was the beginning of what was to become the last chronicle of man.

Morrison remembered that project very well. He had always been something of a loser in his field; in fact, this project was his first real success. Commissioned to develop "the ultimate insecticide," a project which his superiors thought would keep him busy for a few years, Morrison went at his task with zeal, after selecting as his target the family of insects which included the locusts and grasshoppers, as these were the worst food pests known to man. He maintained a kind of hellish dedication for the next eight months, trying compound after compound on those infernal green bugs which just sat there with their mandibles chewing the air.

In fact, when he first introduced compound 113 into the test chamber and observed no visible effect, he was about to write off the attractive blue gas as another failure, when a curious thought struck him and he put the insects away for observation. In two months he was astonished; the insects had not reproduced. Could they have been rendered sterile? Dividing the specimens up and matching them with normal insects, he found this hypothesis to be apparently correct; only .10% of the pairings produced normal offspring. As the test results rolled in, the hypothesis was confirmed; compound 113 was shown to be 99.9% effective, and after all, what harm could .10% do? The world was soon to find out.

As the "miracle poison" was exported for widespread use, crop production increased overwhelmingly in the world's locust-plagued nations. Morrison was deliriously happy with his success. Now, as he sat at his desk, he thought with a rather fond sadness of that time eleven years ago when he was happier than he had ever been in his life, when his thoughts of the future were ambitious and bright, and when the Institute for the first time assigned him to a project which was of high priority. He remembered his second thoughts about the project when he heard how devastating 113 was to insect populations. He remembered wondering whether he should have disturbed the delicate balance of nature, and he remembered the apprehension he felt after reading papers concerning monstrous mutations, and he even remembered the nightmares which plagued him after viewing the science-fiction movie, "Bug Planet," on the late show. But these misgivings gradually disappeared as reports of plunging starvation

rates came pouring in; human beings enjoyed a period of gastric prosperity which lasted eleven years.

It was in the autumn of 1987 that the locusts first appeared. It began in India with the loss of 89% of the wheat and rice crop; something about a new breed of grasshoppers that swept the country before anyone could do anything about it. They ate their way across Pakistan and divided into two swarms, one headed northeast and the other northwest, devouring the food supply of whole nations with lightening rapidity. Everyone seemed to be taken completely aback; Dr. Morrison knew hardly anything about the crisis until he got the entomologist's report which described the insects as "incredibly voracious, with hyperdeveloped mandibles and a reproductive rate 75% faster than any previously known species." Morrison realized then that it was indeed his brainchild 113 which was responsible for these terrible mutants. Now he remembered how horrified he had felt as a man who had witnessed an attack of these insects described what he had seen and heard. "It was an awful thing; the sky was black with 'em; you couldn't hear yourself for the noise, which was kinda like ten million rocks being shaken in a giant can. They'd settle on a big field of wheat and for a few seconds it'd be dead quiet; then you'd hear a sound sort of like an eggbeater churning the empty air and they'd take off again, leaving nothing, not even stubble."

As it had in so many other crises, water shielded the United States from the deadly insects, but Morrison knew the nation couldn't stay isolated forever. "My first real success," he muttered, "and it turns out to be the biggest injustice against nature that man has ever committed." He tossed the now-worthless notebook into a trash-basket as he rose and walked out the door, the locusts crunching in a green mass beneath his feet.