

"You have become a demigod!"

Mind Over Matter

by Raymond Z. Gallun

Illustrated by M. Marchioni

IF ever I am badly injured, take me to Dr. Toussaint. If ever, after an accident, the company physicians pronounce me dead, take me to Dr. Toussaint anyway."

This was one of Lloyd Jorgensen's favorite sayings spoken half humorously, half ruefully, yet with a deep undercurrent of seriousness and respect.

For you see Lloyd Jorgensen was a crack test flyer for the Hartman Rocket Plane Corporation. He was the biggest, quietest, and probably the nerviest cuss in the outfit, and he knew what his job meant. He knew also Dr. Pierre Toussaint.

Their comradeship was based on mutual admiration, the one for the other. Toussaint admired Jorgensen for his cold, reckless courage and for his almost heroic proportions and physique. As for Jorgensen, the dapper little savant aroused in him a feeling that was close to awe.

Nor was the emotion unfounded. To the test flyer, and in fact to the world at large, Toussaint was not a mere scientist; he was something of a wizard.

And yet a restless, ruthless energy drove him on with the spirit of the conqueror, seeking new fields to bow to his will. His brain, keen and quick as an electric spark, was of the kind with which the world is gifted or cursed, not more, perhaps less, than once in a century.

It was natural in the circumstances that Toussaint should be the ruling personality of the friendship between Jorgensen and himself. Not that he ever wished to dominate his comrade—he was far too human basically for that—but he was assertive and outspoken; he was very sure of what he thought was a proper course to follow.

IT HAPPENED one day when Toussaint came to deliver some blue prints which he had worked out for the Hartman Corporation. Completing his business, he decided to look for Jorgensen. They often played chess or billiards, or just chatted, in the lounge of the pilots' quarters.

He found the massive Scandinavian in his rooms. A moment of scrutiny told him that Jorgensen's feelings were not of the best.

"Either you are unwell, Lloyd, or you are in love," he stated.

The big blond shrugged disconsolately but said nothing.

"Not only in love but—what should I say?—there is a fly in the ointment," the savant added. "May I be so brave as to inquire for details, my little one?"

Jorgensen's grin was sheepish. No use to try to hold anything back from Toussaint.

"Joyce is afraid I'll get killed or maimed for life, Pete," he said. "She won't marry me unless I quit my present job. To make matters brief, that's just what I'm going to do. It will be easy enough to get a position in the offices. I—"

An explosive laugh from Toussaint cut him short. "In an office!" he burst out shrilly, his round blue eyes widening. "You, the strongest of men, in an office, to become, as time passes, a great, fat, sleepy toad—in an office! Bah! It is droll, it is sad, it is disgusting!"

Jorgensen's jaw hardened with anger. "Well," he growled, "I'm free to do as I choose, am I not?"

"But yes, of course, my friend," was Toussaint's quick, placating response. "Only listen. I am older than you; I know. Once I was in love. My woman refused me for the same reason. My work was dangerous. What did I do? I chose my work instead of the woman. Now I am glad—more so than I can tell you."

Toussaint paused for breath. Then he started off again: "You do not believe that experimenting involves physical risk? You do not remember my right hand? Look at it! It seems exactly like my left, only it is artificial. Some years ago I was a bit careless. A beam from a powerful cosmic-ray generator struck it, and *goof*, there was nothing left but lifeless bone. From rubber, from metal, from small electro-magnets, from tiny platinum wires, I made another hand, as good, as useful, as if it was of flesh.

"How was it accomplished? Ah, my old one, that is something sane to talk about! It has great possibilities! The electromagnets, the rods attached to them, serve my mechanical hand in place of muscles. A little battery carried over my heart, supplies them with energy. The fine platinum threads penetrate the stump of my arm, and touch the motor nerves which once controlled the movements of my real hand. They collect the minute electric currents produced by the nerve fibers.

"Though not basically electrical, nerve impulses do create small quantities of electricity, proportional to the strength of the impulses. These currents are amplified until they can work the electromagnets. I command my mechanical hand to move, just as if it was a living member, and, behold, the fingers of it, all of it, respond perfectly. See! It can grip almost as good as yours. I will show you."

Toussaint grasped Jorgensen's brown paw and gave it a hearty squeeze. "I apologize for having bored you, my unhappy giant," he said. "But come! You told me that you wished to resign. It is best to put unpleasantness out of the way as soon as possible. Is it not so?" The scientist's smile was faintly uncertain.

"Oh, go to the devil, Pete!"

JORGENSEN didn't resign. There was a deep-hidden sensitiveness within him. A sleepy toad in an office! He could not bear the thought. Besides, he loved flying. He renewed his contract for six months. Perhaps in that time he could win Joyce over.

In his decision, however, fate spoke. Two months afterward, the Grim Reaper made a vicious pass at him. Late one afternoon he climbed blithely into a new plane, X-96, which it was hoped would reach, in the upper stratosphere, a speed in excess of three thousand two hundred miles an hour.

But the ship had barely attained an altitude of three hundred feet when a port-side rocket tube, weakened by some flaw in the metal, exploded, damaging the wing surfaces. Erratically the craft shot groundward. Jorgensen could not get clear. They pulled him from the wreckage, a gory pulp of a man who quivered now and then, and in whom the pulse of life still fluttered feebly.

Fate was pulling the strings again, for Dr. Pierre Toussaint was an eye-witness to the accident. No need to waste precious time calling him. He mastered the situation at once, giving shrill, staccato orders.

In seconds they had the test pilot loaded into an ambulance. In five minutes the twisted flesh of him lay sprawled on a white table in Dr. Toussaint's laboratory. With a gesture the little man sent the others away.

A momentary moisture of rebellion and grief blurred his round eyes. He had not expected this to happen. Subconsciously he must have endowed Jorgensen with some of the immortal qualities of a demigod. But that his hero could revert to dust was starkly evident now.

His gaze grew clear and hard, his lips tightened. With a reckless precision his slender fingers darted here and there. Dr. Pierre Toussaint, wizard, was at work

LLOYD JORGENSEN battled his way from oblivion, regaining a sluggish and precarious consciousness. Dimly he was cognizant of his surroundings, or, rather, the lack of them. He seemed suspended in a black void, in which great balls of fire burst and spattered every few seconds, bringing with them twinges of exquisite pain, of intense heat, of bitter cold. He seemed to hear grating, roaring sounds.

What was this place? The abode of some post-mortal existence? Heaven, or, far more likely, hell? His brain was too fogged for him to follow the idea through. But he must have died, or he must have met with an accident. Else, why was that fearful memory spinning inside him—a memory in which he clutched useless controls and hurtled down toward a row of hangars?

Maybe Toussaint was at hand. He tried to call the savant's name, but his vocal chords produced no

sound that he could hear. He had no sensation of breathing. He tried to raise himself from wherever he was lying. The only result was a terrific rush of searing agony that almost made him lose his hold on the thin thread of consciousness that he had grasped.

A pretty face—Joyce's—floated across his inner vision. Delirium made him think that it was real. He attempted to clutch at it, as a baby reaches for a bright object. The pain the effort brought drove him back into the empti-ness from which he had so recently emerged.

An indefinite time later, the realiza-tion of some sort of existence returned. Jorgensen was more comfortable now, his thoughts clearer. However, the things he had noted before—the dark-ness, the flashes of light, the sounds, and the pain—were still present. After a while, as though a drug had been ad-ministered to him, he seemed to fall asleep.

And so it went on, a period of wake-fulness followed by a period of slum-ber, like night and day. It happened so often that he lost count, but he was sure that weeks at least had passed.

His mind could function normally once more. The gloom around him per-sisted, but the agony was gone except for very rare twinges. The roaring, grating sounds and the flashes of light grew less frequent and seemed confined to definite intervals of time. He knew that he was recovering from the acci-dent, and he was glad. At least he was not dead.

Yet everything was puzzling, filling him with a tense anxiety. Still he could not move or speak; he could not see or hear anything familiar.

AT LAST, when he was almost re-signed to an eternity of jumbled, mean-ingless impressions, a voice spoke to him from somewhere—just a few tired, re-assuring words:

"Have patience, my old one. We have a great reason to rejoice. You cannot talk to me yet, but to-morrow, I promise you, we shall chat a little once more. For the present, this must be all. Rest!"

Lloyd Jorgensen did not rest at once. The voice had been Toussaint's with-out question, and yet there had been something oddly keen about it—metallic, almost. Perhaps it was only because he had not heard coherently for so long. There was no sense in allowing so trivial a matter to become troublesome. He dismissed it and fell asleep.

Toussaint was as good as his word. It was the little savant's voice, sounding queerly elfin with its new, ringing, tin-klng tones, that aroused Jorgensen.

"Speak, my small giant!" he com-manded gayly. "I long to hear you tell me that you are well. It has been sixty-three days since last we really conversed. Speak, or I shall go mad with suspense!" There was triumph throbbing in his words.

The test pilot felt a curious wave of reverence. "That I am as well as I am is probably nobody's fault but yours, Pete," he said.

That he was actually speaking, he knew, for he could hear what he was saying. His words possessed that same odd, metallic quality that Toussaint's displayed. It annoyed him a trifle.

"Do not waste time on useless flat-tery. Tell me more!" the savant or-dered eagerly.

"No," Jorgensen responded. "I feel all right, and I'm sane. That's enough for just at present. You tell *me* some-thing! Will I be a sound man again? Will I recover my sight and the use of my limbs? For Heaven's sake, spill it!"

The emphasis of Toussaint's answer was almost electrical. It was almost terrifying.

"Yes, my old one, yes! You shall see and hear and feel and move about again. You shall be sounder, more ac-tive than ever before."

"Then I'm happy," said Jorgensen. "Do you know what I intend to do? I'm going to quit flying for good. I'm going to marry Joyce. I'm going to get away from machines, at least for a while—away from anything that has wheels to turn around inside it, or is moved by man-harnessed energy. I'm sick of that sort of stuff!"

The scientist's tones became faintly reproachful. "Can you talk thus, Lloyd, when I have made so many plans? Do you still think of the woman when the future holds so much that is glorious and inspiring?"

"What do you mean?" Jorgensen de-manded in rebellious puzzlement.

"I cannot say more yet, my stubborn giant." Toussaint chuckled benignantly. "To-morrow you shall know everything. You will be completely recovered then. There is work for me to do. Once more I ask for patience. That is all."

Jorgensen tried to cry out in protest; but his power of speech was suddenly gone, and he could hear nothing with meaning. Again he was imprisoned in a dark void. A sedative stilled his tumultuous thoughts.

TO-MORROW became to-day. Lloyd Jorgensen awoke abruptly. At first everything was just as it had been for over two months. Then there was a snap like the closing of a switch. A great change came. The world materialized around him.

Toussaint was bending over him, haggard and gaunt from overwork, yet smiling. The savant seemed to wait. Then, impatiently, he gestured with his slender hands.

"Up, my lazy colossus!" he piped shrilly. "Is it that you cannot feel your health and your strength? Up! Do not keep me hanging in the air!"

Further invitation was quite unnecessary. Jorgensen was on his feet in the twinkling of an eye. The ease and swiftness of his motion startled him.

Pierre Toussaint rubbed nervous fingers together. That he expected a crisis was evident. He cleared his throat and began to speak in a low, steady manner that was not quite like his usual self.

"It is time to—what should I say?— pull the cat out of the bag, my old one. I can startle you now and explain after-ward, or I can explain now and startle you later. Since these are my only two alternatives, I prefer to get the startling over and done with immediately."

He pointed toward a corner of the room. "For the convenience of the occasion I have placed there a large mirror," he went on. "I ask that you examine yourself in it."

Wondering what it was all about, Jorgensen did as he was told. Where-upon he received a double shock. First he did not see himself at all—only what he thought was a reflection of the laboratory equipment. Had he become a disembodied spirit? He brushed his hand dazedly across his forehead. No; he was not a spirit, for the mirror threw back to him the image of a moving hand—his hand—yet it glistened with the silvery sheen of metal.

A thick arm of the same substance supported it, and the arm in its turn was attached to a huge cylindrical torso as smooth and shiny as a new flywheel. There was a second arm and hand on the other side of this body. Two gleaming, jointed pillars, terminating in broad, rubber-shod feet, supported the monstrous thing's weight, and a head shaped like a pyramid rested on its vast shoulders.

Jorgensen started at the colossal doll, and its great, quartz-lensed eyes stared back. He understood at last. It was the image, the reflection, of himself. By some bizarre alchemy he had become a being of aluminum, steel, glass, and rubber. Deep within him he could feel the throbbing whir of some vital mechanism.

"God!" he choked. "Oh, God!" Though pain-racked, the words were peculiarly without specific feeling. His emotions were stunned.

THE little doctor tapped him solicitously on the shoulder. "You will know presently what I know, my dear pal," he said softly, "for I shall tell you. You are depressed now. You should not be. You have become a demigod. You should rejoice as I am rejoicing, and in the end you shall, I assure you—unless you do something very rash. Glorious things, glorious adventures, lie ahead. I will explain. Do not think; do not interrupt. Only listen!"

The robot nodded dumbly.

"When I brought you here after the plane crashed, in no circumstances could you have lived, as you were, more than half an hour," Toussaint began. "What did I do? What *could* I do? I removed your brain from your skull, salvaging it from the wreckage of your body. I placed it in a bath of oxygenated fluid containing nourishing food elements. I caused the fluid to circulate through the veins and arteries of your brain by means of a small mechanical pump which served you then and serves you now as a heart.

"I kept the fluid always perfectly pure by means of a filter system. The oxygen content was constantly renewed, the carbon dioxide, and other wastes, removed. Necessary gland secretions were supplied in

their normal quantities. The temperature was held steady at blood heat. It was all quite simple, entirely automatic.

"Your brain lived, harboring—what should I say?—a trapped soul, an impotent intellect. It could receive no real impressions of the outside world, only false and incoherent sensations of light and sound from the severed and raw optic and auditory nerves, and similarly jangled impressions, including great pain, from other crushed nerve tissue. It had no body. I must give it one, else its life was worse than death.

"You can guess much of the rest. This hand—this mechanical hand of mine—gave me the needed suggestion. I made your form as it is now. I made it strong—far stronger than you were. Thousands of electromagnets went into its construction, almost as many delicate relay systems. As a source of power I installed in it a sub-atomic energy cell that can hardly run down in a hundred years. Countless fine platinum wires were prepared, ready to be attached to the motor nerves leading out of your brain, when I started the final assembling.

"Meanwhile, I was trying to give you senses. This phase of my task was somewhat more difficult, for I had never worked with sensory nerves before—only motor nerves controlling the movements of muscles. I constructed eyes, they were television cameras, really; I made a microphone to serve you in place of ears; I devised artificial organs of touch, and artificial organs of balance. Smell and taste I did not trouble with, for I considered them superfluous. I fitted my creations with platinum threads for attachment to the various sensory nerve ends leading into your brain. All this was quite simple.

"The great trick, my friend, was to cause those platinum threads to carry a properly modulated electric current to stimulate your nerve cells in just the way that would make you see and hear and feel properly. Tests were necessary. In part I experimented with you, and when I did, many of those jangled sensations of the first days were doubtless repeated, even though your injuries were healed. But I did not wish to make your position unbearable, so I did most of my testing on a blind man and a deaf mute whom I called in for the purpose.

"Finally I was finished; I was successful. I began putting you, my Hercules, together. When I first spoke to you the work was already far advanced. The next time, we exchanged greetings, your voice nerves activating a sound diaphragm.

"And now, see! You are as you are, my old one. Can you not tell me that you are not too displeased with what has happened?" Toussaint waited, anxiety showing in his pale face and round eyes.

LLOYD JORGENSEN had a better grasp of matters now; he could realize a bit more clearly what his outlandish position might mean to him.

"This is what you called glorious, Pete?" he asked. "I don't quite see it if it is so. Better tell me."

His words seemed mild, composed, and matter-of-fact; yet in them was a hint of a rising fury that might easily swell to murderous proportions.

"Don't see it?" Pierre Toussaint shrilled. "In the name of a green beard, is it not clear? You have become a genie of the Nights Arabian! Your form will never grow tired! You are more powerful than twenty bulls! All of you that is of flesh, your brain, is sealed up, protected from injury, from germ infections, by metal, cushioned by the most efficient shock-absorbing system that I could devise! It is, for all one may know, almost immortal, since it is not dependent upon a weak human body for its sustenance.

"What shall you do with this mechanical form of yours? Continue testing stratospheric planes? Bah, mere play for a child! You shall go on, up, my old one, into space! I have plans—new fuels, better rocket tubes. The terrific acceleration will not trouble you at all. Nor the cold of the void—nothing! You shall walk on the crater bottoms of the Moon, and on the deserts of Mars. Perhaps you shall enter the hot atmosphere of Jupiter, or even plumb the region of the stars. It is colossal! My great child, why can you not understand it as I do?"

Breathless, Toussaint paused. He was sincere, perfectly so, in everything that he had said.

"Where is Joyce?" Jorgensen asked with seeming irrelevance, his words still deadly mild.

Perhaps the voice diaphragm did not register his feelings quite as they were, but his armored

shoulders hunched menacingly.

The little doctor looked worried, hurt. "You can understand, Lloyd, that you must put such things behind you," he said. "The woman was properly grief-stricken when she was informed that you were dead. She attended the funeral of your original body. Now she has gone away—I do not know where. By this time she is doubtless herself again. Nature will be kind to her, as it often is to all living creatures. But there is no reason to remember."

The robot that was Jorgensen edged a little closer to Toussaint. "There is no reason?" he queried calmly. "Do you know what you have done to me, Pete? You have stolen my right to be called human, and to enjoy the things human beings were meant to enjoy. You want me to be a pawn in the fulfillment of your dreams.

"Do you remember that day when I was going to quit flying and you laughed? What followed was not your fault, yet I hold you responsible. Perhaps I'm crazy, but I want revenge. At least you could have let me die. Now I'm going to take these two steel hands you have given me and crush you with them."

Toussaint stared at the advancing metal bulk. Nothing that could be read showed in its gleaming, quartz eyes. The pulse in the scientist's white throat throbbed quickly.

"It is not like that, Lloyd!" he cried. "It cannot be! I did my best, I swear! And I am not infallible! Mistakes—every one makes them!"

Toussaint was not a coward; he was not pleading for his life, but for some-thing more elusive. Understanding, faith, was what he wanted from the cool, silent test pilot who had been his hero for so long.

HOWEVER, the automaton continued its advance. A heavy chair splintered in its path. Its long arms, clawed with steel, reached forward.

Then Pierre Toussaint, wizard, acted. Like a released spring he leaped to close quarters. A dial on the breast of the mechanical man, turned in his grasp. There was a click and the glistening colossus was still. Toussaint opened a small door in its torso and drew a vial from his pocket. Quickly he poured a portion of its contents into the funnel-like end of a tube which led into the vitals of his creation. When this was done he reclosed the door and stood waiting for a full minute.

"Mind over matter," he muttered rue-fully. "I am sorry, but it was that or worse."

He returned the dial to its original position. The robot swayed, steadied itself.

"You feel better, Lloyd?" Toussaint queried solicitously.

Jorgensen, who once more had been steeped in familiar gloom, surprised himself by saying "Yes."

He did feel better, much better. A thrilling warmth and a sense of well-being had come over him. Toussaint had been right. Nothing could please him more now than hurtling at terrific speed through the cold emptiness of space—the planets, the stars. This opportunity against the other—how could he have been such a fool?

"In the name of sense, Pete, what did you do to me?" he demanded.

The scientist hung his head just a trifle. "I am not glad, my old one," he said. "I did not wish to tamper with your emotions. It was desecration. But I could not see you unhappy. I put into the nourishing fluid of your brain a certain liquid which—what should I say?—I prepared beforehand for the uncertainties of the occasion. Adrenalin is part of it, and something else.

"Remarkable, is it not, how it changes one's feelings? I must never let you become depressed again. We shall pre-prepare soon for our adventure. Perhaps I shall become as you are, if I can train a surgeon. Perhaps sometimes we shall both return to the flesh if we so desire. Already I know much of why protoplasm lives, you remember. However, it is not fitting for me to say more, my old one. I am very, very tired. I must sleep."

He threw himself down on a near-by couch. Jorgensen watched him benignly until his eyes closed and his features relaxed. If the metal visage could have smiled, it would have done so.

Filled with a wild, ecstatic longing, the robot man hurried out of the house and onto the lawn. It was very still. The evening air of late autumn was frosty, but he did not feel the cold. Stars were beginning to twinkle. Jorgensen sent a steel fist clanging against his armored chest. Over the treetops, at the edge of

the city a half mile away, the Moon rose, beckoning with a call like that of home.