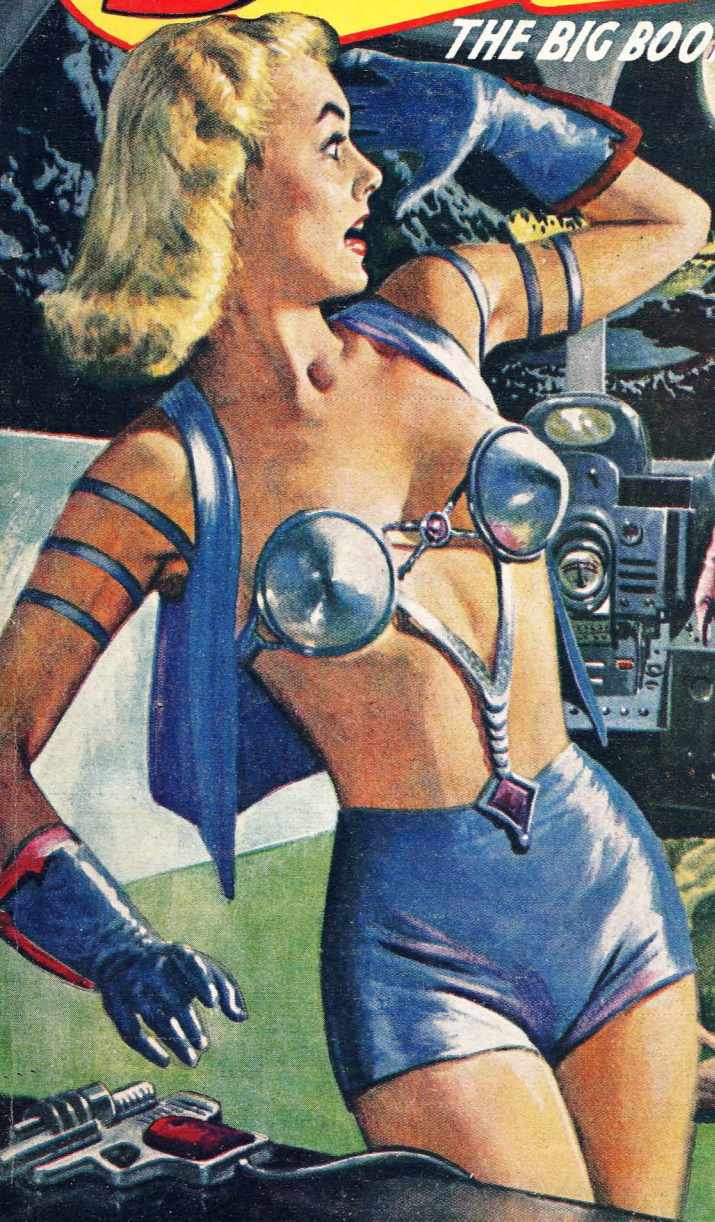


JULY

# **SUPER SCIENCE** STORIES

25¢

THE BIG BOOK OF SCIENCE FICTION



## **THE BRAIN BEAST**

A NOVEL OF  
FORGOTTEN  
WORLDS

by **WILLIAM  
F. TEMPLE**

## **CHANGELING**

by **RAY BRADBURY**



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*THE BIG BOOK OF SCIENCE FICTION*

VOL. 5

JULY, 1949

No. 3

**A NOVEL OF FORGOTTEN WORLDS**

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A single destroyer crouched in the minds of all men, drawing them ever closer to the web of the brain beast!

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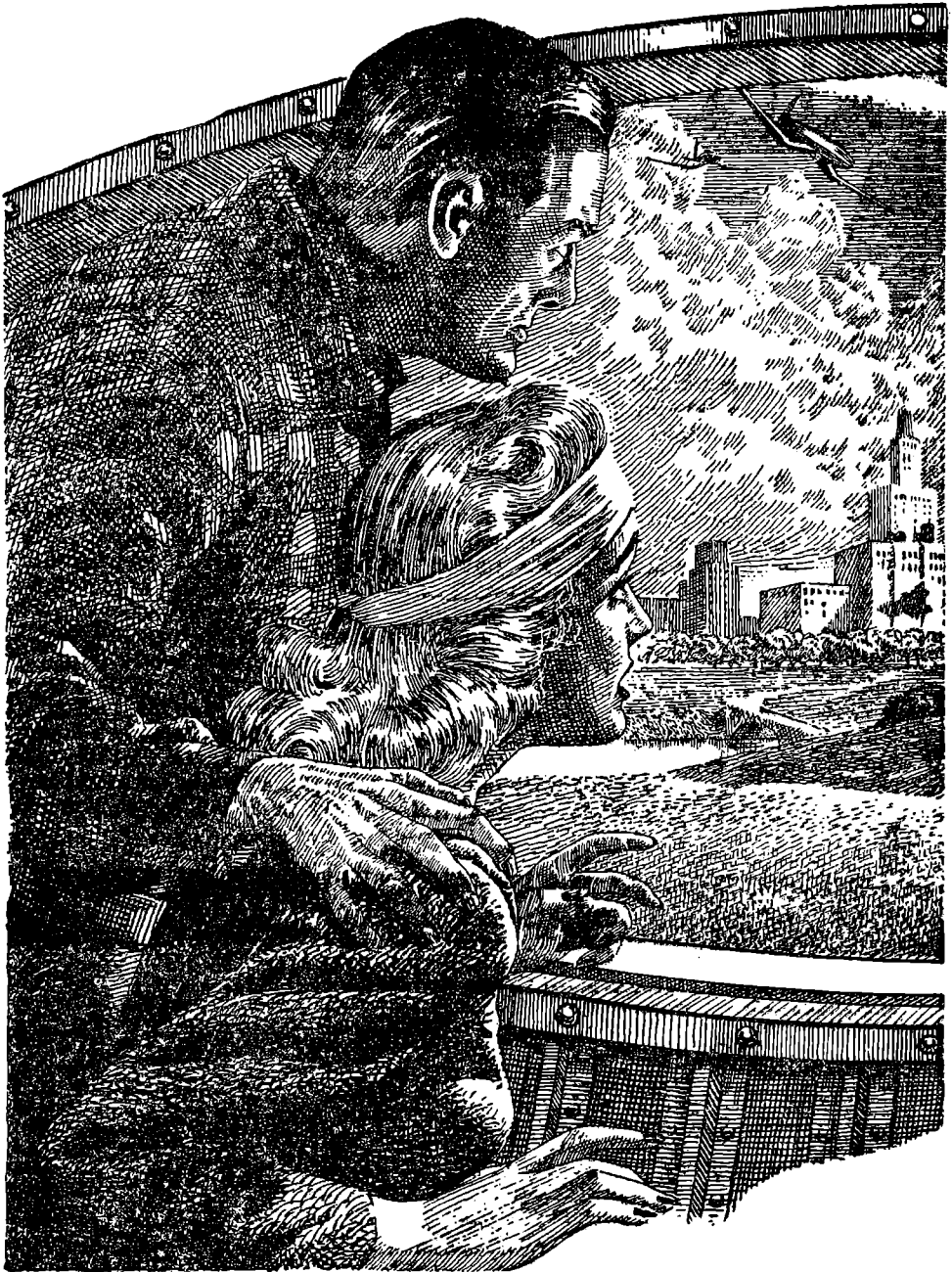
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Illustrations by Bok, Finlay, Kramer, Lawrence, Leydenfrost and Paul  
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Super Science Stories is published bi-monthly by Fictioneers, Inc. at 353 Third Street, Niagara Falls, New York. All correspondence relating to this magazine should be addressed to 353 Third Street, Niagara Falls, N.Y., or to 205 East 42nd Street, New York 17, N.Y. Application for entry as second-class matter is pending. This issue is published simultaneously in the Dominion of Canada. Copyright, 1949, by Fictioneers, Inc. under the International Copyright Convention and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction in whole or in part in any form. Annual subscription \$1.50. When submitting manuscripts enclose stamped self-addressed envelope for their return if found unavailable. Publishers will exercise care in the handling of uncollected manuscripts, but assume no responsibility for their return. July, 1949, Volume 5, No. 3. Printed in Canada.

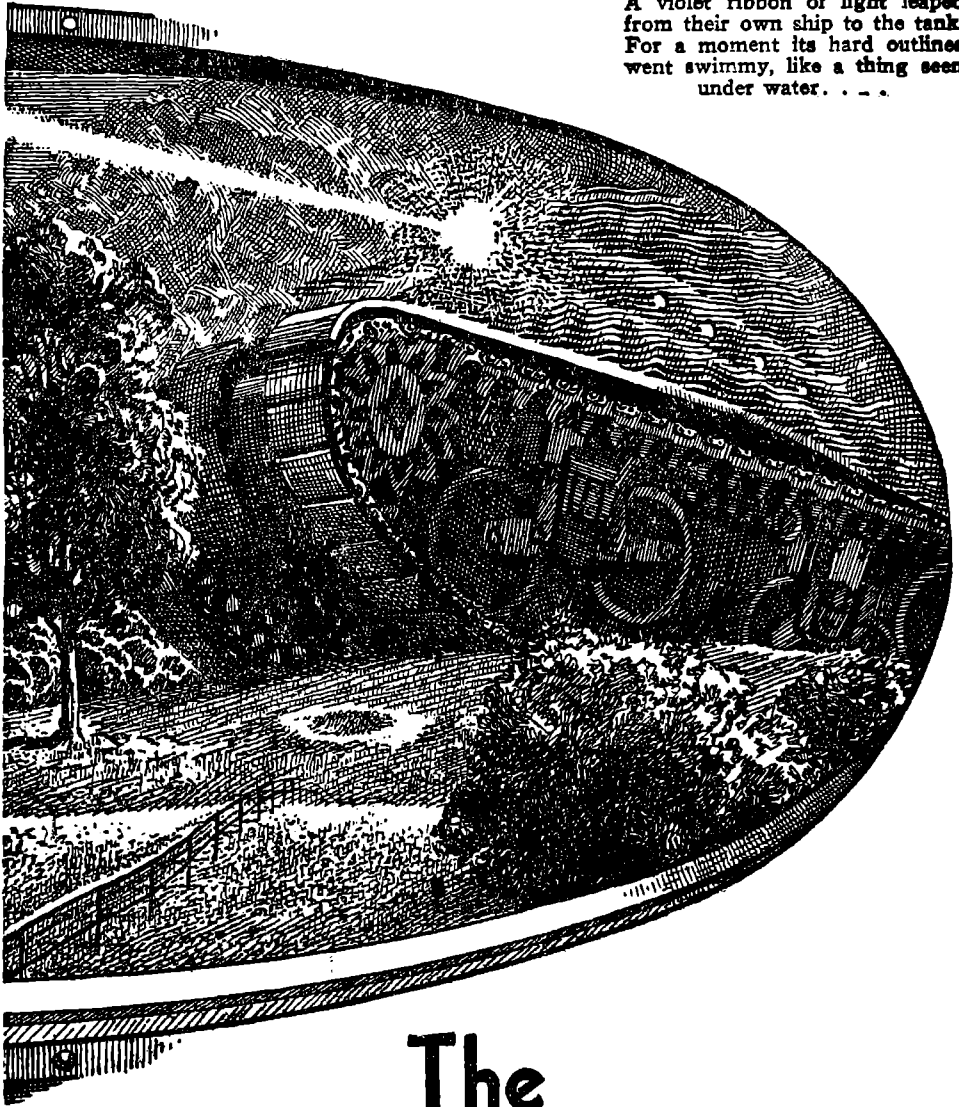


A creator of life, who could not live . . . an insect who worshiped Man . . . three space-voyagers who made blood-sacrifice to Fear — a single destroyer who crouched in all their minds!

## FOREWORD

**I**E, AT a moment when the patch of sunlight called the 25th May was sliding around the Earth, omniscient being had been asked what was

A violet ribbon of light leaped from their own ship to the tank. For a moment its hard outlines went swimmy, like a thing seen under water. . . .



# The BRAIN BEAST

A Novel by William F. Temple

the most momentous event occurring at that instant on the globe, it would have indicated four widely separated points:

A house on a hill overlooking the town of Jacksburg, Ohio.

A radio station far out on the Arizona desert.

A room in a nursing home in the Surrey hills, England.

A ledge on the North Col of Mount Everest, in the Himalayas.

For omniscience could see that these points were interconnected; that they were not isolated mysteries but events coalescing to become the one greater event; and that the greater event was the real birth of humanity.

## CHAPTER ONE

### It's Not the Heat

**M**ARY SLADE and her brother, Morton, lived in the house on the hill overlooking Jacksburg. At the moment, the center of their interest was the house next door.

Like theirs, it was wooden, white, with a wide front porch. A week ago one could scarcely have told the two houses apart. Each had the same chintz curtains, the same green lawn out in front, the same white-painted picket fence.

But now—Mary and Mort peered through the chintz at their neighbor as he hammered the fourth wooden notice, on its post, into his lawn.

"What's it this time?" asked Mary.

Mort craned.

"DO UNTO OTHERS AS YOU WOULD BE DONE BY," he reported.

"Perhaps he's not really crazy," said Mary thoughtfully. "Just a little cranky."

Long, hatchet-faced Morton turned to look at his young blue-eyed sister.

"Look, kid, if that was meant for his neighbors he'd plant it facing the road, wouldn't he? Well, look at it. It's like the others—facing his own front porch."

"Maybe it's to inspire him every time he looks out of the window?"

"He can't see out of any of his stupid windows! He fastened up all the outside shutters last Thursday."

"So he did," said Mary. "Hm."

She took a long peek at the new notice and the narrow back of their neighbor, Dr. Hartley. "I'm going out to see if he wants any help," she said.

"Why?"

"He's such a little man and that's such a big mallet."

"You mean, you want to be nosy again. Okay, so do I. Let's go. But we'll get the cold shoulder again."

"It's only reserve. You know how reserved Englishmen are. Especially the academic type."

"Yeah," said Morton. "But he never used to be like that. He was friendly enough before he started putting signs up on the lawn."

"Perhaps he's delirious. Come on."

They went out. They had scarcely put their feet over the dividing fence before the thin little man with the white hair spun around, mallet in hand. He regarded them coldly. He put up one hand to halt their advance, and pointed with the other at a notice: **AN ENGLISHMAN'S HOME IS HIS CASTLE.**

Morton looked around at the other notices staggered over the lawn, all facing the doctor's house. **IT'S NOT THE HEAT, IT'S THE HUMIDITY and WASTE NOT, WANT NOT** said two of them, while one announced cryptically the name **ANDREW CROSSE.** All in Disney colors.

He asked, with some concern: "Dr. Hartley, have you been feeling the heat lately? Or the humidity? I mean, would you like me to fetch a doctor just to check up—"

"It never rains but it pours," interrupted Hartley, frowning.

"True. True," nodded Mary. "And all that glitters isn't a goldberg. I think you'd better have that doctor, doc."

"An apple a day keeps the doctor away," said Hartley in his grave, reedy voice.

Morton groaned. "It's enough to make even Andrew Crosse," he said. "By the way, who is Andrew Crosse? The name seems to ring a bell. Friend of yours, doctor?"

Hartley stared at him stonily for a moment. "Ugh!" he emitted suddenly. He turned on his heel, strode into his house and slammed the door.

"Not a friend of his," commented Mary. They strolled back to their own house. All Jacksburg lay spread out below them like a toy town. Distant windows glittered in the sun, model trolley cars moved slowly along the blocks. In the clear air you could even make out the moving specks of people.

"Andrew Crosse," muttered Morton, as they went indoors. "Wait a minute. . . . Got it!"

He accelerated along the passage, up the stairs, and dived into his den at the top front of the house. Mary found him scanning the yards of bookshelves. "Here it is," he said, sliding a book out from a top shelf. He riffled through the pages, then stood taut, reading intently.

Mary sat in the tubular steel chair, put her feet up on the desk, lit a cigarette.

**T**EN MINUTES later she stubbed the end out.

"Think you can make this world again?" she said.

Mort started. He looked around slowly, focused his eyes on the room as though it were the first time he'd seen it.

"Oh. You still here?" he muttered.

Mary pinched her own arm experimentally.

"Yeah," she reported.

Morton came over, bringing his book, and sat on the edge of the desk. "Maybe it's another Andrew Crosse," he said. "The guy in this book's been dead some time."

"Long as he's buried, I reckon that's okay," said Mary, callously. "What's the book?"

He held it so that she could see the title: "Oddities," by Lieutenant Commander R. T. N. Gould.

"Published by Geoffrey Bles, London," he said. "It's a collection of articles about queer facts. The facts are authentic enough—all documented. There's one about Andrew Crosse. He was an Englishman. Lived in an old mansion in the Quantock Hills, in Somerset. In 1837 he was the most reviled man in England."

"Why?"

"There's a lot to it. Listen. He was an amateur scientific research worker, but a careful and methodical one. In 1837 he was experimenting with the artificial formation of crystals by means of weak and long-continued electrical currents. He was trying to make crystals of silica by letting a fluid—a mixture of hydrochloric acid and a solution of silicate of potash—seep through a piece of porous stone. The stone was largely oxide of iron, kept electrified by a battery."

"Sounds exciting," yawned Mary, taking another cigarette.

"On the fourteenth day, observing through a lens, he saw a few small whitish excrescences projecting from the stone. On the eighteenth day they were bigger, throwing out filaments. On the twenty-sixth day they were perfect insects standing erect on a few bristles forming a tail. They had eight legs, and on the twenty-eighth day they moved 'em. A few days later they detached themselves from the stone, moved around freely. A few weeks later there were about a hundred of 'em."

"What did he do—sell 'em to a flea circus?"

"He called them 'acari.' He thought

they were from ova deposited by insects floating in the atmosphere. But—there were no signs of shells or remains of them. He thought they might have come from the water content. He examined the water. It was pure."

"They'd been hiding in the lump of stone all the time," said Mary.

"No. He discarded the stone. He electrified the fluid alone in a glass cylinder. The 'acari' appeared again, around the edge of the fluid, and sometimes two inches underneath it. They climbed up the electrified wire stuck in the fluid, and many of 'em escaped from the cylinder."

"How did they get in, in the first place?"

"That's what Crosse wanted to know. He got 'em clinging to a bit of quartz in flouric acid holding silica in solution— $H_2SiF_6$ . Then he really got tough. He boiled his silica solution, put it piping hot in a closed, air-tight glass retort. One wire was fused through the wall of the retort; the other came in through a cup of mercury at the beak of the retort. He connected the wires to a battery. The oxygen and hydrogen liberated through electrolysis pushed the atmosphere in the retort out through the mercury, totally expelling it. So now there was no way extraneous matter could enter. The retort had been washed out with hot alcohol."

"And he got bugs again?"

"He did."

"Why didn't he try insecticide?"

Morton sighed. "I'll try some on you if you don't cut the cracks. You seem to have the brains of a louse. Can't you get what all this implies?"

"Do I have to?"

"All England got it in 1837, anyway, when he made his work known. They lambasted him for presuming to create life artificially."

"You mean, they swallowed his story whole?"

"Look," said Morton, patiently. "Crosse was a single-minded, straight guy."

"I get you. Not a double-Crosse."

Morton was patient. He resumed, "Another scientist did the experiment with even more stringent precautions. Same results. And does the name Faraday mean anything to you?"

"Wasn't he in that movie last week—?"

"He was one of the pioneers of electricity. At the height of the uproar in 1837, Faraday stated in a paper read at the Royal Institution that similar effects had occurred during his own electrical experiments."

"It says that in the book?"

"Yes."

"Where did the rest of the dope come from?"

"Mainly from two papers written by Crosse in 1837. One in the *Annals of Electricity*, October, 1837. The other in the *Transactions of the London Electrical Society* for 1838. Also, after his death—in 1855—his wife wrote out again the details of the experiments in a book called 'Memorials of Andrew Crosse,' published in 1857."

"That's a long time ago. Hasn't anyone found out anything more about it since?"

"No one seems to have bothered to try," said Morton.

"What about the little man next door? He's English. And he's a university lecturer—or was. And a Doctor of Science, or something. He knows about Andrew Crosse, too, and seems to want to advertise him. I bet he's producing bugs by the million next door."

"I doubt it," said Morton. "He's not a Doctor of Science, he's a Doctor of Literature."

He slid off the desk and went over to the window to gaze down at the front lawns.

"He's out again," he said, presently. "Putting up another notice. It's a beaut. Must have taken some work. No hard colors this time—all pastel stuff. Lettering in old gold, apricot, orange, sepia, on a background of emerald, olive, and beryl."

"Ugh. Sounds like decomposition. What's the lettering say?"

"HONESTY IS THE BEST POLICY."

"Now I know he's nuts," said Mary. "Fetch the doctor."

"Okay," said Morton, and reached for the phone.

## CHAPTER TWO

### The Moon Terror

**T**HE RADIO station stood alone in the Arizona desert like an empty white box someone had abandoned on the seashore. Near the far horizon something like a flattened oval mirror reflected the sun's rays dazzlingly. It was the patch of fused sand where the rocket ship had started for the Moon nearly two days before. The rocket was the first manned lunar ship—humanity's first physical stride toward a new world.

Inside the station, a single voice had priority. Even General Atkinson, whose irascible voice everyone dreaded, kept quiet when the voice spoke. It was coming secondarily from a loud-speaker on the wall; primarily from Mooring, one of the three men in the ship 150,000 miles away.

In the receiving room, a circle of technicians, Washington big shots, Army brass-hats and front-rank reporters sat very still, except that the reporters' pencils flickered over paper. It

was a still-life contrast to the press room next door, which someone had thoughtfully soundproofed.

Here was more than news. Here was drama. Some unforeseen stress had attacked those people out in the void. And it was mounting.

The strain could be detected in the voice itself, fading and booming though it was, as the short radio waves battled to go through the ionosphere.

"... We must be battling along like an electron in a hurry, but you wouldn't notice it—the jets are off at the moment and we're coasting. I guess you guys down there know what you're doing. But you don't know how it feels to us up here. We feel that we're suspended, helpless. Hanging perfectly still, like a bathysphere on the end of a cable... The bottom of the ocean could hardly be blacker than this sky. It's like being stuck inside a tar barrel, along with a billion specks of radium dust... The stars aren't quite what I'd expected. They don't twinkle and they don't seem friendly, somehow, any more. They all look smaller. Hard, bright, cold little pinpoints. Unsympathetic. Staring like insects' eyes. Millions of 'em.

"I thought that out here, with parsecs of nothingness all around, I'd get agoraphobia. It's the other way around. I feel shut in a tight little cell. A suffocating sort of feeling. I keep remembering there's only so much air for the three of us. The others feel it too! It's not just me... And we can't do anything about it. We can't get hauled up and let out. Got to be, I suppose. All the same, I wish there were manual controls on this ship.

"Can see the Moon away on one side from where I am. Looking quite big. A disk, one half gray-black, the other, bright yellow-white splashed with silver. The Earth-light, on the dark half, is all we have to remind us of our home.



"The Earth itself is behind our tail. We couldn't see it without opening a port and craning out. I feel a terrific urge to do just that. To see Earth, break this claustrophobia, get a breath of fresh air. . . . That's ridiculous, of course. There isn't any air. Only what's in here. And that's rationed.

"Christ, I wish I were down there where you are! I'd go straight out on the open desert, walk miles, gulp the air down. . . .

"Feeling depressed. Signing off for a while. Hope to be reasonable when I come on again."

There followed now only the murmuring and crackling the antenna was gathering from the endless spaces.

Some reporters slipped hastily away to send the news hot. The wiser birds hung on to eavesdrop on Atkinson. He sat there, brooding. There were one or two nervous coughs, but no one dared break the silence before him.

He had always been a leader. At college, captain of the football team, a heavyweight boxer none could match, and a mathematician who before long was teaching his teachers. He did not seek honors or degrees: they came and attached themselves to him.

And then, in his late thirties, when he was rising to the top of the Army Technical Section, some obscure form of paralysis got him, reduced him to a chair-bound cripple. He fought it, was still fighting it after ten years. And by a mighty sustained effort of will he kept control over the upper part of his body.

So he was always braced for aggression, and the slightest opposition to his will had him spitting fire.

"Hm," he said, presently. "Their morale's crumbling. There's something funny going on."

One of the Washington big shots said: "Maybe that's just Mooring alone. The others—"

Atkinson rounded on him. "Mooring's the toughest of the three," he snapped. "I picked him. I insisted on him. I trust him like I trust my right hand. You can bet your bottom dollar that if he's cracking the other two are about broken."

The other recoiled slightly. "Oh, yes," he said pacifically. "But maybe we underestimated the psychological effect of putting them in a ship over which they've no more control than over a runaway train. Perhaps—"

"The reasons for this sort of control are manifold, as everyone else knows," said the general, as if addressing an idiot child. "Because the information for negotiating a precise and safe landing can only be supplied by radar. The crew can't observe for themselves, because there isn't room for the transmitter in the ship. Too much delicate stuff in it, anyway. Liable to be damaged by the takeoff, and then where would they be? Again, I wanted to spare them the worries of navigation, leave 'em free to make observations and notes. And still again, we couldn't be sure what effect the condition of weightlessness, during coasting, would have on human bodies. We thought it might cause sickness—as to some extent it has. Or upset the balance organs, impairing physical judgment—and their navigation would go to hell. That effect happened, as you've heard."

"Yes, I heard," said the politician, glad to agree about something. "Then there's this odd depression. It's just as well their guidance isn't in their own hands. They seem to have lost the will to go on."

The hostility died out of the general's eyes. He looked pensively at the radar screen showing greenly the shape of the rocket ship suspended amid a reticule of graduated hairlines. He glanced at the chronometer, then

pressed a button and moved a dial slowly. The faintest luminosity came from the tail of the ship. It began to move off the screen with the added speed of the jet. He busied himself with centering it, and then lapsed into silence.

"I don't get it," he muttered, presently. "All the first day they were bursting with excitement. Pleased as punch to have got off the Earth, mad crazy to get to the Moon. Full of speculation. And now. . . they're already wanting to come back, before they've even got there!"

**O**NE OF the brass-hats ventured, "It's a pity we can't get through to them on the radio. A pep talk from you might have worked wonders."

"If we can't, we can't," said Atkinson, huffishly. "No good whining about it. Anyway, we've learned something about the ionosphere: it's easier to get through from outside. The odd thing is that the radar is faultless."

He turned a switch on the panel. A nine-foot square on the wall changed abruptly from blank gray to the luminous green of the cathode ray screen. It showed in fine detail the quarter of the Sea of Serenity about Bessel.

Atkinson glanced at the smaller screen before him showing the rocket ship in space, and then back at the green lunar scene.

"When I get her off this small screen onto the big one, I'll be happy," he said. "She'll come in at the bottom left-hand corner. We'll run her up forty miles or so towards Point NW 277395, then bring her down within ten miles of the lunar surface, rear first and braking jets at full blast. We get her in side elevation on the small screen. The landing will need some tricky fingerwork on the—"

He checked himself. From the loud-

speaker came the sound of a transmitter starting up. There was a preliminary cough, and Mooring's voice came again.

"Back again, not feeling any better. We all feel lousy—on edge, irritable, depressed. We keep snarling at each other. Like three General Atkinsons at their worst. I feel safe in saying that, general, with nearly 200,000 miles between us. Especially since it's not certain you can hear. But we know you're still watching and guiding us. The jets started up a few minutes back, and gave us weight again. And we're right on course.

"We ought to be grateful. But, dammit, we're not. We feel your hand on us, pushing us the opposite direction from the way we want to go. We resent it. That isn't all. We're scared green of going on. God knows why, but we're scared of the Moon! Every minute it gets worse.

"Then we've got the claustrophobia. I don't know how much imagination there is in it, but we feel half-suffocated. We've examined the air apparatus a dozen times. It seems all right. But . . . there must be something wrong somewhere! It's as stuffy in here as a telephone booth in summer. The sweat's running off me. . . . Pipe down a minute, you two! Can't hear myself talking on this thing. Besides, you're wasting air. . . .

"The Moon looks bigger and brighter. A dead world. Pockmarked, dried up, stained, like the face of a decaying corpse. . . . Gives me the willies to look at it. I dread the thought of touching it. If only . . . Look out, Paul!"

The voice had been slow, unsteady, punctuated by gasps, as if the speaker had been short of air. But the last three words were a sharp shout.

Followed a silence.

There was a stirring and muttering

among the crowd in the radio room. The reporters were tense with excitement. They held their pencils poised for action like darts.

"Quiet!" snapped Atkinson.

There was silence and stillness for five minutes, save for the continual wash of etheric noises and occasional crackle of static from the loudspeaker. Most of the waiting audience watched the green echo of the ship on the radar screen and wondered what drama was going on behind the hull that reflected those impulses.

At last Mooring's voice came again, obviously controlled with effort. "Got to report . . . two deaths. Paul Levett. Arnold Todd . . . They'd been arguing for quite a while. We all had . . . I was broadcasting. I didn't get the last of it. First I knew, I saw Todd grab a pair of steel compasses. He—stabbed at Paul. One point . . . went through Levett's left eye, pierced the brain . . . I asked Todd why he did it. He only—glared at me. He looked so dangerous I got my revolver out. I remember how we laughed when somebody suggested we bring a gun. 'There aren't any wild beasts in space,' we said. 'You never know,' you said, general. And we never knew—never knew we were going to be the wild beasts.

"Todd looked at the gun and said, 'I get it. Shot while resisting arrest, eh?' I asked him what he meant. He said, 'You know well enough. I was crazy mad when I killed Paul, but there was a solid reason behind it. The air's running out here. There's not enough for all. But there's more for only two. And even more for only one. You're getting ready to be the only one, aren't you?'

I said, 'Don't be a fool,' but he made a dive for my gun. I fired—missed. The second shot . . . got him through the head . . .

"I'm sitting here in the bright moonlight. It's pouring in through the ports on one side, slantwise. Queer effect. My first shot smashed the light batteries. All the acid ran out. Fubar, fubar. . . . I'm sitting here in bright moonlight, mike in one hand, gun in the other. The other side of the cabin is pitch dark. There are a couple of corpses lying there in that darkness. . . . And this—whatever the hell it is—is all around me. That's why I don't leave go of my gun. I'm trying to keep a grip on myself.

"The ship's still accelerating. Guess it's the final burst to cross the neutral point. Then down we go. Two dead men and a nervous wreck. It was self-defense! It had to be! How else could I—"

There was a sort of sob, and the transmitter was off again.

Atkinson's hands were gripping the arms of his wheel-chair so tightly that the knuckles stood out white. He was leaning forward, mouth tight and grim, eyes coldly glaring.

One of the world's leading astronomers dared to speak.

"Might I suggest, general, that in view of what's happened this project be abandoned? It's no use landing a man in that state on the Moon. Better turn the ship back, save it and what data has been collected. Then we could interview Mooring, get some idea of the psychological sickness that's attacked them, and guard against it on the next trip."

Atkinson turned his cold glare on the astronomer.

"Mooring's still trusting me," he said deliberately. "And I'm keeping my faith in him. He's got more guts than any other man I know. I'm backing him to come out of the other side of that nightmare. He's not going to give in, nor am I. That's final."

He looked at a chronometer and, timing the movement, turned a switch.

"The jets are off now," he said. "Ten minutes' coasting now will edge the ship over the neutral point. Then it begins a free fall to the Moon. We'll take care of it again later, when it appears on the big screen."

The company relaxed a little. They sat imagining the scene in the ship as it went falling with its cargo to the dead Moon.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### Dream of the Id

**I**N THE room in the nursing home on the wooded Surrey hill, in England, another one-man struggle was going on.

He was a young man, thirtyish, but his hair was already more gray than brown. He lay on his side, in bed. He was alone in the room, which overlooked pine woods and gorse-covered heaths rolling away and up to the Hindhead ridge.

His struggle was with a pencil and a paralysed body, not a muscle of which he'd been able to stir for six years—until now.

Sweat stood on his brow, and his face was strained and pale, as he forced his fingers to grip and guide the pencil on the letter-pad he had managed to make the doctor understand he wanted. But the doctor was a busy man. He hadn't waited after the first few straggly words Morgan had succeeded in getting down.

"That's great," he'd said, examining them. "Keep it up. I'll come back later and see what you've done. We'll have you cured yet. This is all very promising. Good luck."

He went. And Morgan's struggle, it seemed, was left without an audience.

Actually, there were at least three watchers. Two of them were invisible and one nearly so.

For hours he wrote. And this is what the intent watchers saw him form, letter by letter:

#### Statement by Douglas S. Morgan

The doctors think my case is hysteria. What was called "shell-shock" in the first World War. It is not so. The thoughts run in my mind as freely as ever they did. And what thoughts they have been these last six years!

My body has been paralysed by a suggestion in my subconscious mind, certainly. But it was not a suggestion placed there by any fear on my part. It came from outside. Or, shall I say, very far inside?

This looks like gibberish. It's plain I must set out the whole story if any notice is to be taken of this effort. I hope I can last the distance. For years I've been fighting to move. I never gave up hope, though knowing my opponent, I judged my chances infinitesimal. I can't explain this sudden partial victory over my near-atrophied finger muscles. But there's no time to waste on theories. Here are the facts.

Leon Strang—the pianist and composer—was my friend. He was my private music tutor before he started out on his own career. But Strang had a number of interests—an all-round genius. Psychology was one. But I didn't know how deeply he'd gone into it until the Second World War.

Before I went abroad I used to call on him during my furloughs if he happened to be home.

One evening I found him in an arm-chair with a book. The piano stood neglected in a corner.

I said, "Hello, so you're still around."  
"Yes," he said. "I hope to be for some time. You see, I employ my

brain pretty strenuously all the time."

"Don't see the connection," I said, reaching for the whisky decanter.

"Have you never noticed that most of our greatest thinkers, artists, and scientists exceed the 'three-score-and-ten' without much effort? To name a few at random: Galileo, Michael Angelo, Darwin, Newton, Schopenhauer, Plato, Eratosthenes, Goethe, Tolstoy, Shaw, Wells—even though some of 'em were life-long semi-invalids like Darwin and Wells."

"I didn't notice any musicians among that lot," I said.

He laughed. "I'm not great—yet. Anyway, I've other interests than music."

He showed me the book he held. Freud's "Traumdeutung."

"Was Freud another long liver?"

"Yes. An octogenarian. Despite a serious disease."

"You mean, it's a case of mind over matter?"

He sobered. "It's a case of a strong Ego resisting the pernicious death-suggestion of the subconscious mind, the Id."

The whisky was warming my stomach.

"Well, you've no need to worry," I said. "You're egotistical enough."

"That's self-confidence, not self-approval."

"Perhaps you're right. I admit you've terrific self-confidence. You had the London Philharmonic in the palm of your hand all through Brahms' Fourth last Thursday. In fact, I think your conducting is even better than your playing."

"My composing will prove better than either, in time."

Strang got up and played a few bars on the grand. They were mainly in the bass clef, and sounded sinister, ominous—a dark threat.

"What's that?" I asked.

"The opening of the first movement of my Id Symphony," he said, quietly.

"What the hell is all this 'Id' business?"

He went back to his chair, collecting a drink on the way.

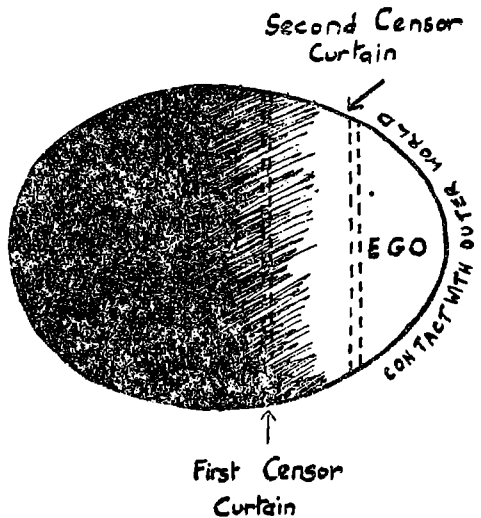
"I don't know it all. I'm still investigating. It's a solemn, awful business. I've been wandering alone on the edge of the unknown. I've never been afraid of anything before—I guess it's that self-confidence you mention. But this is making me damned uneasy. It's not so much what I actually know. It's what I surmise."

"Let's have it. I haven't much time. This was meant to be a flying visit. My pass expires at 10.30, and it's fifteen miles to my billet."

"I'll be as brief as I can, then."

He scribbled a sketch on the fly-leaf of "Traumdeutung."

I looked at it and raised my eyebrows.



"THAT'S a rough representation of Freud's idea of the human mind," Strang said. "The Ego is the only part of the mind that is you or



I, the part which has conscious control of the body. A small part, which would be completely overwhelmed by the influence of the subconscious were it not for two barriers of a force Freud calls the 'Censor', which act as buffers in between—and which we know vaguely as the 'conscience'.

"All the impulses that come from the subconscious—which Freud calls the 'Id'—are evil. Anger, greed, vanity, fear, hate. The Censor curtains take the direct impact of them and try to shield the Ego. The degree of the Censor's success depends upon the cooperation of the Ego in resisting. In the average person the Ego is weak. Not much will of its own. It acts more or less on the resultant force of the two obliquely opposing Id and Censor forces.

"The main battle-ground of the Id and Ego lies between the two Censor curtains. Freud calls it the 'pre-conscious.' Sort of no-man's-land. They thrust against each other. A trial of strength, the Censor aiding the Ego. If the Id wins and crowds the Ego back through the second curtain, then after the breakthrough it has the Ego at its mercy. We say the man is mad: he obeys every impulse his subconscious dictates. And those impulses are generally murderous or suicidal. In any case, the soul is killed.

"There are degrees of madness, of course, apart from the obvious homicidal maniacs and the manic-depressives. You have racial fixed ideas of suicide, like the lemmings — like the clear death-wish that lies deep at the heart of the German and Japanese races."

"I object," I said. "In the first place, there isn't any German 'race', and in the second, I think this racial explanation is an easy way of avoiding the real economic and social causes of war."

Strang shrugged. "It isn't important. Personally, I think most of us are nuts. We don't wish for wars, but we keep having 'em, bigger and noisier. We pretend our Egos are functioning perfectly and providing sound reasons for these wars. Economic and social ones, among others. But it's the Id, pressing through the Censor curtains, that's thrusting these suggestions, these 'reasons', on us.

"But if the Ego is strong, it resists the suggestion. Does its own reasoning. These strong Egos are our geniuses. They are, I'm afraid, the only hope of homo sapiens. And they've got their backs to the wall these days. I'm telling you.

"One point you must understand. Humanity shares a common subconscious mind. Jung's theory, borne out by the practical laboratory work in extra-sensory perception by Rhine, Soal, Tyrrell, Thouless, Carington, and others. The same subconscious mind, the Id, attacks us all.

"Now, this is where I come into it . . .

"Several nights lately I've had the same dream. I find myself confronted by a white wall. No, something less substantial. Thick, white mist? No. More like a slow-motion film of Niagara Falls. A curtain of water, churned white, falling with majesty and restrained power. Anyway, I knew at once that it was the second Censor curtain.

"I advanced toward its brightness, passed into it like a wraith. Directly, a great and sweet exaltation surged up within me. I felt—it's hard to describe. The joy of faith vindicated, of love reciprocated, of reaching a safe haven in a storm, of peace, friendliness, serenity. That — and much more. Like Franck's Symphony indescribably glorified. I could feel cool tranquil

waves of force flowing about me, like a breeze on a hot day. I was utterly content. Wanted to stay there forever.

"Then suddenly I found myself drifting in a pinkish half-light, my sublimity on the ebb. I'd emerged at the far side of the Censor curtain. Oddly, the curtain I'd left was invisible from this side. This pink haze was all around. In the distance it became deeper and deeper, became red, then darker red, then, far away, merged into blackness. Across this blackness lay a thin shimmering white band. The other—the first—Censor curtain. Behind that must lie the mysterious realm of Id. I wanted to enter that realm and explore it.

"I began to move toward the curtain. Easily enough, at first. The region I was traversing could only be the pre-conscious. I got impressions of mighty conflicts that had occurred here in the past. Like unveiling an old battlefield.

"I went rapidly. Presently, the curtain was towering up like a white cliff. Then, when I could make out the descending streams of force, an unknown power suddenly barred my way. It was like walking into a wall of spongy rubber. I pushed on with increasing effort. I became exhausted, stopped pushing—and the force flung me back. I rested, and tried again. Same result. I gathered strength for a big effort. I penetrated farther, but the moment I had to rest from trying I was flung back to where I started.

"I rested, and then tried all-out. I got almost to the curtain.

"And then there was a sudden loud yell. Instantly, without volition, I went hurtling backwards across the pre-conscious, shot back through the second Censor curtain like a bullet going through a wreath of smoke—and awoke in bed with a start.

"It was dawn. Another cry sounded. It was the milkman beneath my window on his first round.

"I felt weak, spent, and hellishly annoyed. I could have got there, I thought. Then I remembered it was only a dream. But I had the dream again. And again. And each time some echo from this material world came at the crucial moment to awaken and defeat me. Finally the dream stopped recurring."

**S**TRANG fell into brooding silence. I looked at my watch, shifted uneasily.

"Was that the end of it?" I ventured.

"Not quite. Last night I did everything calculated to make me dream. But first, I wanted no more interruptions. I took a quiet room at the back of the house. Hung thick blankets over the window. Stuffed up cracks and crannies. It was pretty well soundproof. And I arranged chairs to prevent me rolling out of bed—that had happened once. I read Wells, made my brain active, and ate an eminently indigestible supper of cheese, apples, and celery.

"I dreamed, all right. Same dream. But this time I broke into the further Censor curtain.

"It was the same as the previous curtain. Indescribable bliss. But when I drifted out of the other side of it, I passed abruptly into profound darkness. It was like being taken out of the bright-lit nave of a cathedral and dumped into the unlighted crypt. My uplift oozed from me.

"I felt cut off, utterly isolated, buried alive. The darkness seemed to press about me so thickly that I felt suffocated.

"Then, presently, I noticed dim blotches of color floating about in the darkness. Like those shapeless color

patches you seem to see when you close your eyes after looking at a bright light. Crimson, green, purple. Their aimless motion slowly became a circular one, like parts of a turning wheel. They became brighter, spun quicker. Then they were whirling dizzily, and my mind whirled with them. They became a gray blur, like the colors on a spinning Newton's disk. The grayness spread like a mist.

"Suddenly, this mist was split like a tissue, torn aside.

"I discovered myself in the center of a floor of highly polished stone, so lustrous it seemed unreal. I couldn't see any definite walls. A ring of tall plain pillars surrounded me, and outside were more pillars, and more pillars. An impenetrable forest of 'em. I had the impression that a huge black dome was arching over me. But it might have been the night sky. There were scattered points of light, like stars. Or it could have been some form of planetarium.

"Then gradually I became aware of another presence. Not human, but sentient. A faintly glowing ball of nebulosity appeared at the very edge of my perception. I couldn't get it into focus at all. It remained blurred and indistinct as though I were peering at it from the corners of my eyes or through someone else's spectacles.

"And then I heard a voice. Cold, hard, deliberate. Chilling, because it was utterly emotionless.

"Your will is abnormally strong, little Ego,' it said. 'You are the only one to reach my frontiers for nearly ten millions of years. . . .'"

Morgan's pencil slipped from his cramped fingers, rolled off the pad onto the counterpane. He was exhausted. He closed his eyes. He tried to resist sleep, but it overcame him.

**The watchers relaxed.**

## CHAPTER FOUR

### The Abominable Snowman

**T**WO MEN lay in their eiderdown sleeping bags in the two-man tent on the narrow ledge on the North Col of Mount Everest. They were at a greater height than any other men on Earth. They meant, in a few hours, to get higher yet. They were leading the current attack on the unconquered peak.

It was scarcely dawn, but they were already awake and talking—hoarsely, for the membranes of their throats were slightly frost-bitten.

One was Sherwood Parkston, from Ontario. A huge man, physically and mentally. Too heavy for top-flight mountaineering, the experts judged. But they left out his inflexible will.

The other was George Merling, Englishman, graduate from Cambridge University. Young, medium-sized, wiry. The right build, the experts said. He was as likely to make it as anyone.

Merling had been lying there, his nose a couple of inches from the snow-weighted convex bulge of the tent side, mentally picturing his position in time and space.

The coolies and rickshaws of Darjeeling seemed years ago—another life. The journey from there seemed more real. Somewhere away and below now stretched the dusty bare Tibetan plains, and the gorges, mountain passes and forest country of Sikhim. He remembered the pilgrimage that went on and on, over rocky tracks, past the lamaseries where the lamas droned in worship and spun their prayer wheels.

Then the spectacle of the great Himalayan chain.

And at last Everest, and the last monastery in the valley at its foot.

Down there in the base camp they

were warm and comfortable—and wondering. Wondering whether he and Sherwood would make it that day. Down at Camp Five they'd be wondering, too—Dyke, Renson, West, Scriven, and the Nepalese porters who'd gone down again last night: the ledge was too narrow to sleep more than two.

"Sherry," he said, "do you ever stop to wonder why the hell we ever wanted to come to this bleak, freezing, and damned uncomfortable spot?"

The Canadian grunted.

"I'm comfortable enough. What's the matter with you—have your bedsocks come off?"

"No. I've just been reflecting that what started me on this crazy trip was an idiotic fancy I got in my teens. I read that the height of Everest was 29,002 feet. I always liked to see things neat and tidy, in round figures. That odd two feet irritated me. I got a yen to climb Mount Everest with an axe and chop them off. I grew out of that obsession, but the idea of climbing Everest stuck. And here I am."

"It might have been easier to have shoveled the two feet away from the bottom," observed Parkston. "If you'd have been young when I was, you'd have found there was 140 feet to cut off. The textbooks gave the height as 29,140 feet in the old days. That's what the first trigonometrical survey made it. Done by Sir George Everest—hence the name—in 1841. There were other estimates."

He rattled them off, giving the references, and mentioned incidentally that the Fourteenth Edition of the Encyclopedia Britannica had given two different heights on two different pages.

He gave the page numbers and added that the current edition had been corrected.

Parkston had an amazing memory. Like the historian, Lord Macaulay, he

could recite whole pages of print he had glanced at only once. And, like Macaulay, he liked to display the gift.

"Okay, okay," said Merling. "I believe you. But the question was; why did you elect to get in this spot?"

"I just like to try things people haven't been able to do before. The Will to Power, maybe. Overcompensation for an inferiority complex. Cussedness. Pioneer spirit. A showoff. Take your pick. I hadn't even thought of Everest until a couple of years ago. I might just as well have gone on that attempt to reach the Moon the U.S. Army were cooking up. If I could have got into the show, which seems unlikely."

"That rocket must be nearly there by now, judging from the last news I heard on the radio down at base. How does the darn thing work, do you know?"

"The radio?" yawned Parkston.

"The rocket, ass."

"It's two rockets in one, actually," mumbled Parkston from the depths of his black beard and his sleeping bag. "Atomic and chemical. The main drive in space is atomic. Liquid ammonia, turbo-pumped through uranium 233—U235 is less suitable—becomes super-heated, jets out at a helluva lick. But it can't be used for the takeoff or for braking on landing. Because the emitted gas is highly radioactive. On a takeoff from Earth it would blot out life for miles around. And if it were used to brake the descent on the Moon, the ship would land in the middle of a radioactive area of its own creation. Tough on anyone who tried to get out and explore. So they added chemical rockets."

"It's a pretty big ship, then."

"Yeah. But there's not much living room for the crew. The pile takes up most of the room, together with the

ammonia tanks... Bet they're cramped."

"Well, good luck to 'em," said Merling.

"To hell with them," said Parkston. "Good luck to us! We've got plenty on our hands. Nearly five thousand feet to climb and scarcely enough air to blow up a toy balloon. It's light now. Come on, George."

He wriggled slowly and with difficulty out of his bag. You had to do everything slowly at this height, even talk.

They had some hot and very strong black coffee from a thermos flask, munched a couple of stone-hard crackers smeared with meat extract. Then they wriggled out of the tent into the cold morning light, Parkston dragging the thirty-pound oxygen apparatus after him.

The only clouds were distant below them, tattered fragments floating along

the valleys. Up here the air was marvelously clear. Peaks thirty miles off looked no more than a mile away. Others two hundred miles away were quite visible.

There was a slight breeze. They looked up. Two thousand feet above them the pyramidal peak was flying its usual pennant of something between snow and mist. But it was a short one today.

"Good sign," said Parkston. "I think the weather will hold."

His voice sounded faint and faded out in the open.

They looked down. None of the other camps stretching in a chain down the mountain was visible from here. Even the base camp was out of the line of sight. But there were the lesser peaks all around: snowy Ling-Tren, precipitous Pumo-ri, overhanging Gyachung-Kang.



"Everest is the king, plain enough," commented Parkston. "But when we stand on top, we'll be six feet higher than him. Come on."

They started.

**I**T WAS hours later.

George Merling was not the integrated being who had started out resolutely behind Parkston's broad back just after dawn. True, the back was just ahead of him, and they were still both moving upwards. But they were taking ten breaths to every step now.

Merling's purpose was breaking up. He was like a man in a dream. His mind wandered loosely through old memories, old experiences. Snatches of music, lines of poetry, passed through his head, hand in hand with scenes from movies and novels and his own childhood. It was like dotage. It was like "Finnegans Wake". He couldn't sort fact from fantasy and it was too much trouble to try.

It was too much trouble to do anything, except one vital thing: to keep following Parkston's back.

Merling, alone, would have lain down and died amid his sick fancies. But Parkston was the living proof that it was possible to go on. Following that broad back was the one fixed idea in Merling's chaotic mind.

But he did realize they were getting up the worst part—the stretch of rather loose steep rock between 28,200 and 28,400 feet. This, so went the theory, was where Mallory and Irvine had come to grief in the 1924 expedition. They'd been watched through a telescope from base camp. They were still climbing strongly for the summit when a veil of mist hid them. They were never seen again.

On the 1933 expedition Mallory's ice-pick was discovered. But there was no

sign of his body then. Nor Irvine's.

And here, on the tricky slope itself, there was still no sign.

To the Hindus, the Himalayan chain was the abode of the gods. The legends of the Tibetan monasteries said Everest was the seat of "a Mighty One."

How had Mallory and Irvine disappeared?

It was like the vanished crew of the Marie Celeste. The celeste was first introduced by Tchaikovsky, in the "Dance of the Sugar Plum Fairy." "There are fairies at the bottom of my . . ." Bottom was the weaver in "A Midsummer Night's Dream" . . . But this wasn't midsummer. Nor a dream. Parkston's back was still there.

They were over the rocks, onto the snow slopes above them.

Surely this was far enough? Surely this would do? No. Parkston's back was going on.

"His soul goes marching on . . . John Brown's body meets a body comin' thro' the rye—whisky. Could do with a slug of whisky . . ."

And then Merling just couldn't go on. He sank to his knees. Parkston's back receded. Merling tried to shout. No breath. He keeled slowly forward.

He seemed to be coming down from an immense height to hit the snow. Right beneath him he saw a strange footprint in that snow. Huge, it was. Much bigger than Parkston's big feet. It was—

He landed right on it, obliterated it with his stomach and chest.

Oh, delicious ease! "Give us long rest or death, dark death, or dreamful ease . . . Is there any peace in ever climbing up the ever-climbing wave? . . . Let us alone . . ."

Someone lifted him off his face. Parkston.

"Up," said Parkston's hoarse, frost-bitten voice. "Get ya . . . two feet



Now he was dreaming again. A door in the mountain opened . . .

going . . . if ya . . . want the . . . two feet . . . off the top."

Damn the man! And bless him!

Parkston, the giant, the indefatigable, more than half carried him up.

The summit was visible. A pyra-

midal, snow-veined rock point, floating high.

It occurred dreamily to Merling that he ought to tell Parkston about that footprint. There must be others, too. But speech was far beyond him.

Then Parkston sagged and collapsed utterly. Merling rolled over him, lay on his back, looking up at the peak. It was no higher than an average English seaside cliff. God, to have to finish now!

Now he was dreaming again. It seemed that a huge square section of the peak came swinging open ponderously like the door of a bank strong-room. A huge door of rock it was, with the snow still clinging to it. And out floated a dull gray shape—like one of the old London barrage balloons, fins and all, but altogether bigger and darker.

It stopped, resting on a snow slope. From behind it, from the depths of the dark square-mouthed cavern now revealed, came bounding a fantastic figure. A naked, hairy giant, twelve feet tall. Its frontal development was like that of the skull in the museum at Neanderthal. There were ferocious brows on jutting bony ridges; wide nostrils; gaping mouth with eye-teeth very prominent. The thing came leaping down towards them with the vitality of an infuriated gorilla, looming bigger and bigger.

Merling goggled at it. Then he connected it with that footprint and knew what it was. In his horror and weakness, he fainted.

The uncouth giant landed in a final jump beside them. He crouched over them, his breath coming out in clouds of white vapor in the thin, freezing air. Then he lifted the two unconscious bodies, one under each arm, and strode easily up the slope to the waiting gray shape.

**I**T WAS Parkston who first opened his eyes.

In the beginning he was conscious of nothing except that there was plenty of air and he was breathing it freely. For a time he was content to lie there doing just that. Then he took stock of his environment.

He was in a small metal-walled cell. There was a window in one wall, a blank square glass screen in another, a shut door in a third. Merling's body lay on the floor beside him. That was all. He made sure Merling was still breathing, then tried the door. It was locked.

He crossed to the window, and saw nothing but empty sky, then caught his breath as he looked down. They were far above the clouds. There were a couple of gaps in the clouds and through them, far, far below, he glimpsed a dark green landscape. Jungle, perhaps.

Merling groaned, and got up on his elbow.

"What the hell—?" he said faintly.

Parkston knelt beside him. "Feeling all right, George?"

"Yes, but—where are we?"

"About thirty thousand feet up, I guess."

Merling looked at him incredulously.

"What? Was there a penthouse on top of Everest?"

"I don't know. We never made it. We're in a very silent airplane, or a dirigible."

"Dirigible?" echoed Merling. "Oh, I remember now. Something like a dirigible came out of the top of Everest."

"What's that?"

"You didn't see it? Oh, no, you were out . . . Hey, what in blazes made you come back for me? You could have made it alone. You threw your chance away."

"Never mind that," said Parkston,

shortly. "What were you talking about?"

Merling described the opening door, the big gray shape, and the naked ogre that came for them. "It's fantastic, but there's no doubt about it. It was an Abominable Snowman. The critters do exist, then. The moment I saw the footprint I remembered those photos in the London Times back in—1938, was it? They were close-ups of similar prints in the snow up in the Himalayas, and the natives swore they were traces of the Abominable Snowmen."

"I remember the fight about it," said Parkston. "The pros said they were only the prints of a giant panda. I could have told 'em they weren't that. But I'd never have believed the Snowmen stuff."

"The Nepalese and Bhotia porters believe it all right. Half a dozen of 'em had cousins or uncles who'd seen 'em in the distance. They were full of bloodthirsty yarns. They don't call them Abominable Snowmen for nothing. It seems they have no table manners. They prefer their meat uncooked, they prefer human meat, and they prefer to kill by twisting their

victims' heads round back to front."

"Just a whim," said Parkston. "By the way, is my head on straight?"

Merling laughed.

"It's no joke, though," he said. "Who put us in here? Why are we kept here? And where's 'here', anyway?"

"I imagine your Tarzan pal put us in here. We may be kept here because it's the larder. But somehow I don't think the Abominable boys run this joint. From your description, I guess their I.Q. is no higher than a trodden-on flatfish. As for 'here', I may have a line on that—not that it gets us anywhere."

"What is it?"

"Something I read, belatedly, a couple of years ago. In fact, the thing that first made me get the idea of climbing Everest to find out what it was all about."

"I'll buy it. Give the usual chapter and verse, and word for word."

"In 'Everest 1933' by Hugh Rutledge. Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1934. You read it, no doubt. There's a bit in F. S. Smythe's chapter, 'A Solitary Climb.'

"He said: 'During my climb two curious phenomena were experienced.'

And went on: 'I was still 200 feet above Camp VI and a considerable distance horizontally from it when, chancing to glance in the direction of the north ridge, I saw two curious-looking objects floating in the sky. They strongly resembled kite-balloons in shape, but one possessed what appeared to be squat under-developed wings, and the other a protuberance suggestive of a beak. The two objects were very dark in color and were silhouetted sharply against the sky, or possibly a background of cloud.

"So interested was I that I stopped to observe them. My brain appeared to be working normally, and I deliberately put myself through a series of tests. First of all I glanced away. The objects did not follow my vision, but they were still there when I looked back again. Then I looked away again, and this time identified by name a number of peaks, valleys and glaciers by way of a mental test. But when I looked back again, the objects still confronted me.

"At this I gave them up as a bad job, but just as I was starting to move again a mist suddenly drifted across. Gradually they disappeared behind it, and when a minute or two later it had drifted clear, exposing the whole of the north ridge once more, they had vanished as mysteriously as they came."

"What was the other curious phenomenon Smythe saw? You mentioned two."

"The other phenomenon was that he didn't see anything. He had a strong feeling that he wasn't alone, but was accompanied by some invisible being. Presumably a friendly presence, for once Smythe involuntarily turned to offer it some chocolate. Still, that's a common enough experience for people alone and high up on mountains. Had

it myself more than once, up on top."

"So have I. Maybe our guardian angels live on mountain tops."

There was a scratching outside the door.

"One of our guardian angels coming in now, by the sound of it," said Parkston, grimly.

The door swung open.

Merling felt his muscles contracting, the hair on his neck bristling. The primitive horror of the Abominable Snowman swelled rapidly within him.

But what came through the door was not a Snowman. It was not any sort of man.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### Black Juggernaut

**T**HE DOCTOR'S car strained up the hill from Jacksburg and stopped outside the Slade homestead.

Morton Slade opened the door.

"What's your neighbor been up to?" asked the doctor.

"Take a good look," said Morton, "and then come in and tell us."

In the living room Morton and Mary sat and told him what little they knew.

"Sounds like you should've sent for a psychiatrist," said the medico. "Still, I might as well look the old boy over."

Morton took a peek through the window.

"He's out now," he said. "Putting up a new sign: LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF. In puce, indigo, cream, and pale blue. Looks awful."

They hurried out and found Doctor Hartley amid his notices, watching them glassily.

"Doctor Hartley?" the doctor inquired.

Hartley didn't even look at him. He raised his fixed stare to the attic window



of his house. They followed his gaze. They saw the wooden shutters of the window slowly open from within. Then they tried to make sense of what they saw.

The glass panes were gone. In their place was a large round lens, nearly filling the window space. It was in a setting of what seemed to be black metal. It was directed down at the trio on the lawn.

They looked down again just in time to see the front door closing on Hartley's back.

"Whoops!" Mort took the porch steps in a bound, caught the edge of the door before it had entirely closed. He yanked it open, and all but dashed his brains out against what seemed to be a strongly-riveted black metal inner door, which was tight up against the door jambs and just as tightly shut.

He turned to regard the other two. "Any theories?"

Mary just shook her head. "Get an axe," the doctor said. "Let's smash the shutters of one of the windows and get in that way."

They got an axe from the Slade woodshed. Mort attacked Hartley's living room shutters. One leaf came off its hinges and fell out. The other swung outwards.

They peered through the window panes. The window was blocked on the inside by a sheet of black metal, entirely covering the space. Mort broke a pane, unfastened the window, attacked the metal with the axe. It was as unyielding as the screen over the door. They found that all the lower windows, including even the tiny larder window, too small for a dog, were similarly screened.

Mort wiped his brow and put his jacket on again.

"Leave it for now, doc," he said. "Come and have a drink."

They sat sipping mint juleps in the Slade parlor and discussed the situation gravely.

"Reckon he's got those damned screens behind all the bedroom windows, too," said Morton. He paused "I suppose—"

What he supposed was never known. He was interrupted by the floor, which tilted suddenly to an angle of twenty degrees. The table, the chairs and their occupants, and all loose objects slid into a confused heap on the lower side of the room, amid a great smashing of glass. But louder than the noise in the disjointed room came a great grinding and rumbling from outside.

"Earthquake!" shouted the doctor.

Neither Mort nor Mary answered. Mort was nursing the back of his head, which had tried to make a hole in the wall. Mary was dabbing with the back of her hand a bloody cut over one eye. She had jabbed herself with her own broken julep glass.

The doctor saw her injury. "Hold on, I'll fix that," he called. "I'll just get my stuff from the car."

He picked himself up as the heavy rumbling stopped. He was nearest the door and pulled himself up the slope to it. He vanished. Fifteen seconds later he was back again, popeyed.

"My God!" he said. "Come and look at this!"

"Can you make it, Mary?" Mort asked anxiously.

"Sure. Just lend me your handkerchief."

He did, and helped her up and through the warped doorway. There they stood as popeyed as the doctor.

An unbelievably monstrous black tank stood alongside their half-wrecked house, pointing in the direction of Jacksburg. Its caterpillar treads covered the entire site of Hartley's house and front lawn, and reached across

the road outside. From the huge waves of upflung earth, it seemed that the leviathan had risen out of the ground immediately beneath Hartley's house—like a whale surfacing under a long-boat.

The remains of Hartley's residence, a crazy floorless shape of torn and gaping planks, still perched like a very tattered white hat on the black turret fifty feet in the air. The tiles had spilled off the roof like a shower of playing cards, and through the joists a thing like a nacelle, with a lens mounted in its front end, had poked itself. It was moving slowly from side to side, like a submarine's periscope scanning the horizon.

There were far-off shouts, as neighbors came running to investigate.

The three gaped at each other, and then again at the tank. Its weight was so enormous that the track at the front had sunk a good yard beneath the level of the concrete road.

"The turret!" breathed Mort. "That was what we saw—just the turret. And it filled the whole damn house!"

A moment later the tank gave a jerk, and with a shattering grinding of gears began to move forward slowly. The ground trembled. The thing lurched across the road, stood for a moment on the brow of the hill, then began to plow downhill across the fields towards Jacksburg. It went slowly and very noisily, leaving a deeply sunken road behind it.

"That thing'll have to be stopped!" shouted the doctor excitedly.

He darted across the road after it. Morton and Mary followed to the hill brow, and looked down after him. He was running like mad alongside the huge furrow the tank was leaving in its wake. He overtook it, ran ahead, got out in its path, and stood facing it, waving to whoever was driving it.

The ponderous hulk plunged straight on towards the doctor, neither slowing nor deviating. The doctor stuck it out till the last few seconds. When it was plain that the tank wasn't going to stop, he leaped briskly to one side—or tried to. Actually, he leaped into a barbed-wire fence, dividing that field from the next, which he hadn't noticed.

The barbs caught in his jacket and held him. He tore himself free. Too late.

"Oh God!" said Morton hoarsely, swinging Mary round so that she could not see.

The doctor was dead—and buried.

"Come on, Mary!" snapped Morton, turning back. His thin hatchet face was flushed with anger. He had taken a liking to the doctor.

The piles of earth around the great tunnel had reached the back fender of the doctor's car, but luckily had not covered it.

"Get in and get started, Mary," Mort threw at her as he shot into their own lopsided house. He came out stuffing his revolver into his jacket pocket, and leaped into the car as she got it started.

"Take the winding road down," he said. "We're going to catch that tank."

She nodded, and trod on the accelerator. The car scattered a bunch of their neighbors coming cautiously up the road.

"Get the Army after that tank!" Mort roared at them.

Mary drove on. Her forehead was bleeding still. Mort's bloodstained handkerchief lay on her lap.

"What's the plan?" she asked, staring ahead.

"I'm going to jump on the back of that thing. I think the top is its only eye, and it's looking right ahead just now. It's blind at the back. There's a door somewhere in that turret—where Hartley got in, remember? I'm going

to try to get in there, and stick my gun in the ear of the driver. There may be only one man in it, and that Hartley. That's all we know of."

"But—he couldn't have built that thing alone!"

"I don't know. No time to theorize now. There it is!"

**H**ALFWAY down the hill was the ten-story block of the State Hotel. The tank swung round, lined itself close alongside the hotel and stopped. Almost immediately a flash of red flame jetted from its front. A puff of gray smoke rolled out. Bang!

A shell wailed on its way to the town. The tall post office building suddenly wore a crown of black smoke. A few seconds later the splintering crash of the explosion rolled up to them.

"Declaration of war," said Mort, grimly. "Park over behind that house."

Mary did so. The house was a couple of hundred yards, laterally, from the tank.

Morton jumped out.

"Keep your head down," he said.

"Mort! Wait!" In agony she watched him running, swerving away downhill, keeping out of the line of sight of that lens.

The tank fired again. The shell landed in the center of the main shopping thoroughfare.

Mort had reached the back of the tank. He climbed one of the motionless tracks as though it were a ladder. He gained the turret, slid round to the front of it, and began hammering and kicking at a place where he had apparently located the door. Mary's heart was in her mouth. She could only see the tank's side. The door was invisible to her.

Suddenly Mort seemed to stumble forward right into the side of the turret, and passed from view. She guessed the door had opened inwards unexpectedly. Whether he'd forced it open, or someone had opened it, she could only guess.

She watched in awful suspense. She groped mechanically for her handkerchief, dropped it on the floor. She bent to reach for it, and saw something that petrified her. Mort's revolver lay on the seat beside her. He had stuffed it too hastily in his pocket. It had dropped out.

Then she heard the rumbling of the tank starting up. It was moving off. It turned the corner of the hotel, began grinding along the road away from her. It was clear that Mort had failed.

Hastily she bound the handkerchief round her head to keep the blood from trickling into her eyes. Then she started the car and followed the tank. In her red-smeared eyes was the same

look that had been in Mort's. She put the gun in the pocket of the door beside her, where it would be nearest to hand.

**I**N THE radio room in the desert station everyone stopped murmuring. Mooring's voice from the Moon rocket was coming through again. It was the very voice of despair.

"This is the last time you'll hear me. Can't stand it any longer. . . . Been trying to keep control, but can't. . . ."

"Moonlight streaming in. Could shut the ports, but I'd be in the dark. Something screwy about bright moonlight. Any attendant in a nut-house will tell you. Dogs bay at the Moon. Human sacrifices—always made at the full Moon. . . ."

"Sorry, General, if you can hear me . . . I've lost faith . . . in all existence . . . I've got my gun against my temple . . . Good-bye . . . 'The rest is silence.' . . ."

It was.

The eminent astronomer said presently: "And now, General Atkinson, will you bring the ship back?"

Atkinson lifted a haggard face. For some time he had sat motionless, bowed head in hand. The astronomer thought he saw a trace of tears in the corners of those bleak eyes. But Atkinson's voice was quite composed.

"Yes. I agree there's no point in going on now."

"Perhaps if the uranium pile were more effectively screened—" the astronomer hazarded. "A leakage of radio-activity might have caused the mental unbalance—"

"Nonsense!" barked the general. "The Geiger counters didn't give a solitary click in the ship at any time. And I'm willing to bet that air apparatus is still functioning perfectly. No, it's something else, something I couldn't have foreseen. There's no

reason for you, sir, nor any of the others—and I especially mean the reporters—to stay here a moment longer. I'll turn the ship around, but it'll take hours to check the present momentum. As you know, we're not bringing the ship back here. We're bringing it down in the sea two hundred miles off the California coast. That's where your story is now, gentlemen. I'll be glad if you'll leave as soon as possible."

He set himself to work out the turn-around of the ship.

The reporters rushed out with their story. The politicians and scientists followed slowly.

When Walker of the Tribune had got his story through, he remarked to a colleague: "That's that. The story is all washed up here. We'd better beat it for Frisco on the next plane."

His colleague agreed. So did all the newspapermen. They packed and left.

And so missed the biggest story in all mankind's history.

## CHAPTER SIX

### The Acari

**T**HROUGH the door, into the amazed presence of Sherwood Parkston and George Merling, came something as tall as a man, but certainly not a man.

It was an eight-legged insect, stone white. It was advancing slowly, balanced on its ultimate two legs, which were larger, thicker, stronger than the other three pairs. It had two faceted eyes, and a pair of feelers waved slowly over its head like strands of seaweed on the sea-bottom.

"Good Lord!" muttered Merling, and shuddered.

Parkston whistled in astonishment, got a grip on himself, and said with too-studied politeness: "Do come in

and make yourself at home. Is it still raining outside?"

Deliberately, the creature shut the door behind it. It set on the floor a piece of apparatus it had been carrying with its upper four limbs. It was a metal box with controls on the top and a ground-glass screen let into the side, like a portable television set.

Both men got an odd reaction. They sensed that despite this strange creature's controlled and assured actions, it was a little uncomfortable in their presence—indeed, that it was to some degree in awe of them.

Suddenly it was as if a voice spoke in the mind of each man. "Please relax, Mr. Parkston, and you, Mr. Merling. I am sorry there are no chairs or couches. You will appreciate that our species has no use for them."

And naturally they found it impossible to relax when they realized that direct thought was this creature's method of communication.

As it addressed them, the creature clicked a switch under the square glass screen on the wall. It became a colored moving picture—a closeup of a writing pad with a yellow pencil moving on it. The tips of a human finger and thumb, holding the pencil, were visible. A streak of red and green jazz pattern lay along the edge of the pad—some sort of cloth it was resting upon. The fidelity was exquisite. Every thread of the cloth could be distinguished, every loop of the writing was plain.

"Please ignore that and give me your attention. There is much to explain and we are racing against time," came the thought. They looked back at the insect, and it seemed to be looking at them. Yet somehow they knew that those faceted eyes, with their wide angles of vision, were watching that writing at least as attentively as they themselves were being regarded—and

that the creature's brain, unlike theirs, could hold more than one thought at a time.

"I am the first acarus," continued the thought. "That means the oldest and most highly developed. But it means nothing to you unless you know something of a countryman of yours, Mr. Merling, named Andrew Crosse . . ."

The voice in their minds told them the history of Crosse and his experiments. It told them that it was the first of the tiny acari produced by Crosse to escape by climbing up the electrified wire out of the jar and into the laboratory. It had reached the floor, gone down one of the cracks between the floorboards, and so burrowed deep into the earth under the Quantock Hills.

It came at last to an underground cavern where there was radioactive rock. Here it stayed, for radioactivity was life to it. Under that influence it grew rapidly in size and intelligence. Presently, others who had escaped in the same way joined it. The colony flourished. They sent out scouts to guide other wandering acari there. But there came an end to these immigrants. Andrew Crosse was dead, and the making of acari was finished.

"He was our Creator. We regarded him as God, and worshiped his memory. Because of him we worshiped all his kind, all men. We did not understand death through murder, disease, or old age. Such things did not happen to us. No acari, deep underground, died except through rare accidents. We felt not superior but inferior about this. We thought death a quality of the gods, denied us. We thought accidental death was a rare gift bestowed on us by man. For we believed the mind of Crosse, like those of other men, left Earth at death for other worlds, while we, his creatures, were Earthbound.

"If our theology was not exact, our



technological advance was rapid, greater than your own. We watched man—always with reverence—from a distance. With television instruments, like that on the wall—we have thousands of concealed cameras at work above ground. Or by personal surveillance from silent and fast-moving electric ships like this. Always unseen.”

“**P**ARDON me.” interrupted Parkston. “Generally unseen. Not always. Your ships based on Everest were observed and noted by man. There have been many other occasions reported in our newspapers over the years. One man, Charles Fort, collected the reports, put them in his books. Chapter Ten of his ‘Lo’ is full of things like this: ‘In the EASTERN DAILY PRESS, January 28th, 1908, it is said that at night—moon bright—“a dark, globular object, with a structure of some kind on the side of it, traveling at a great pace,” had been seen in the sky, by employees of the Norwich Transportation Company, at Mousehead. “It seemed too large for a kite, and, besides, its movements seemed under control, for it was traveling against the wind.’”

“That is interesting. That was this very ship, and I was in it,” said the thoughts. “However, we mostly use less conspicuous observers these days, specialists—our Observer Corps. They are acari whom we breed of a very small size, not a great deal bigger than I was in Crosse’s laboratory. But they’re intelligent. They steer very small ships, no bigger than a house fly, and carry television cameras. They fly low and observe for us constantly.”

“Is that set tuned into one of ‘em?” asked Merling, nodding at the picture of the still writing pencil.

“Yes. It’s coming from an operator stationed on the bracket of the electric

lamp over the bed of a man named Douglas Morgan, in a nursing home in Surrey, England. It is vitally important. I will tell you about it.”

“Just a moment,” said Parkston, a little pugnaciously. “I don’t want you to think you’re entirely outsmarting us. Men have detected your Observer Corps too.”

He cleared his throat and put on his Macaulay quoting-from-memory voice. “Extract from ‘Proceedings of Institute of Radio Engineers.’ October, 1947, page 110: ‘Radar equipment operating on a wave length of approximately 1.25 cms and directed vertically has given fairly consistent unexplainable echoes at altitudes between approximately 300 and 3,000 yards. For want of a better term, these echoes have been dubbed “Angels” by Signal Corps personnel. The possibility exists that these “Angels” may be echoes from the same phenomena as have occasionally been observed on wavelengths in the vicinity of 10 and 3 cms. . . .

“The number of echoes varies greatly during the day and from day to day. They are most numerous in the first 1,000 yards above the ground, and none has been observed much in excess of 3,000 yards. The duration of the echoes is short, varying from a fraction of a second to perhaps a maximum of 10 seconds. The short duration may, in part, be explained by the possible motion of the reflecting medium through the relatively narrow radar beam produced by the equipment. “Angels” have been observed on four different 1.25 cm radar systems, which lessens the possibility of equipment peculiarities. The obvious explanation that the echoes might be birds has been discarded by optical checks. Insects have been ruled out, since the echoes have been recorded in midwinter.

William B. Gould, Signal Corps Engineering Lab., Belmar, N.J.'"

"Men continue to surprise me," came the acarus' thoughts. "I did not know that. Acari, of course, are as active in midwinter as at any other time. There's an odd coincidence: it was at Belmar that men first made radar contact with the Moon, in January, 1946. Those men were doing a dangerous thing. Not through detecting our observers, but. . . You will understand when I have told you the whole story.

"You may have observed that we are flying westwards, with the sun, at high speed. We are racing thousands of miles against time in a matter of life and death. I must be brief.

"The acari discovered a system of tunnels and caverns running under the whole Earth. We enlarged and shaped them with an implosive ray—a ray which, causing matter to implode, rather than explode, compresses matter into hard, heavy, shapeless little lumps. So we made space for ourselves. We had to. Our population increases through birth, but is not balanced by any decrease through death.

"At first we thought man's death a voluntary act. Further study revealed the astounding truth that it was not. Men did not wish to die, tried to avoid it. But always died. We had to reorient our view of men. We still loved and

reverenced them, but we had to face the fact that they were not gods, not omnipotent. And therefore it was our duty, and not a presumption, to help them.

"One minor thing we did was to draw underground and train as our servants a race of sub-humans who inhabited the Upper Himalayas. You called them 'Abominable Snowmen.' They used to prey, horribly, on the real humans they encountered. I hope the one you saw did not frighten you?"

"No," lied Merling.

"They do our heavy work. We watched your attempt on Everest from the first. I went to our air base at the top and waited. I especially wanted to meet Mr. Parkston—for a purpose you'll learn. But I didn't want to spoil your attempt. I waited until you reached your limit. I think Mr. Parkston would have conquered the peak alone, but because he is a great man, he went back for you, Mr. Merling. Still, you would both have died, as Mallory and Irvine did, had I not saved you. I tried to save them, but I was too late. Their bodies are preserved by us, and there are devoted pilgrimages to their tombs. For though man is not a god, there's something god-like in his spirit.

"Your great men are great. For they're courageous, unselfish, strong-

willed and long-lived in spite of an immensely powerful enemy that tries constantly to make them weak, vicious, and short-lived. You two are great, in your way. So is General Atkinson. So was Leon Strang, the composer, and his friend, Douglas Morgan, who at this moment in England is fighting against terrible odds to do that writing you see on the screen. I, like all the acari, have been watching that great effort. So, too, has the intelligence Morgan is fighting against.

"I'm going to tell you what that pencil has already written, and bring you up to date with it as it moves. Together we can watch the end of it. We're waiting for one all-important fact to be given.

"This is the document so far: 'The doctors think my case is hysteria . . .'"

The acarus told it quickly but smoothly. Parkston and Merling sat there and forgot their own strange surroundings as they listened to the dreaming Strang describing the even more bizarre realm of the Id. . . .

**"A**ND THEN I heard a voice. Cold, hard, deliberate. Chilling, because it was utterly emotionless. "Your will is strong, little Ego," it said. "You are the only one to reach my frontiers for ten millions of years."

"You are the Id," I answered, slowly. "The influence that seeks to make man destroy himself. Why?"

"It is simple. I was here before man. Man's form of life is a formidable rival. I do not intend to give place to it, to let it overwhelm me—as it will unless I stop it. Self-preservation is my reason. I kill rather than be killed, little Ego."

"You see man in your own foul image," I said. "Because you have no capacity for love you think they have

none. Man is not cold and calculating like you, but generous and cooperative. You're employing the wrong methods."

"They are successful," said that awful voice. "This series of world wars is decimating you very well. The third should finish the operation."

"I'll expose you first. I'll tell all the world of you."

"Go on your mission, then, little Ego—and see who will believe you."

"The pillared chamber seemed to be receding into the distance, the Id with it. It became small, vanished into utter darkness. I realized the effect was relative: I was moving backwards with great speed—and I awoke in my darkened room. . . . You'd better catch your train, Doug. Don't comment now. Think it over at leisure. And come and see me again."

I had to rush then. I never saw him again for a long time, for in a week I was in a troopship bound for Egypt.

But we met up again in Sicily—Messina. "Messina" ought to have been transposed—In a Mess. The Allied bombing had flattened it.

Strang was on one of his tours, playing to the troops. We met on a hillside overlooking the Straits, and Scylla and Charybdis. We looked down on the ruined town.

"The Id seems to have a particular grudge against this place," Strang remarked. "It flattened it once before, in 1908. Terrible earthquake."

"Yes," I said, noncommittally. I'd still not made up my mind about this Id business. I knew Strang believed it; but how far could I trust his judgment? He was an artistic genius, and a creative one. Such people dwell on the borderline of fact and fantasy and live half in a dream.

I asked if there had been any further developments.

"There's a fight on," he said. "I

realized the Id was right. No one would believe a word of my dream tales. Except you, Doug. I hope you do?"

"What's the fight?" I said.

"Oh . . . I decided to switch my attack from the victims of the Id to the Id itself. Attack the source of the trouble. But first I had to find where it was. Physically, that is."

"You think it has a physical body?"

"Oh, yes. Mind can't exist without matter, not even the Id's. All that weird landscape I traversed in my dreams was only some symbolic representations of moral states, which my memory cooked up out of Freud's ideas. I wanted to discover where that pillared chamber with the stone floor really was. It was a long time before I could dream and fight myself into the Id's presence again. I made it, last week. There I was in the chamber again, with the nebulous patch of the Id all but evading my sight.

"'I know why you are here,' it said. 'I've been trying to keep you out. You have more self-confidence than most of your kind.'

"'Your suggestion doesn't work with me,' I said.

"'Don't flatter yourself. It does,' said the icy voice. 'You want to know where this chamber is. It is nowhere. This was the sanctum of the ruler of Hausse-Mel. He was self-willed, too. He discovered and attacked me. Unfortunately, his country was where the bed of the Mediterranean now is. I destroyed the dam across the Straits of Gibraltar . . . and the ruler, and the sanctum, and the population. You are looking only at a memory I have suggested to your mind.'

"'I don't believe it.'

"'No? Look again.'

"I looked, and noticed a change. The pillars were elaborately carved. They had been plain before. Then the carving

looked—like—like creepers entwined around—the boles of trees! And I was in a forest. The dark dome above had changed into a green arch of foliage.

"The scene changed again in a flash. I discovered myself a mere speck on a flat grassy plain, under a blue sky. The blue of the sky seemed to come down, mingle with the green grass. And presently all the plain was blue. It started heaving, rolling—it was the sea!

"The whole time, immutable against these dissolving views, the misty disk of the Id hung there.

"I knew all these surroundings were illusory. What were the real surroundings of the Id? I stared out over the sham horizon of that sham sea and concentrated my will—to see what was really there. The Id knew at once what I was doing. It put out all its mental power to resist me. I fought . . . but I failed. I woke up as weak as a kitten. . . . But I shall keep fighting. I'll get there in the end."

In the evening, in the canteen, Strang played me, on a battered upright piano, the first two movements of his Id Symphony. The first movement was slow, all menace and horror. The second movement conveyed brilliantly the clashing fight the composer was experiencing now.

"I can tell the world of the Id, you see," said Strang. "But through the medium of music, not words. . . . The third and last movement will be triumphant, a shining victory. My victory."

Strang had lost none of his self-confidence.

Nor had he reason to. He got the information he wanted. He told me next time I saw him, one day in his London house just before the Second Front. He had penetrated the phantasmagoria and seen the Id's real home. . . .

(The acarus' voice ceased in Park-

ston's and Merling's minds. The creature indicated the screen. The yellow pencil wrote on, slowly, laboriously.)

**H**E SAID: "I was in the center of a great ring of rocky cliffs. They were extraordinary clear-cut in the sunlight. The shadows were black. The sky was black too, although this was day. It was dusted with a multitude of hard, unwinking stars. Hanging low in it was a great globe, shadowy on one side, silver and cloudy gray-green on the other. I knew it was the Earth. The Id's home was in a crater of the Moon!"

"Good Lord, Leon!" I said. "It's quite out of our reach, then."

"No," said Strang. "It's getting within our reach. These new V rockets the Germans have started using on us are the beginning. After the war, they'll be developed rapidly. It's a certainty that, if we get a long peace after this war, man will reach the Moon in our lifetime. Then it'll be goodbye, Id!"

"If we get a long peace," said I. "But the Id is working against that."

"I know. We've seen how successful it's been at that game. Attila's Huns, Jenghis Khan and his Mongols, the Punic Wars, the Thirty Years' War, the Hundred Years' War, the incredibly bloody American Civil War, Passchendaele, the Somme, the eternal cockpits of France and Poland, the battles of the Burmese jungles, China's plains, the Russian steppes . . . But there's one hopeful thing."

"What's that?"

"Men—the great men—are beginning to sense that in these wars they are not their own masters. Thomas Hardy, for instance—and, by the way, he lived to be eighty-eight. In 'The Dynasts,' his masterpiece, he described a queer, invisible Intelligence pulling

the strings to bring about the Napoleonic Wars, and moving the soldiers on the battlefields as though they were pawns. He called it the 'Immanent Will', and thought it unconscious of what it was doing. He didn't know, as we do, that it only works through the unconscious, but is certainly conscious itself of what it does! Napoleon himself detected something more than that—"

He stopped suddenly. We both stood with ears cocked. Yes, it was the faint buzz of a flying bomb in the distance. They were frequent visitors in those days.

Strang resumed: "When he was leading the six hundred thousand men of his Grand Army to perish in the frozen wastes of Russia—for scarcely one per cent of them returned—to serve no other purpose than the will of the Id, he said 'I feel myself driven towards an end I do not know. As soon as I become unnecessary, an atom will suffice to shatter me.'"

"He said that?"

"Yes. He had a divination of the truth. I wonder if Hitler ever has? I myself have had a divination of a really tremendous truth lying behind this whole business. It struck me when I was reading my old friend, Freud. In his 'Civilization and Its Discontents' he says that a source of our unhappiness which is regarded as inevitable is 'the disposition to decay of—'"

We both flung ourselves to the floor and away from the window. The engine of the flying bomb had cut off almost directly overhead. We knew now the thing was plunging toward us. We'd too often seen the area of destruction a doodlebug caused. We had a second or two before it landed.

In that brief space, I heard in my mind—as Strang must have heard, too—a clear, cold, frightening voice, with

an edge like a wind from the Polar seas: "You have gone too far."

And I knew it was the mouthless voice of the Id.

I remember nothing of the explosion that blew half the house down. Strang was killed outright, of course. As the Id intended. What opportunism to seize that flying bomb out of the air, guide it towards Regent's Park, and cut off the engine at the exact moment!

They dug me out of it, unconscious. Paralyzed. I've been paralyzed ever since, until now. Either I'm winning my own fight against the Id, or its grip on me is weakening through some diversion of its attention. No doubt the first manned flight to the Moon is keeping it well occupied. I don't envy the men in that rocket. The more near they draw to the realm of the Id, the stronger will be its influence on them—the suggestion of death.

My story is told. I have won that fight. The struggle now is going to be to convince the doctor or anyone else that these are facts and not mental delusions. . . . I fear that will be hardest of all.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### The Lair of the Id

THE PENCIL slowed and stopped. The finger and thumb relaxed. The camera panned back, or up, and showed Douglas Morgan lying exhausted, with eyes shut.

"That seems to be all we'll get from Morgan," said the acarus. "Now you understand what you men are up against."

"Aren't the acari up against it too?" asked Parkston.

"We were not. It may be our thick shield of earth, our concealed existence. It may be the fact that our minds are constructed differently from yours. But the Id did not know of our existence until recently. Now it is trying to worm its way into our minds and control us. Probably that's the main diversion of attention Morgan suggests."

"Has it succeeded in any measure?" pursued Parkston.

"Yes. It's affecting the weaker minds. That means, primarily, our children. You see, our children don't

yet understand about the Id. They still think men are gods, who welcome death, who fight wars with enjoyment and like to be killed. You must admit that, in view of your history, an alien observer of mankind could not avoid that impression."

"Too true," said Merling.

"Some of our children have already declared war on you. We are passing near the scene of that war. We shall pause to stop it. But that's only part of our race against time. Morgan's story confirmed our own suspicions that the Id dwells in a lunar crater. I had hoped that Strang might have recognized the actual crater, given us a precise location. That was what I was waiting for. We must get that information. That's where I now need the help of Mr. Parkston."

"I'll help all you want," said Parkston, at once. "How?"

"You're one of the few men in the world with a will, or Ego, strong enough to face the Id and see through its stage scenery to that crater."

"Yes, but I don't know enough selenography—"

"That doesn't matter—I do," interrupted the acarus. It reached for the metal box it had brought with it. It passed a flexible band, on a lead from the box, to Parkston. "Please place that around your head. That's it. It's an electronic sleep-inducer. So settle yourself comfortably. Your dream-thoughts will be represented on the screen on the side of this instrument."

"But can I will myself to dream of the Id?"

"If you fall asleep thinking of it—and your mind should be full of it now—you'll dream of it. Relax, close your eyes, and keep thinking of Strang's experiences."

In a minute or so, Parkston was sound asleep.

THE SCREEN went cloudy. A few blurred pictures of memories appeared first: a view of Everest's peak; Merling's head protruding from his sleeping bag in the tent; the acarus itself. The pictures faded, became obscure, and then suddenly the screen went very bright indeed. It showed a white wall of some down-pouring substance, like a milk mist.

"The first—that is, the Second—Censor Curtain!" exclaimed Merling, excitedly.

"Yes," came the acarus' thought briefly. The acarus itself was doing several things at once with its many arms and many-sided brain. It was watching Parkston and his dream images. It had switched on the wall television and was tuning it. It was manipulating knobs and switches in the little panel beneath the set.

"These are the manual controls of this ship," it explained. "There's no one aboard except ourselves. Up till now an automatic pilot has kept us on course. But we've got to land now, in Jacksburg, Ohio, and stop that." It indicated the television screen.

Merling, with his inadequate human eyes, was torn between the two screens. It was hard to take one's eyes from either. The television showed a huge black tank, stationary on one side of a green park, firing shells into the luxury apartment building. Each shell made a hole you could have driven a bus through.

Spasmodic, but valiant, smaller spurts of flame came from the courts and arches of the buildings—Army anti-tank guns, in a hopeless attack on a target their designers had never dreamed of: black metal, harder than steel, six feet thick. The tracks had received direct hits; they were scarcely scratched. Bomb craters surrounded the tank. Some of them were from

armor-piercing bombs which had simply bounced off the great hulk.

"Our children kept their secret well," said the acarus. "They constructed that thing bit by bit under a house overlooking Jacksburg—choosing a site where they could survey the town and plan in advance their attack on it. The turret they built up into the house itself, removing the floors and the furnishings and taking them away underground. The idea of the tank, its camouflage, and the blitzkrieg method they took from observing the Nazis at war. They think it's a beautiful game and great fun all round."

"It seems to be," said Merling, grimly. "I suppose it was an unoccupied house?"

"Our Information Service reported one occupant. An old academician. They got the sleep-inducer on him one night, when he was asleep. And then . . . well, there's a way of reversing that apparatus, by projecting your own thought-images on the screen and inducing a state of hypnosis. They made him perform tasks for them about the house that they couldn't do themselves without revealing themselves prematurely."

"I see," said Merling, glancing back at the sleep-inducer screen. It was pink and red now, with a thin shimmering white band across its center.

"Sherry's out in the pre-conscious area!" he cried. Then he remembered that there was no need to draw the acarus' attention to it.

"Look at the other screen," came the thought almost at once.

Merling did, and saw an amazing thing. Charging across the park, directly toward the tank, came an open car. The fine detail of the television showed the face of its lone occupant, a girl with a bloodstained bandage around her head. Her eyes were fixed

and determined, her mouth set grimly.

Merling jumped to his feet. "My God, that's suicide! Are we near enough to do anything?"

The ship was falling rapidly. "We'll try," said the acarus.

The car had stopped. The girl stood upright in it, aimed a revolver at the tank and fired three times quickly.

"She's mad," groaned Merling.

The ship landed with a slight jar. Merling rushed to the window. He saw they'd come down in the park, neatly interposing themselves between the tank and the car.

"The doors are open," the acarus said. "Go and get the girl in here quickly. Planes are overhead. We'll be bombed in a few seconds."

The cell door stood open. Merling rushed through, along a metal passage, and found the open outer door of the ship. He dropped a yard outside into the roaring of engines—the planes were beginning to dive.

The girl was still standing in her car. She raised the gun uncertainly as Merling ran towards her.

There was a whistling crescendo, and a sound like a great glass ball smashing. The first bomb—a hundred yards off. The girl was thrown off her balance; Merling caught her neatly, and started carrying her back to the ship. She struggled.

"Blessed are the peacemakers," he said breathlessly. "Keep still, darn you!"

He got her into the ship somehow, and pushed her into the cabin. She took one look at the dead-white acarus, at Parkston lying full-length on the floor and groaning in his sleep, and at the two screens. She tore herself violently away from Merling and rushed to the window. He followed her.

Something new was coming out of the tank: a cylinder perched on the



end of a long jointed rod of black metal.

Then a flash! A violet ribbon of light leaped from their own ship to the tank. For a moment its hard outlines went swimmy, like a thing seen under water. Then it buckled, went altogether shapeless, collapsing in upon itself like a balloon with the air escaping. It became a black, jagged-edged mass, and shrunk rapidly almost out of sight. Not quite. Merling could just detect something like a small piece of coal lying out there on the grass.

And then the grass, the park, and all Jacksburg fell away below him. It was as though he were trying to support ten times his own weight. He held onto the window frame beside the girl as the ship mounted vertically at a rate which left the bombers beneath it almost at once. The motion became horizontal. They had resumed their journey.

The girl—he noticed she was a remarkably pretty blonde, with pale blue eyes—had gone white. She looked as if she were about to be sick. He took her elbow, steadying her.

“Feeling woozy?” he asked, sympathetically. “Is it that bang on the head? Can I—”

She shook him off. She was still clutching her revolver. She pointed it at him and said in a low voice, trembling not with fear but with anger: “What happened to that tank?”

**T**HE thoughts of the acarus sounded in Merling’s mind as they answered the girl.

“I destroyed it. Your aim was true. You did as you intended. Your bullets smashed the lens of the television camera and made the tank blind. Unfortunately, the very sight of my ship would have checked those in the tank; then I could have ordered them to return whence they came. But you blinded them. And blindly they were

going to continue the fight by using at random an implosive ray, which this ship carries as a tool, but which can be used as a deadly weapon. It was impossible to communicate with them in time to stop them. I used our own ray just in time.”

The girl was a bit bewildered. Then, from the direction of Merling’s attention, she realized that the thought message was coming from the huge insect.

“My brother Morton was in that tank,” she said. “And one of our friends, a harmless old man. You killed them both!” She switched the gun suddenly to the acarus and pulled the trigger.

Merling gave a shout and grabbed the gun from her—but the hammer had sprung harmlessly. Morton’s gun had contained only three shells. The acarus hadn’t moved.

“Control yourself!” said Merling violently. And then, more quietly: “It’s too bad about your brother and the other guy. But you must realize that their deaths were accidental. Those whom the acarus here killed deliberately were children of his own race. It’s a long story, but you must believe me when I say that creatures like these would consciously kill themselves or their own kind rather than cause harm to men. He did it to save the people of Jacksburg, yourself among them.”

“There were two of my own children in the tank,” came the slow thoughts of the acarus. “But . . . they were no longer really mine. The Id had taken them.”

Merling was silent. He did not know how to express his sympathy or his gratitude. He was deeply moved. The acari, obviously, still traditionally worshiped men as gods, greater than themselves. And what unworthy gods men were beside their adorers!

Mary Slade was puzzled and contrite.

“I’m so confused. It’s poor Mort . . .

I'm sorry, I—What is this thing we're flying in? Who is that man sleeping? What is—that creature? What did it mean—the Id had taken his children? Where are you taking me? Everything seems to have gone mad lately. I'm—lost."

Merling put a friendly arm around her shoulders.

"I'm pretty well lost myself," he said. "A few hours ago I was climbing Mount Everest, and half my psyche still is. Guess we'll both have to try to get adjusted to all this. There's a lot of explaining to do. To begin with: the Id. The Id is what made you try to shoot the acarus just now—"

He broke off. The shimmering band of the First Censor Curtain, on the box screen, had been tall and towering for some time as the dreaming Parkston fought to enter it against an invisible influence. But now the whole screen had become milk-white.

Softly, without taking his eyes from the screen, Merling began telling Mary the whole story of the Everest climb, the acari, Strang and Morgan and the Id. He was aware, as he told it, that it

sounded fantastically incredible. But his audience had seen part of the story herself, and now was confronted by visible evidence of the rest.

He was not halfway through when the screen went suddenly black. Not gray, as when the instrument was off. It was conveying the Stygian blackness beyond the curtain. Patches of vague color appeared in the darkness, began to revolve. . . .

"Look," said Merling, gripping Mary's arm tensely. "You'll see the Id for yourself."

The screen had become one great gray-white whirlpool. Then abruptly the whirlpool opened out, ran off the edges of the screen. It left revealed the pillared chamber Strang had described—the polished stone floor, the dark dome. There was a faint patch of radiance, hard to pin down.

"The Id," Merling whispered, hoarsely. Why he whispered, he didn't know. The sleeping Parkston began to mumble loudly, but they couldn't make out his words. In his dream he was addressing the Id. Presently he fell silent, but went very rigid. His hands

were clenched into tight fists. He was biting his lower lip. His forehead went damp.

Merling knew he was putting forth a mighty effort of will to see past that illusory chamber to the lunar crater. Merling watched tautly, leaning towards the screen, fearful of missing the glimpse that might come.

**I**T CAME—for a split second. It was just a flash of a curving range of jagged mountains in vivid sunlight under a black starry sky, and a loose floor of tumbled pumice. Then utter darkness obliterated the scene.

"Wake him up quickly," came from the acarus. "The Id will threaten his sanity in the darkness. Only a stimulus from the outer world will get him back."

Merling knelt and shook Parkston's shoulders. He had to do it violently before Parkston opened his eyes with a groan. He muttered, "Am I glad to see you, George! Where did you get the skirt? What's she done to her head? . . . Any mail come for me while I've been gone? Hello, Acky, old man—did you get that peep at the crater? Sorry I couldn't hold it longer. That Id's plenty tough."

"I saw it, and recognized it," answered the acarus. "It's Sulpicius Gallus. Congratulations on winning the fight. I thought I had the right man in you. You'd better rest and get strength again. I have one more opponent for you."

"Well, I'll be—Who's that?"

"The only other living man who might have put up as good a fight as you did. If you'll come and sit over here, I'll tell you the plan, while Mr. Merling brings our traveling companion up to date. Time is running very short now."

Parkston looked at Mary.

"What's your name?"

"Mary Slade."

"I hope I get around to saying hello sometime. The acarus keeps us on a tight schedule—especially me. By the way, George, when I get a minute I must tell you of my tête-à-tête with the Id. Some conversationalist! O.K., Acky, shoot—"

He and the acarus went into a huddle. The acarus evidently could direct its thoughts at one person only when it chose, for nothing reached the others.

Merling continued his story as he did what he could to clean up the gash in Mary's forehead. When he'd finished, she told him about herself and Mort, Hartley and the crazy signs, the tank, the death of the young doctor, the car chase.

"I guess the signs were put up under the direction of the young acari," said Merling. "They built the tank themselves, piece by piece. Presumably they constructed their own television camera. The acari cameras record detail and color shades perfectly. I guess those colored signs were test objects to get the focus and color values exactly right."

"But why the proverbs?"

"They'd seen signs and adverts stuck up all over the place. I suppose they thought if they put up a few themselves they wouldn't look out of place. More camouflage. Long as they were in English they'd look ordinary enough—they thought. But about all the English they knew was the name of their creator, Andrew Crosse. They put that up, but it wasn't enough. So they picked a few common sayings out of Hartley's mind."

"He must have been reading texts," she said. "Mort and I laughed . . . I can't get over Mort's—death. I loved him like no one else."

Merling said, "Your brother was willing to die to save the townfolk. So I guess, if he knew, he'd be glad of what the acarus did. It—"

Parkston came over. "George, give me that gun."

"But it's empty."

"Doesn't matter." Parkston took it. "Thanks. I'd still like to meet you, Mary, but we're going to be busy again in a few minutes."

The ship was sliding towards the ground. The acarus was tuning in a new scene on the television screen.

It was a lone cubical building, standing like a white box in the spreading empty desert.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### Immortality or Death!

**T**HE REPORTERS had gone. So had all the big shots. There was no one in the radio room now but half a dozen technicians—and Atkinson.

There was no opposition to the general now. He had let himself sag, and sat hunched in his chair like an old man, unmoving—even when a strange gray shape came sweeping down out of the sky and set all the technicians agog.

"I'm going out to have a look," said one with a half-apprehensive look at the general. He slipped out of the room.

A few seconds later he was back, with his hands up and a revolver jammed against his spine.

"Where's the remote control of the ship?" asked Parkston, taking in the great radar screen on the wall with its closeup of the Moon.

The technician nodded his head.

"General Atkinson is sitting at it."

One of the technicians began, "Hey,

what—" He jumped back a yard when the gun abruptly pointed at him and Parkston boomed, "Be quiet. Stand still, all of you. I promise I'll kill anyone who interferes."

He pushed his captive technician towards the remote control panel.

"My information is that the rocket ship is returning to Earth. Is that so?"

"Y-yes," stammered the technician.

"Turn it around, then. Back to the Moon. Pronto."

"Only the general touches that. Only he knows how to use it. He won't allow—"

"Can that," said Parkston, tersely. "Get moving."

"I'll—I'll try."

The technician laid a hand on the panel. Atkinson, who had been sitting motionless through all this, staring before him with dull brooding eyes, came suddenly to life. "Hands off that!" he snapped. "What the hell are you doing?"

He glared at the technician, at Parkston, at Merling and Mary, who were just coming in, then back at Parkston. "Who are you?"

"I'm Sherwood Parkston, explorer and mountaineer, among other things."

"That's a lie, to start with. Parkston is in Tibet."

"Was in Tibet. I flew here on urgent business. I'll explain, if you'll turn that ship around right now."

"I'll see you in hell first. Here, you men, get his gun."

Parkston glared at the technicians. His beard seemed positively to bristle.

"Anyone care to try?"

They looked at his huge bulk, and then at each other, uneasily. They did nothing.

"My God!" blazed Atkinson. "If I only had the use of my legs!"

Parkston said coldly, "General, I'll shoot you where you sit if you don't

turn that ship around and land it on the Moon, as planned."

Atkinson fell silent with fury. He rolled his chair forward, pushing the technician out of the way, and came right up to Parkston.

"Get this," he grated. "No one but me can land that ship on the Moon. And I'm bringing it right back to Earth. I'm not throwing that ship away, with all its equipment, to suit you or any other lunatic. Now go ahead and shoot, and see where it gets you."

Parkston sighed.

"Look here," he said. "I know, through a certain information service, that Mooring and the other two were driven to kill themselves at the suggestion of a power inimical to man—to all men. Including you and me. Mooring was your curly-headed boy, wasn't he? You put all your faith in him. Well, he didn't let you down. He was overpowered, that's all. Now, I promise if you'll do what I say, you'll avenge Mooring—and all mankind."

Atkinson scowled. "Give me that gun," he said, and held out his hand.

"If I do, will you promise—promise, mind—to keep your tame technicians off and listen for just five minutes?"

"Yes," said Atkinson.

Parkston threw the gun in the general's lap. Merling, looking a little uncertain, but trusting Parkston as usual, came up to stand beside him in case the technicians started anything.

Atkinson examined the revolver. His face twitched, but he said nothing. He looked at Parkston.

Parkston said, "This alien power I spoke of is in a Lunar crater. It is immensely egoistic—it won't tolerate the existence of any other form of life but its own, and it's been trying to wipe us out all through history.

"It's getting dangerously near success. You had a small demonstra-

tion of its power with Mooring and the other two. I'm telling you the same thing will happen to any other expeditions you send to the Moon. Your only chance of success is to help me attack that Intelligence now. There's no time to waste, because the Intelligence can get most of the thoughts of the people in this room at this moment. It is part of our own minds. It knows I'm trying to move against it. It doesn't know exactly how, because I'm keeping my thoughts on the conscious level and out of its reach. But it will kill every one of us here just as soon as it can, now it knows we're gunning for it."

"Are we?" said Atkinson, sardonically. "Don't you think—"

A vivid streak of light shot down the sky visible from the window. There was a thud that shook the building. A mile away half an acre of desert lifted itself in a great fan-shaped cloud.

"What—?" began Merling, and was thrown off his feet as the room was filled with a dazzling blue glare. The whole station seemed to leap a yard in the air and come down with a jarring crash. Each wall sprang a spiderweb of cracks.

**P**ARKSTON had kept his feet. "That's our friend gunning for us," he said. "Now, General, do you believe me?"

"I do not," said Atkinson. "No doubt you planted those bombs yourself."

"Hell, they weren't bombs!" snapped Parkston. "I don't know what they were, but—"

"They were meteors," said a quiet voice in everyone's mind. The acarus was at the doorway, supporting itself against a door-post. Three of its arms were ragged stumps. There was a great gash down its left side, and something like a golden gelatine was oozing out.

Mary gasped and started towards it.

"Don't waste time on me," came its instant thought. "There are more pressing matters. The Id diverted two meteors that happened to be near the Earth. The first missed by only a mile. The second was a direct hit on my ship outside. There are no other meteors big enough or near enough for it to use now. But it will try something else. An earthquake, very likely. But an earthquake is the result of a long chain of subterranean events. It will take much of the Id's strength to get that chain into motion. The result will not come for three or four hours. We must bring off our own plan before then."

Atkinson had been staring hard at the acarus.

"I don't know what you are or how you fit into this attempt at sabotage," he said. "Nor how you plant your thoughts in my head. But I always prefer to do my own thinking. Now get to hell out of here, the lot of you!"

"You utter fool!" stormed Parkston. "Here, I'll land that damned ship myself somehow, by trial and error."

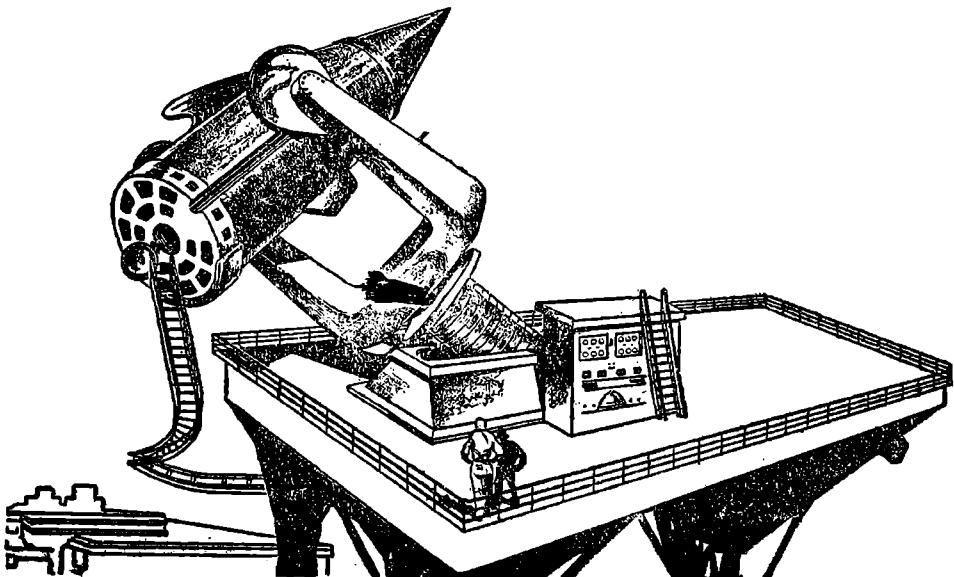
"Wait!" said the acarus. "There's no margin for error. One mistake and our chance is gone. Parkston, have you ever read Freud's 'Civilization and its Discontents'?"

"Yes," said Parkston, puzzled by the non-sequitur.

"Then I rely on your remarkable memory. Strang's last words, as the Id killed him, were an interrupted quotation from that book. About a source of mankind's unhappiness which is regarded as inevitable, being the disposition to decay of— Of what?"

Parkston thought. "Of our bodies," he said.

"I thought so. Strang's divination, for which the Id killed him because he had gone too far, was that human beings are naturally as immortal as we, the acari, are. Only physical injuries, on the scale of my own, should be fatal. Your race was designed for immortality. It would have spread light and knowledge through all the universe by now, had not the Id declared war on it from its birth. It deliberately implanted in man's mind the suggestion that his days were numbered. The



days of our years are three score and ten,' said the Id, through the Psalmist. Senility has been a perpetual mystery to your psychologists. There seemed no good reason why flesh and blood should not always go on replacing itself. There is no good reason—except the Id, and your complete acceptance of its suggestion."

"I have immortal longings in me . . ." quoted Parkston. "My God, no wonder! General, it's in your hands to give all mankind unlimited life. Think of it! The curse upon us has always been that no generation has had a chance to grow up. Most of us never mature, never get more than a glimmering of wisdom before old age clamps down on us and we're done. Only a few great men have resisted the Id's suggestion long enough to become to any degree wise, as Strang found. Think of the accumulated knowledge of Archimedes, the profundity of Plato. Had they lived till now! And then think of what they might become! . . . The real birth of humanity is your decision, General."

"I think not," said Atkinson, and Merling was sick at heart to hear the same sardonic tone. "The great killer of men is neither old age nor accident, but disease. Do you expect me to believe that is imagination, too?"

"Alexis Carrel, in 'Man—the Unknown', has pointed out that for every state of consciousness there seems to be a corresponding physical state," said Parkston, impatiently. "D'you think you know more than a man of Carrel's experience and reputation—a Nobel Prize winner? Lord, every physician knows a sick mind can cause a sick body. Duodenal ulcers are a classic example. Would microbes, germs, viruses matter a damn if our bodies weren't susceptible to 'em? Through our unconscious mind the Id makes

our bodies their easy prey, besides giving us all sorts of fancy organic jimjams. The authentic faith-cures are rare cases of Egos making a stand against the Id, for once in a way—perhaps with the help of the Censor—but you wouldn't know about that."

"I wouldn't know about a lot of things," interrupted Atkinson, reflecting Parkston's impatience. "But I know I'm sick of all this prattling about the Id, whatever that is. Now get this in your head. I'm not going to throw that ship away, whatever you say or do. And—"

"And now listen to me!" snapped Mary, losing patience in her turn. "I was told you were a great man. You're nothing but an obstinate fool. We're not listening to General Atkinson, we're listening to the Id, using you like a ventriloquist's dummy. You think you're showing you've got a mind of your own, but you're not. Your mind belongs to the Id. You haven't done a bit of conscious thinking since we've been here. You're just a—a mish-mash of pride, jealousy, fear and hate. I think you're contemptible. The acarus is worth a million of you."

Atkinson was open-eyed, open-mouthed.

She went on furiously, "Because Mooring went under, you let yourself go with him. You're scared silly—frightened to put any faith in anything or anyone. Don't you realise, you numskull, that you've been fighting the Id for years yourself? That as soon as it realised you were planning to be the first man on the Moon, it struck you down with paralysis, tried to make you utterly helpless? You fought it then. Now you've surrendered. You've lost all hope of walking again, of leading your old active life. You're finished."

"Do you mean that if I do what you want, I'll have a chance of walking

again?" asked Atkinson, very slowly.

"You'll walk again. And you can still be the first man on the Moon," said Mary.

"That's right," said Parkston and Merling simultaneously.

"If the Id is defeated, it is certain," the acarus telepathed.

Atkinson looked at them in turn. He seemed to be undergoing a terrific internal struggle. Then suddenly he said, quietly, "I'll do it."

He wheeled his chair to the control panel and turned the rocket ship back to the Moon.

**P**ARKSTON mopped his brow. "Lord!" he muttered. "That was the toughest battle of my life—and a girl won it for me. Mary, I've really got to meet you sometime."

"You ought to have seen her stalking that tank with a pistol," said Merling warmly. "She's some fighter!"

Mary started to reply. She stopped suddenly, ran to the side of the acarus. It had slid gently to the floor. The two men hurried after her. Parkston knelt to assist.

"I shall not see the end of it." The thoughts were weak now. "But it will be an end to the threat to both our races. And the true beginning for yours. Also, I know, the beginning of a great alliance. Humanity and the acari shall spread life together among the stars . . . Parkston, I want you to be the liason officer between our races. Do you accept?"

"Of course," said Parkston, and cleared his throat.

"The acari will know you. One of our observers is stationed in this room—has been all along. What we say and do here is being broadcast all over the acarian world.

"I'm finished now. It was the Id who set you and General Atkinson against each other, to waste your strength and gain time for itself. Be on guard against it until—"

It never finished the sentence.

Parkston got to his feet. He went over to Atkinson. "How's it going?" he asked.

"Well enough. I had only just countered the inertia of the ship in its original forward drive. It hadn't stopped going Moonwards, actually, though it was slowing constantly."

"Cram on all power, then."

"I have."

"How long before it gets there?"

"Three and a half hours," said Atkinson.

"It's still a race," said Parkston. "The Id's earthquake might hit us first. Or some other funny trick."

One of the technicians had wandered near. Suddenly, he dived forward, snatched the gun from Atkinson's lap, jammed it against the general's heart and pulled the trigger. Just as rapidly Atkinson cracked his skull with a steel ruler.

"Your Id friend is slipping," said Atkinson, composedly. "It didn't even know what I noticed myself—that the gun was empty."

Parkston was shaken. "Thank heavens he didn't use it as a club," he said, and jut the gun in his pocket.





"Now listen, everybody. From now on every one of you may expect to get crazy impulses to do things like that. To kill the general or me, to smash apparatus, or blow the joint up. That'll be the Id working on you. Now it's up to you to keep those feelings in check. It's possible, when you realize what's really happening to you. Prove you are the master, not the Id. You men are the representatives of humanity in a fight with its mortal enemy. Keep self-control for three or four hours and you've won—we've all won. Got that?"

Everyone got it.

"Damn good thing we're in the middle of a desert," muttered Parkston to Merling, later. "Else it'd have been too easy for the Id to have worked up a lynching party."

**O**NE . . . TWO . . . three hours passed, very slowly. The sun went. It was night.

The technicians sat silently. Every now and then one clenched his fists, closed his eyes and fought a battle where none could aid him. But the others watched alertly to stop him should he lose. No one lost.

George Merling and Mary sat talking in low tones of many private things.

General Atkinson kept his eyes on the small radar screen and his fingers on the controls. The ship was very near the Moon now, and he'd turned it stern-down for landing.

Parkston paced restlessly up and down between the white, still, mutilated body of the acarus and the wide window looking out on the starlit desert.

Then: "She's on the big screen," said Atkinson.

Everyone gazed at the radar map of the Moon. Out of its bottom left-hand corner crawled the tiny green

shape of the rocket ship. It began making for Point NW 277395.

Presently, Parkston said, "I reckon that's far enough, General. Now branch off southeast and land her in the crater Sulpicius Gallus. But don't us the chemical rockets to brake her, as you intended to. Use the atomic jet."

"Right," said Atkinson, without questioning.

But everyone else asked a mute question.

"I can tell you now the acarus' plan. It's too late, I hope, for the Id to escape—anyway, we'll soon know. You see, the acarus came from a silica solution in Andrew Crosse's lab—that's a long story we'll have to skip for now. But it knew all about silicon formations and their possibilities. When it saw the Id trying to conceal its hideout from me, it noticed something—the Id appeared dimly in all the fake scenes it thought up—as a glowing ball. But that was disguise too. When I got one glimpse through the veil and saw the crater, the Id didn't seem to be there. But it was. I was seeing it straight and plain. The Id is the crater Sulpicius Gallus!"

Even Atkinson looked surprised.

"The Id is silicon life—and Sulpicius Gallus is all silicon and pumice. I should have guessed it was something like that. There's no air or water on the Moon, and so carbon life, like the Earth's, isn't possible. The Id, silicon life, regards carbon life as a dangerous rival. The Moon is a dead world, because the Id wiped out all carbon life on it, and it's been trying to do the same here. But we're going to wipe out the Id instead."

"How?" asked Merling.

"A slow trickle of radioactivity probably benefits the Id, as it does the acari. But a lot of it all at once would

be fatal. The clouds of radioactive gas the ship will jet into that small crater as it descends will completely permeate it. The porous pumice will retain it long enough to burn out the mind of the Id altogether."

"Aren't you unwise in revealing this?" asked one of the technicians.

"Too late for the Id to do anything about it now," said Parkston. "It might have figured out some way of protection if it had known earlier. But we kept it guessing—I don't think it even suspected we knew which crater it was in, let alone that it was the crater. It couldn't have wormed anything out of the acarus' mind about it. I can only hope I've been as good a clam myself."

"We'll know in a few minutes," said Atkinson. "I'm landing her."

They watched the bright point of the ship settling into the ring of Sulpicius Gallus, and tried to imagine a strange life dying a strange death there.

There came a rumbling from far below ground. The room began to shudder. In its death throes, the Id was fighting them yet.

Then the rumbling died away.

"Landed," said Atkinson.

And then, suddenly, a great peace descended on the room. Every man felt the load of anxiety fall away, dissolve utterly, and his mind become clear and serene.

"It's done," said Parkston, and peals of bells seemed to ring through his head. His gaze fell upon the motionless, torn body of the acarus . . . He turned his head away and was silent.

The others were watching General Atkinson. He had levered himself slowly from the wheel-chair. He stood up straight, took one or two uncertain steps. And all at once he burst into tears.

Parkston shook himself, and went over to Mary and George. "'Bout time I met you, Mary," he said.

"Too late, Sherry—we're going to be married," said George.

"Oh," said Parkston. And then, "Congratulations! I've got a full-time job coming up, anyway—liaison officer. Remember, George, I told you there was a point to everything, even climbing Everest, once you saw the plan whole. I see where I fit in now."

"I see the point now, too," said George, squeezing Mary's arm. "I'd never have gone within miles of Jacksburg if I hadn't climbed Everest. By the way, we're honeymooning in England. We're going to look up Doug Morgan—I bet that guy's jumping round the bedroom at this moment and wondering what happened. We're going to tell him. And we're going to show him that his lone fight wasn't pointless, either."