

Eaton's 'Self-Portrait' paints a chilling picture

("Self-Portrait of Someone Else," by Vincent Eaton; Viking)

"Recently I think I became someone else," narrator Tim Buckles tells us at the start of Vincent Eaton's chilling first novel.

"Self-Portrait of Someone Else" is a step-by-step inside-view of the mental collapse of a young Los Angeles lifeguard, who becomes convinced that he's evolving into a different personality.

"I don't know what's causing this, and I don't know what to do...I'm different somehow. I'm not me," Tim Buckles writes with fear in his journal.

Some readers may be reminded of Travis Bickle in "Taxi Driver" as they read this book, or they may recall the similar loss of personality undergone by the pod people in "Invasion of the Body Snatchers." Tim Buckles is a former psychology student who knows something awful is going on inside his head, but he's not quite sure what can be done about it.

Vincent Eaton brilliantly orchestrates the growing distress of Tim and the people around him — he also creates strong suspense by interspersing Tim's journal entries with police reports and comments

by examining psychologists, so we know something terrible is going to happen as a result of the lifeguard's emotional upheaval.

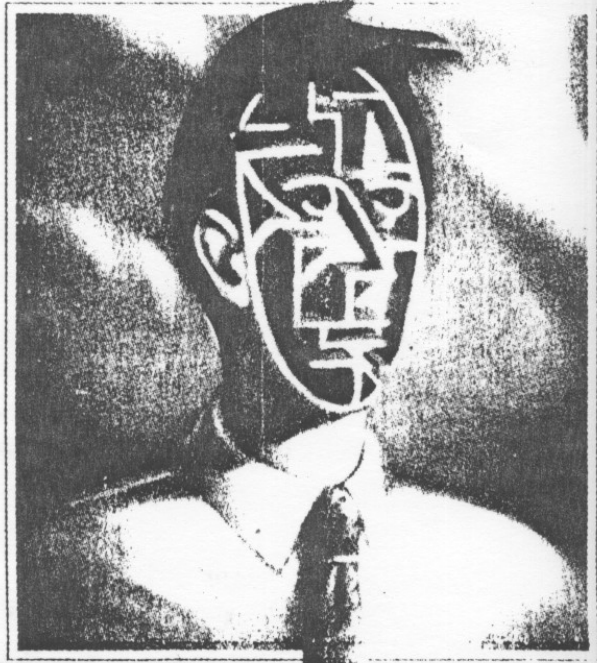
What makes the novel especially harrowing is the everyday believability of its anti-hero. Eaton draws us into the twisted logic and mounting paranoia of Tim, who gives up his lifeguard job after two swimmers die during his shift.

Tim's condition escalates when his girlfriend Alisa arranges for him to get a job at a huge, faceless corporation where he — ironically — becomes involved in personnel analysis. There is a bit of "Being There"-style black comedy in the fact that Tim's bizarre, detached behavior goes unnoticed in his new corporate environment.

The reader's dread increases as we share Tim's growing number of black-outs and his inability to distinguish between his fantasies of what is going on around him and what is really occurring.

Eaton's writing is so compelling that he holds us as Tim's behavior deteriorates into sordid (and even stomach-turning) interludes. The author gives us an inside view of those disturbed personalities who briefly command media attention

VINCENT EATON



when they erupt violently. "Self-Portrait of Someone Else" may be too intense for some read-

ers, but it is a remarkable debut fort by Vincent Eaton.