



*a plot by legendary beasts
to take over the world?
the patient was obviously out of his mind*

THE CHIMERAS

fiction BY ARTHUR KOESTLER

"RELAX," said Dr. Grob.

"How can a man relax when the chimeras are after him?" complained Anderson, fidgeting on the couch.

"Relax, relax," said Dr. Grob. "Close your eyes. Tell me the first word that comes into your head."

"Chimera," said Anderson.

"You are not properly relaxed," said Dr. Grob with a patient, hardly audible yawn. "Try again."

"Chimeras," said Anderson. "They are after me. They are after you, too. Only you don't realize it, because you yourself suffer from a low-grade chimeric infection—grade three, I should say, or maybe grade four. The infection produces a blind spot, so you cannot see them."

"Look," said Dr. Grob. "Who is the patient here, and who is the doctor?"

"That is what I don't know," Anderson said doubtfully.

"Then why do you come to me and pay me a hundred dollars an hour?"

"To talk about chimeras," said Anderson. He thought for a while, then nodded. "Yes, that is the purpose."

"All right, then," said Dr. Grob. He stopped taking notes, put his pen away and leaned back in his chair. "What is a chimera? Animal, vegetable or mineral?"

"It is difficult to decide," said Anderson. "Everybody knows that the Greek chimeras had lions' heads, goats' bodies and serpents' tails. But they are also in the brain."

"In whose brain?"

"In yours, for instance. I believe it is only a low-grade infection, but if you don't take care, it will spread and eventually you will turn into a full-blown chimera yourself. Anyway, you need a haircut."

Dr. Grob looked furtively into the mirror concealed in the top drawer of his desk and for a moment tried to visualize himself with a lion's head. The idea was not unpleasant; whatever people say, a lion is a noble animal. As for the goat and the serpent's tail, they were obviously products of his patient's sick imagination.

"Can't you think of anything (continued on page 235)

The chimeras

(continued from page 146)

but the chimeras? It is an obsession, you know," he said gently.

"Of course it is," Anderson said. "How can you not be obsessed with chimeras when they are after your blood?"

"Well, that doesn't get us anywhere," Dr. Grob said, wondering whether he should continue with this patient. But most patients nowadays were obsessed with chimeras, and he had to make a living. His parlor was full of beautiful stuffed lions, and they cost a lot of money.

"No, it doesn't," said Anderson. "Not until I succeed in convincing you that in a world that is being taken over by the chimeras, to be obsessed with chimeras is a healthy, normal state of mind."

"An obsession can never be called normal," said Dr. Grob.

"Do you deny that the chimeras exist?" asked Anderson.

"Well—yes and no," Dr. Grob said patiently. "I do not question the facts. We are faced with a genetic mutation on a statistically significant scale, which has produced some of the phenomena to which you refer in such unscientific and wildly exaggerated terms. It is further admitted that some of the mutants seem to be carriers of an unusual type of virus that effects similar transformations in the infected person. That's all. The rest is fantasy—and that's where psychotherapy comes in."

"But you yourself have caught the infection," Anderson repeated stubbornly, thumping the side of the couch with his fist.

"All right, then, I am infected," said Dr. Grob quietly. "Tell me who, in your opinion, is not."

"Everybody is. Only the grades vary. There are seventeen grades. In the higher grades, the blind spot expands and the infectee can no longer see the changes in himself and in others. A chimera looks to another chimera like a normal person."

"All right, you have explained all this to me before. Who, in your opinion, is not infected?"

"I am not."

"Is it not rather strange that you are the only one?"

"It is a tragedy. I would be much happier if I developed a blind spot."

"But if you are the only sane person, why do you want treatment?"

Anderson looked at the doctor slyly.

"I told you I would be much happier if I, too, had a blind spot. Just a tiny one. Life would be much pleasanter."

"You mean you came to me, not to be cured, but to be made insane?"



"You're rubbing me the wrong way again."

"Not exactly insane. Just a tiny blind spot. Life is unbearable when you see clearly what's going on around you."

"Most extraordinary," said Dr. Grob.

"Look," said Anderson in growing agitation. "Supposing that time were speeding up in our part of the universe by some relativistic quirk. Then all the clocks would be ticking faster and faster and our pulses would quicken at the same rate, so no clockmaker or physician would be aware of what's happening. See?"

"No. I don't," said Dr. Grob gruffly.

"But how can you help me, if you don't understand?" Anderson shouted. "The infection is spreading faster and faster. What do you intend to do?"

"I intend to cure you," said Grob, "because that is my job. Integration of the personality. Adjustment to society. Accept your fellow beings and they will accept you. Cooperate. Learn to respond in a positive way."

"What is the positive way?"

"The opposite of the negative way," Dr. Grob said, and rose awkwardly from his chair. His head, with the tumbled mane, seemed top-heavy. "I am afraid the hour is up; but before you go. I want you to meet my assistant. He takes over when I am on vacation."

He pressed a bell and a blond young man with a pleasant smile came in. "This is Dr. Miller," introduced Grob. "One of the most promising therapists of the younger generation."

Dr. Miller advanced to shake hands with the patient. Anderson took a quick jump, cowered behind the couch for protection and looked at Dr. Miller with wild, staring eyes. The two doctors exchanged a glance and Dr. Miller quietly left the room.

"Well, well," said Dr. Grob. "I am sorry I upset you. Did you see anything unusual in Dr. Miller?"

"But of course," said Anderson, refusing to emerge from his shelter behind the couch. "How can you not see that he

is almost a full-blown chimera? You must have a grade-ten infection, after all."

Dr. Grob laughed reassuringly. "I must confess I never saw his serpent's tail. Does it come out through a hole in his flannels?"

"Of course not. They all wear it coiled round their stomachs, like a cummerbund."

"Well, maybe next time we'll get Dr. Miller to undress before us. Would that convince you?"

"You will never make him."

"We'll see. But, as I said, the hour is up, and so goodbye for today."

"Make him now."

"The hour is up," Dr. Grob repeated for the third time, giving out a noise that sounded like a growl. At that very moment, like a responding echo, they heard an inarticulate clamor coming from the street, getting louder and louder. Curiosity triumphing over fear, Anderson came from behind the couch, dusting his trousers, and took up his position next to the doctor at the window. Across the whole width of the street, a horde of chimeras was advancing, roaring some leonine war song, smashing windows and lampposts with their scaly tails, while their goaty parts erupted in farts that turned into a poisonous, swirling cloud, rising ever higher.

"I thought so," said Dr. Grob, nodding benignly. "A demonstration of the Peace Scouts' Love Brigade. Nice kids, full of vitality."

"But don't you see . . ." cried Anderson, glancing sideways at the doctor and hurriedly averting his eyes from what he saw.

"You seem frightened," Dr. Grob remarked solicitously. "What's the matter with you?"

Instead of a reply, Anderson made for the door. As a farewell greeting, Dr. Grob rose on his hind legs and gave Anderson an encouraging lick on the cheek. He was seen out by smiling Dr. Miller, who, having in the meantime unzipped his hip pocket, smartly opened the door with his tail. "He looks already much improved," Grob remarked to his colleague.

On his way down in the elevator, Anderson no longer knew whether he was boy or girl, man or chimera. It was already dark when he got out into the fogbound street, and he could see only vague shapes, neither real nor unreal, like a face in a tree, open to different interpretations.

He shuddered at the thought of going back to Dr. Grob next Friday at six P.M. and wondered whether it was worth the \$100. But what else could he do?



"Head down and keep slithering. This is an opportunity that may never come again."