



"Your brain shall be replaced by a much better one!"

THE BRAIN OF MANY BODIES

by E. A. GROSSER

The world marveled at the perpetual youth of the mighty Air Chief—and Wrane Randall got the inside story. But little value did he find this information, strapped to the Table of Death, a victim of the most heinous plan of body stealing in history—for his body was to continue life, ruled by an alien brain!

CHAPTER I

THE BODY STEALERS

WRANE RANDALL slouched in one of Limpy's chairs completely engrossed with thought. He didn't see the Air Cop eyeing him from the doorway; nor did he see Limpy nudge the barman and say:

"They're after him again. Take him a highball and ask if he knows Moses."

The barman looked at Randall, then at the Air Cop. "I'll bet that's why they call him Rainy," he said mournfully; "there's always a storm when he's around."

"Sure," agreed Limpy with a grin, "but he's a good customer and always pays later for the damage when he tries to take the place apart, so get ready for a blackout."

The barman took the drink to Randall's table, set it down and mopped the varnished wood with his towel. "Limpy wants to know if you're acquainted with Moses," he muttered indetectably.

"Huh?" asked Randall, looking up quickly.

"Don't look now," warned the barman, "but they're after you again." He nodded toward the door.

The barman left and several seconds later Randall turned lazily to look at the doorway. He eyed the Air Cop, mildly surprised. So far as he knew, they couldn't pin anything on him except incipient vagrancy, and while the situation demanded attention—immediate attention—it wasn't a penitentiary offense. He turned back to his table, looked sternly at his glass and attempted to lose himself in a maze of low finance.

"Wrane Randall, rocketman?" asked a voice at his side a few moments later

Randall looked up at the Air Cop, then got slowly to his feet. It appeared that he was being polite, but he had discovered long ago that there was nothing like being prepared.

"Yeah, that's me," he admitted. "What do you want?"

"Come along."

The Air Cop grasped Randall's wrist and tried to flip his arm up behind his back. But Randall couldn't see things that way and presented the Air Cop with a fistful of fingers.

The Air Cop did a quick-step adagio backward

on rubbery legs, tripped over a chair and went down. And the lights went out! Randall leaped for the nearest exit, went through to the alley and found himself in the grip of two husky patrolmen.

This time each had an arm and he wasn't in any position to engage in sanguinary retaliations. Especially so, a moment later when one of the patrolmen jabbed a sapper into his side and turned on the juice. All the "jump" went out of Randall's body immediately.

They carried him back to the entrance of Limpy's where they found the Air Cop waiting.

"Ah, got him, I see," he approved, wiping the blood from his mouth with an expensive handkerchief. Nothing, in an Air Cop's opinion, was too good for an Air Cop, and as they were the private army of the Air Chief, outranking all local, state and national officers, they were in a position to indulge their opinions.

THE paralysis of the sapper was wearing off. Randall gave a premonitory heave. One of the patrolmen brought out the sapper again to quiet him, but the Air Cop took the weapon and motioned the patrolman away.

"Go to headquarters and get a couple of squads of men, then come back here and rip all the wiring out of this dive. You needn't be gentle, and you needn't put it back," he said with a grin. "Teach them a lesson."

Then he turned to Randall. "I have orders to bring you in, in good condition—no bruises. So move along quietly and don't count on any chances for escape. At the first sign of your getting mean, I'll give you enough of the sapper to make you be a good boy for several hours. My ship is on the Administration Building roof. Now, march ahead!"

Randall staggered along, wishing his legs would behave, but somewhat relieved that he wasn't to be accorded the usual treatment. When the Air Cops went after someone, it was usually merely an informal sentence of death. For instance, when they had an Irredentist, the common procedure was to allow an attempt to escape, then take in a dead man.

He was shoved into the tiny, steel cell at the rear of the one-man prison rocket, and the Air Cop went forward to the controls. A moment later Randall heard the thrumming roar of the rockets and felt their thrust. The air whined and screamed around

the tiny ship, then subsided to a shrill whispering. And Randall knew they had reached the stratosphere.

He was filled with sudden envy. There was power! And speed! But it was power and speed reserved for the exclusive use of the Air Chief and his men. Those rockets must be atomic, as it was rumored they were. Anyway, they were infinitely better than the crude, tricky hydrogen-oxygen rockets that the rest of the world used. And even those had been given to the world by the first predecessor of the present half-legendary, but very real ruling force that was called the Air Chief.

Randall wondered at the genius of that man of a hundred years ago who had in one short year created these powerful atomic rockets, subdued all the nations of the world with his strange, invincible weapons, then started the construction of his vast city of Yss in central Asia. Only when the city was completed and his overlordship of the earth secure, had the Air Chief given the world the inferior rocketships and a thousand other equally harmless advantages to knit the world into one gigantic whole.

Randall differed radically with those who fought the Air Chief, as did the Irredentists. He realized fully the international anarchy that had preceded the Air Chief's coming. Even a despotic international rule was better than none at all, he maintained. But riding rockets like these and realizing that he could never be at the controls of such a ship, was almost enough to make a flag-waving, speech-making nationalist out of the most peaceful rocketman in the world. With these rockets nothing would be impossible. The moon would be easy! Then Mars and Venus! Then Mercury, the Asteroids, and the Moons of Jupiter! And after those . . .

FOR an hour he listened to the half-heard, half-felt roaring song of the rockets, and longing and envy filled his being. He even forgot the dangers of his own position. Then the rockets stuttered, the song shifted to the forepart of the ship, and jolted the ship strongly. The shrill whispering of the thin air rose to a scream and Randall knew they were descending.

The plane shuddered again to the fore-rockets, then the keel jets wracked the ship, then abruptly the ship was still and silent. Randall wished that there was a window to his cell so he could see

where they had landed.

A moment later the wish proved unnecessary. The door of the cell opened and his captor motioned for him to come out. Randall stepped out into the bright sunlight, and was numbly aware that it had been night in New York when he had been taken.

He stared around as two guards stepped forward to take positions at his sides. He marveled at the slender spires of the buildings, the thronged streets, flashing aircraft. And he knew he was in the forbidden city, Yss.

They hurried him across the roof to the elevators, and started down at such a speed that Randall's stomach hadn't more than time enough for one good flip-flop, then his knees were buckling with the deceleration. They led him to a somberly quiet part of the building that Randall took for a hospital, and they halted at a desk. One of the guards spoke briefly with the girl. She looked curiously at Randall.

"I'll tell Dr. Brophy immediately," she said, rising and going into an inner office.

When she returned, she stood to one side and motioned for them to enter. Randall and his guards went into the inner office and found themselves confronted by four men—two of them were hospital orderlies who moved forward to take charge of Randall. One of the two older men dismissed the guards, then turned to his companion with a smile.

"Well? . . . What do you think of him, Torvald?"

Torvald was eyeing Randall with critical eyes. "We could have done better," he said unenthusiastically.

"You're wrong," argued the one Randall thought to be Brophy. "We can tattoo this fellow's brown eyes blue, raise the hairline, remold the face a bit—all superficial work. The important thing is that, according to his registration, this man's skeletal structure, and especially the skull, is the counterpart of the—the other's. Of course, Randall's nose seems to have taken a turn for the worse, but we can fix that easily enough."

Torvald shrugged. "I think we could have done better," he maintained.

Randall tried to ease himself out of the orderlies' grips, but they weren't to be taken by surprise. And they being big and husky, Randall was sure that a struggle would be useless. He faced

the two older men.

"What's this all about?" he demanded.

Neither of them deigned to answer, but Dr. Brophy gestured to the orderlies to take him away. As though by prearrangement, they hustled him out of the room and to a gleaming operating theater. They lifted him helplessly into the air, then strapped him to the operating table. After checking carefully, they left without a word.

RANDALL lay motionless on the table, unable to move even his head. A padded metal clamp clutched the sides of his cranium securely. He could only stare up at the bunched lights above him and wonder what would come next. Though it was probably only minutes, it seemed hours before Brophy and Torvald came. Brophy was still arguing with his companion.

"It *will* work, I tell you," Brophy insisted. "I have done it before, and this time by using my Gen-Rays to facilitate healing, it will be simple. You are new here. That is your trouble. You can't realize that we mean it when we say we are centuries ahead of the outside world. Have you got that negative?"

Torvald gave him a flat folder. Stem took out a negative and fastened it in a bracket so that it covered completely the mouth of a radiation machine. Satisfied, he turned to Torvald.

"You seem to think that the transference, itself, is the most wonderful and unbelievable part. That is merely a very refined technique. We have been doing that for a century. The Air Chief himself first taught us that. But my Gen-Ray! That is *mine!* It takes surgery away from the sciences and makes it an art. The negative allows the rays to strike the living flesh in varying strengths, and under the rays *the flesh molds itself.*"

Torvald looked doubtful. "Possibly," he said.

Brophy snorted. "Small minds from the outer world," he commented. "Only we here in Yss have the bravery and science to really delve into the unknown. Well, first we'll have to break this fellow's nose and set it right. You administer the anaesthetic."

"Say, for God's sake! Tell me what you're going to do!" Randall pleaded, rolling his eyes to look at them in turn.

Brophy smiled shrewdly. "You are a fretful person," he commented dryly. "Millions of people would like to be in your position and know that

their body was destined to rule the world."

"My body? What about my brain?" Something in the doctor's words sent a chill through Randall.

Dr. Brophy shrugged slightly. "It shall be replaced with a much better one," he comforted.

"But what about *me?*"

Brophy shrugged again. "Your brain will have to be destroyed. The Air Chief cannot have a former tenant of the body he is using walking around alive. It wouldn't be proper, and besides, there won't be any body for you if it were. The one the Air Chief has at present is just about worn out. He wears them ragged in ten years. Then we have to find another for him and attend to the brain transference. The anaesthetic, Torvald."

"Do you mean," asked Randall quickly, "that it has been done before?"

"Certainly. The Air Chief himself is the one who taught us."

"Then the man who conquered the earth is the one who rules it now?"

"Yes," Brophy agreed, fussing with the radiation machine. "Torvald!" he snapped annoyedly. "The anaesthetic! I can't work while he is chattering."

Randall struggled to loose his head from the clamp, to keep his face out of the mask. He felt as though he had been caught in the cogs of a great machine and that it was dragging him irresistibly to destruction. It was nightmarish! He was powerless to escape. The mask descended over his mouth and nose and the anaesthetic blanked out his consciousness like a candle flame in the wind.

CHAPTER II

CONSPIRACY!

RANDALL awoke in bed, wondering how he had overcome Limpy's shrewdness and knowledge of his customer's finances. He had all the inward agonies of a hangover. Then he remembered the Air Cop and the two doctors. He sat up quickly, then held his head in his hands and regretted his hasty movement.

He stared down at the cover of the bed. It was heavily brocaded. He felt of it. It was yellow, and had a metallic feel. And though he had seen little of the metal of late and was consequently a poor judge, he bet himself that it was gold.

"Are you feeling better?" asked a soft, feminine

voice.

Randall looked to the source of the words and for a moment the world seemed to consist of clear gray eyes. . . . Then he saw the rest—an evenly featured young face with a few freckles on the nose, dark hair, and all set off to the very best advantage by a nurse's uniform. She was approaching, coming across the huge room to his side.

"Much better," he agreed, staring.

She flushed, then said coldly, "Don't let it get you down. As a rule, patients fall for their nurses, and usually regret it afterward. It is propinquity."

"I don't think so. . . . It's you."

She turned away, muttering something about "—fresh."

"Unspoiled, you mean," he corrected. "Well, how about getting me some clothes so I won't feel so d—darned helpless." Then he remembered Dr. Brophy's operation and added, "And I'd like to have a mirror."

She brought him a hand mirror. He took it and waited for her to speak.

"Sorry, no clothes," she said. "Patients stay in bed better when they know they will be nearly nude if they get up. It makes it much easier to handle them."

Randall grunted and deferred the argument to look at himself. The face he saw wasn't his own! For the first time since that fight in Sydney his nose was straight. His reflection had blue eyes instead of brown, the forehead was higher, and the eyes set deeper.

"A big improvement, don't you think?" asked a third person.

Randall looked up to meet Brophy's eyes. He waited without answering.

Brophy motioned the girl to leave, and when she had, he faced Randall. His eyes were hard and unemotional, as was his voice.

"You know what you face," he stated calmly. "The Air Chief will take your body, and your brain will be destroyed. And don't think that it *can't* happen. I have done it twice for the Air Chief, myself." He halted and seemed to be waiting for some comment from Randall.

"Well, admitting that," Randall prompted.

"You might escape that by cooperating with us. You might not only escape that, but be the richest and most powerful man in the world, subject only to a three-man board."

"Who are 'us' and this three-man board?"

"We are the scientific men of Yss. In this one giant city we have over a fifth of the scientists and research workers of the world. As soon as an outsider reaches prominence, he is brought here to work. We have made great advances, far beyond what the world at large suspects, but we work under rigid supervision. We are forbidden to investigate certain things, told to do others; we are only the laboratory assistants of the Air Chief. He controls everything. A hundred times we have been ordered to cease experimenting along a certain line, and for no visible reason."

"I can't see what all this has to do with me," said Randall.

"Just this!—you, instead, will become the ruler, under our control. There will be a brain destroyed, but a brain is not a very personalized bit of matter as far as appearance goes—not as far as ordinary acquaintance goes, anyway. *His* brain and not yours will die."

Randall locked his fingers in back of his head and settled himself comfortably. "This sounds a lot more interesting," he judged. "Go on."

Dr. Brophy smiled. "That's all," he said.

"Is that why you changed my eyes and face?"

"No," Dr. Brophy said. "We did that at the Air Chief's orders. The transplantation is always a great shock and he thought to lighten it as much as possible. Also, there are many memory-blanks after the operation, and his retinue's knowledge of that and our help, will make the switch possible. Are you going to help?"

"First, how did you change me this way? It's far better than plastic surgery."

"But most of the change was plastic surgery, then we healed the wounds and added flesh to your face by using a variant of mitogenetic rays that can be screened by silver salts. We photographed the Air Chief many times, made a composite negative that was lightest where your face was leaner than his, then screened the rays with that negative. The Gen-Rays, acting on the cells of your body, stimulated growth. You were chosen because your skeletal structure corresponded. Coloring your eyes was simply by the old tattooing method. Is that all?"

"Yes," said Randall sharply. "Why don't you simply transfer your own brain, or the one of someone you trust, to my body. And don't tell me you trust me!"

"We don't, but we are forced to seek your aid," said Dr. Brophy coldly. "Skeletal structures differ, and your cranium will hold your brain, or the Air Chief's—not ours. You were selected after we had searched thousands of records. The Air Chief supervised that work personally."

"He seems to have his fingers in everything," Randall commented dryly. He thought quickly. When he looked up, his eyes and mouth were hard. "I'm with you," he said.

"Good," the doctor returned. "I have scheduled the operation for ten o'clock—that is two hours from now. Rest quietly until then. I'll have to put you under, and create the appearances of the operation having been completed, so you will need your strength." He turned and left.

THE girl came back almost immediately. But she seemed to have changed greatly. Her face was set firmly with determination as she approached Randall. Then he saw that she had a tiny pistol in her hand, and that it pointed directly at him. His hair moved as though a chill wind had blown suddenly on the back of his neck.

He looked at her face, saw that she was steeling herself to do something that was unpleasant to her—and, he suspected, even more unpleasant to him. If he could make her smile. . . .

"Gosh! Trouble sure loves me!" he mourned, searching her face anxiously for some response. There was none. "I always thought I'd be safe if I stayed in bed," he continued.

She was only a few feet away. The bore of the tiny pistol looked like a rocket jet to Randall. He felt a chilly perspiration beading his forehead. Something like this would happen when he had just found out that the world was his oyster!

Her lips trembled, and his spirits soared with sudden hope, only to be dashed abruptly as her finger tightened on the trigger. She was close enough so that he could have reached the gun, but he knew that he couldn't wrench it away from her before she pulled the trigger. And though the pistol was small, he was well aware of the destructive explosiveness of the tiny bullets. Sponges would be in order for him afterward. God! If only he could make her smile! . . . Or even talk!

"Why are you going to shoot me?"

"I *can't* let you live!" she said huskily, revealing the strain she felt. "I *can't*! A Science Board would be worse than the Air Chief. And if you die, maybe

the Air Chief will die before they can find another body for him."

"You talk like an Irredentist," he accused quickly.

"I *am* an Irredentist," she said proudly. "And this is a chance to free the world—a chance that may never come again. You *must* die!" Her finger tightened on the trigger again.

"Wait a minute!" he almost shouted. "Wait a minute! Don't be unreasonable—I'm not."

"You mean—"

"I mean I don't give a damn for politics—of any kind. It seems to be a pretty rough business the way you folks play it. All I care for is a good rocketship, and paydays. Now, you tell me what's on your mind and I'll see if we can't two-time those guys."

She hesitated, then shook her head. "No. We couldn't trust you."

HE WAS tensing his arm for the hopeless snatching at the weapon, when there was a sound at the door. The girl half-turned. Randall reached out quickly and twisted the pistol out of her hand, then turned to the door.

Dr. Torvald was standing in the doorway, staring at them.

"You *must* come in," said Randall with mocking politeness, and reinforced the invitation by leveling the pistol at the doctor.

Dr. Torvald saw the point and came in meekly. Randall sized him up carefully, then turned to the girl.

"You go to the window and watch the street," he ordered. "And you," he continued, turning to Dr. Torvald, "get out of those clothes and I'll lend you a sheet."

The girl faced the doctor. She was close to crying. "I'm sorry, doctor. It's my fault. I couldn't kill him!"

"That's a surprise to me," Randall snorted. "I'd have sworn your intentions were the worst." Then he frowned and looked from one to the other. "Say, are you an Irredentist, too?" he asked the doctor.

Neither of them said anything.

"I see you are," Randall growled. "Well, get over to that window, anyway! And you take those clothes off, and take them off fast!"

A few moments later he faced the pair, fully dressed. He smiled. Dr. Torvald was much less impressive with a sheet for a toga.

Dr. Torvald became even more dignified. "What

do you plan to do?" he asked.

"Well, I think I'll look up Brophy first. He was going to do the right thing by me."

"Any guard will take you to him," sneered Torvald. "He was arrested only a few minutes ago."

Randall's eyes widened with surprise, then narrowed. "Well, maybe I'll stumble over a rocketship, then," he said, knowing he could hardly just run into one. The building was filthy with the Air Chief's personal guards.

He looked at the girl. She had been silent since returning from the window. She avoided his eyes.

"What's your name?" he demanded.

"Patricia Holden," she replied in a muffled voice.

He leveled the pistol at Dr. Torvald, then swept her to him with his left arm, kissed her. He released her as the doctor started forward. The doctor halted quickly.

"Not very satisfactory," Randall said to the girl. "But it'll have to do. I may not be seeing you again."

He started toward the door, but she halted him.

"Do you love me?" she asked.

He looked at her in amused surprise, and smiled. "I could learn," he admitted.

"Then help us! Please! I'll do anything you ask. I'll marry you, if you want."

He stared down at her, found her eyes unwavering. He tried to read her purpose, but couldn't.

"You've forgotten that Brophy has been arrested. The only way I could help you is to die—messily. And I'm not in the mood. And another thing—I like to do my own chasing. It's kind of disconcerting to have a woman snap back at me."

She flushed, and he went on to the door. He halted, listened, then turned to ask:

"Any guards out here?"

Torvald said, "Yes," and the girl shook her head "no."

"You ought to get together," Randall criticized.

He opened the door, holding the gun ready in his pocket where it would be unnoticeable—unless he had to use it. But the girl had told the truth.

"Thanks, Pat," he called back. "And, so long! I'll be seeing you later—maybe."

CHAPTER III

THE AIR CHIEF

HE CLOSED the door after him, feeling fairly confident that they wouldn't dare raise any alarm. There was the awkward problem of explaining how a patient had been able to secure a pistol, and the patient could talk.

He looked around the room, saw that it was larger than the other and equally well furnished. It was obvious that they formed an apartment. There were two other doors.

He went to the nearer one and listened. He heard the slight scuffing of a movement, and went to the other door. He waited for several minutes, heard nothing, then opened the door and started out.

He halted abruptly, hand tightening on the gun in his pocket, and faced a trimly uniformed guard.

"Excellency!" said the guard, presenting arms.

Randall stared for a moment, then his fingers relaxed from his pistol. The guard thought he was the Air Chief! And why not? Hadn't he been chosen because he could be made to resemble the Chief? And Brophy and Torvald had done good work.

"Allow no one to go through this doorway, Guard," he ordered. "Neither in, nor out."

"Yes, Excellency," said the guard, remaining stiffly at attention.

Randall strode away, concealing his elation. The corridor joined a larger corridor and a few feet away he saw another guard stationed at a door. Randall strode up to him. The guard came to attention and waited.

Randall repeated his orders to the first guard, then started down the corridor, grinning as he thought of the time Pat and Torvald were going to have when they tried to get out of that room. Then his thoughts turned exultantly to escape. The masquerade had worked twice, so there was no reason why it shouldn't work all the way to the roof and get him a rocketship—if he didn't meet the real Air Chief.

He stepped into an elevator. "All the way up," he ordered.

The operator closed the door, started up and stopped almost immediately.

"This is the fiftieth floor, Excellency," the operator said, trying to keep his eyes off Randall.

“Your private elevator is at the other end of the corridor.” He hesitated, then added, “I will show you the way, Excellency, if you wish.”

Randall faced the man quickly. “Why?” he demanded, afraid that the fellow suspected.

The fellow paled, was frightened. “A-As one of the Household Corps I was ordered to hold myself ready to assist Your Excellency in any way when it seemed that you—you might act as though you had forgotten.”

Randall remembered Dr. Brophy’s words—that the brain transplantation caused memory lapses. Evidently orders had been issued to take care of that matter. “Show me the way,” he said with relief.

The elevator man led him down the corridor to another shaft, summoned the elevator.

“His Excellency wishes to go to the roof,” he instructed the new man.

Randall was assisted into the elevator as though he were an invalid, and the ride upward was much slower than he knew to be possible.

“Shall I assist you, Your Excellency?” the man asked when they came to a stop.

“No,” said Randall. “I think I can make it.”

Feigning weakness, he left the elevator, then halted abruptly. Facing him was his mirror-image, the face he remembered seeing in the mirror that Pat had given him before he had escaped. Only this time he wasn’t looking into a mirror.

The image purpled with anger, opened his mouth.

“Guards!” he bawled.

Randall ducked back into the elevator and slammed the door before the operator could see. The man looked at Randall uncomprehendingly.

“What—?” he started.

“Down!” snapped Randall. “It’s a revolt!”

That was a word the man understood. The elevator descended swiftly. Randall’s mind raced. He hadn’t seen any stairways—probably there were none; only elevators.

“Your apartments, Excellency,” said the operator as he brought the elevator to a stop and opened the door.

“Stop all elevators!” Randall ordered, getting out.

“The master switches are in your apartments, Excellency.”

“Then warn all the operators you can reach, not to answer calls to the roof. We must isolate them.”

He turned, not knowing which way to go, but a

uniformed servant came and bowed submissively.

“My apartments,” said Randall. “Lead!” Then to impress the urgency for speed, added, “And hurry!”

RANDALL felt like a modern Paul Revere. But events were moving smoothly, so smoothly that he felt a bit suspicious. He followed the servant into a large room. Two men sat at complex control panels and a third, seemingly in command of the trio, sat a little distance from them. They leaped to their feet, saluting.

“Cut out the elevators!” snapped Randall with a silent prayer.

The two men leaped back to their control boards to obey, but the third came toward Randall. Then he came to attention.

“Revolt,” Randall explained tersely, and kept his features rigid to conceal his doubt.

“Dr. Brophy, Excellency?” asked the officer.

Randall nodded. “I think they are still on the roof,” he added. “They performed the operation, but didn’t destroy the other brain. Instead, they transferred it to my old body and revived it first, intending to seize control before I recovered. Have you any suggestions? I am at a disadvantage.”

The officer interpreted the last as Randall hoped he would, and suggested quickly, “We should order the Air Guards to prevent anyone taking off from this building, Excellency.”

“Do that.”

The officer turned and gave the order to the men. Then he faced Randall again. “Excellency, I also suggest that we communicate with the Household Guards, have them gather in force at every elevator. Then we could switch them in and they could attack.”

“Do that, also,” agreed Randall.

While the officer gave the necessary orders, Randall looked around. Now that he had placed the Air Chief’s defenses at his own defense, there was nothing more that he could do except chance revealing his true identity. Even though it seemed not, there must be limits to the credibility of the too thoroughly disciplined guards. He had to keep out of the way until the Air Chief was disposed of.

The officer halted in the middle of his instructions and looked questioningly at Randall.

“Shoot to kill,” said Randall, and the words must have been quite in character with the personality he had blindly assumed. The officer transmitted the order.

“Now, I must rest,” said Randall, waiting for the officer to help him. There were a number of doors leading from the room and it might be just too bad if he took the wrong one. A hint of suspicion would bring the whole edifice of cards down around his ears. The officer hesitated, then as Randall leaned heavily on his shoulder, started toward one of the doors.

Randall found himself in a luxuriously furnished but oddly decorated room. The most general color was a deep ruby shade. The whole effect was decidedly unrestful and reminded Randall forcefully of the effect of colors on emotions. He no longer wondered at the strange brilliance of the Air Chief; a brilliance that had made it possible for him to subdue the world and keep it enslaved. Any person who could find such a room restful must either be mad, or possess a mental balance entirely beyond the understanding of the normal man. Randall felt himself longing for just one touch of green, or blue.

He sat down on the deeply cushioned couch and motioned the officer to go back to his duties, watched the man leave, then gave free rein to his curiosity.

He saw a massive, ornately carved switch on the wall. He got up, went closer. He heard a sound behind him and turned quickly, but he was alone in the room.

A door in the wall attracted his attention. The bottom of the door was three feet from the floor, and it was four feet high by two feet wide. He went to it, grasped the knob, pulled. It opened easily.

HE STARED. Slowly his hand slipped from the knob and fell to his side. Before his eyes was a huge transparent flask containing some transparent liquid. And in the liquid floated a small body, about three feet in height. It was thin, with the huge joints of a rachitic child. The skin was a reddish bronze and hideously wrinkled. But the head was fully the size of a mature man's.

Randall stepped back, disgust filling his soul. Was the Air Chief pitting his incomparable genius against the problem of creating life? Or, what was much more probable, was he trying to create a super-body for his own use? Randall smiled sickly. If that was the case, then he certainly hadn't succeeded—providing this was the best he had been able to do. Nature was still a better craftsman. Despite his situation, he chuckled.

And his chuckle was answered by another directly behind him. He wheeled, found himself facing the Air Chief. The Air Chief held a gun in a hand that didn't tremble.

Hard blue eyes drilled into Randall's, which were of a similar blue. There was the same high forehead, the same strong-willed mouth, the same well-fleshed face. The only difference was that the Air Chief was ten years older in body and looked thirty more, and was decades older mentally.

“My body amuses you?” the Air Chief asked gently, but the hardness of his face defied the gentleness.

Randall moved his hand closer to his pocket, and the pistol. The Air Chief's hand tightened suddenly, the weapon hummed and all the strength left Randall's body. He fell loosely to the floor.

He lay motionless, but though he couldn't move his body, his mind was clear. He could see and hear. The Air Chief came to his side, stooped carefully and took the pistol from Randall's pocket, then stepped back and sat down.

“Like all your kind, you are a fool,” he said wearily. “Did you suppose I might never want to get secretly to the hangars? There are many things that only I know. This weapon is the refinement of the ‘sapper.’ My shriveled, preserved body that you laughed at—” Suddenly he halted, pressed one hand to his heart. His face grayed with pain; his lips became discolored.

Randall recognized the pain for what it was—a heart attack. He hoped that it might be fatal. He cursed his own helplessness and fought to get up. His heart leaped when he felt his strength returning.

But when he tried to get to his feet, the Air Chief leveled the strange weapon with a trembling hand. The weapon hummed and Randall collapsed. Finally the Air Chief got slowly to his feet. He crossed the room to the open locker containing the tiny body, and closed the door. Then he returned and pulled a cord.

A moment later the door opened and the officer came into the room. The Air Chief covered him with the pistol as the officer's bewildered gaze went from one to the other.

“You have been a fool, Commander,” the Air Chief husked. “You obeyed this new body too soon. The operation has not yet been performed, and I doubt if even Dr. Brophy's Gen-Ray will enable a patient to walk away from the table.

“Communicate with Dr. Torvald . . . Have Dr.

Brophy brought from his cell. The change must be made immediately.”

Randall listened to his own death sentence, but it was heard through a hazy horror which made everything seem unreal. The Air Chief had claimed that hideous body as his own. It had been preserved for years—those chemicals and pumps kept it alive. He treasured it! And Randall knew instinctively that nothing on earth had ever produced a body such as that one.

CHAPTER IV

UTOPIA!

THE officer left to obey. The Air Chief lay back weakly on the couch and rested quietly. He seemed to be summoning his last reserves of strength. And Wrane Randall could only wait helplessly for death to come.

Guards came, took him back to the small hospital where his features had been changed. Orderlies took charge of him. In a moment, he was fastened securely to an operating table, and even though he felt his strength returning, he was helpless.

He tried to move. His muscles responded, but he was clamped tight. He lay still, haunted by the thought that though he was to die, his body would live on.

After what seemed hours, the Air Chief was brought in on a stretcher and gently placed on another table. Randall watched from the corners of his eyes, and saw the Air Chief turn to face him. An evil smile gleamed on the discolored face. Randall heard a husking whisper.

“You only succeeded in hastening your end,” the Air Chief mocked. “It is now fifteen minutes to ten, as you Earthlings calculate time. The operation will proceed as soon as Dr. Brophy and Dr. Torvald arrive. I shall have to use him, but three of my guards will remain; and if I do not live—in your body—no one shall leave this room. And the rest of my guards shall wait outside to see that there is no interference. So you needn’t try to comfort yourself that we might both die.”

“That wouldn’t be any comfort,” Randall replied. He was thinking rapidly. Judging from the manner in which the Air Chief spoke of Dr. Torvald, he didn’t know that both doctors were traitors. And he spoke of men as ‘Earthlings’!

“What are you?” Randall asked. “You—your brain . . . that body you said was yours. . . . That wasn’t human!”

“You are mistaken,” the Air Chief chuckled. “I am human—more human than you are. I am from Mars, as were your ancestors. Gradual adaptation over hundreds of thousands of years changed your bodies. I came to Earth a century ago when my last companion died. Mars is a dead world now. But I . . . I have *outlived my world!* I am greater than time! I am greater than all your world! I am greater than the gods! I am the last Martian!”

RANDALL heard him choke. And from the corners of his eyes he saw the Air Chief’s face twist into an unholy mask of agony. Randall grinned. Now was the time!—if he could kill this monster, even though he himself died only a short time later.

“You’ve lived a long time,” he taunted, “but only to die now. Dr. Brophy is a traitor to you, a scientist who cares for nothing but the privilege of unhampered research. So you made an enemy of him. But Dr. Torvald is the man you should fear!” Randall saw the Air Chief stiffen. The gray face turned to face him, eyes horribly alive with an alien intelligence.

They heard the door open, but the Air Chief’s eyes remained fastened on Randall. Suddenly Randall feared that he had delayed too long. A number of people were entering. He heard the door close again.

“Dr. Torvald is the man you should fear!” he shouted at the Air Chief. “He is an Irredentist! All he desires is your death, and it won’t matter to him if he has to die!”

Randall heard a curse from the group near the door. It sounded like Torvald. But he was watching the Air Chief. As he had hoped, the information was too much for the Air Chief’s weak heart. The man stiffened spasmodically, quivered.

One of the guards ran to the Air Chief’s side with a curse, then turned back to the two doctors.

“Hurry! Damn you! Hurry! Maybe you can change his brain to this other body yet!”

Randall saw the two doctors go to the Air Chief. Brophy lifted the lifeless hand. And as he waited, Randall wondered if the other guards had remained at the door. Then he felt a touch and rolled his eyes to see.

Patricia Holden was standing beside him. She

slipped something into his hand. It was a gun! He heard a muffled click and the clamps were loose.

"Do whatever you think best," Pat said softly. "I couldn't see them go on."

The pistol lay comfortably in his hand. Its heaviness balanced a lot of trouble from his mind. Once more he felt himself a firm believer in the adage, "If you want a thing done right, do it yourself."

"You're a regular arsenal, baby," he whispered.

"It's the Air Chief's own pistol," she replied hastily. "I stole it from his clothes."

He motioned her to step away from him, to get out of danger, but she lingered at his side. Randall looked at the others by turning his head slowly. There were two guards at the doorway and one with the doctors. It would take two shots.

Dr. Brophy dropped the Air Chief's hand. It struck the table at the side of the lifeless body with a soft thump.

"It is too late," he said. "Circulation has stopped. Before we could be half through, most of the delicate brain cells would be dead."

Torvald smiled happily and glanced at Pat Holden. Then he frowned that she didn't seem happy. The guard at the doctors' side glanced at his fellows near the door. He nodded.

Their hands went to their pistols. Randall decided to take them first, even though the third guard would probably get him. He reached up, sent Pat reeling across the room and out of danger, then he rolled off the table to his feet as he shot at the men near the door.

The weapon in his hand merely hummed, but the men went down like rag dolls. And as their pistols clattered on the floor, he swept his own weapon toward the remaining guard and the two doctors.

The guard was struggling to draw his gun, but Dr. Brophy fought silently and efficiently. Randall's pistol swept over him and Brophy slumped. The guard brought his pistol out of the holster, lifted it, then he too went down. A moment later Torvald fell like a northern pine. His shoulder struck the operating table on which the dead Air Chief lay, and they crashed to the floor.

Randall covered the door and waited. If the crash had been heard, the guards would be streaming in.

Evidently the sound hadn't reached them. The door remained closed. Pat was climbing to her feet,

frightened and resentful of his harsh treatment.

"Get their arms," Randall said, then was suddenly acutely conscious of his unclothed state. He snatched up the sheet from the floor where it had fallen, and draped it over his shoulders.

Pat Holden glanced at him. "You look like Dr. Torvald," she jibed.

Randall looked quickly at the unconscious doctor, half-expecting to see the man chuckle.

ONE of the guards was struggling to sit up before Pat could collect all the guns. Randall calmly shot the man again, and smiled to see him lay back tiredly and relax.

Pat brought the guns to the table and stood at his side while they awaited the recovery of the men. He looked down at her.

"I thought you were an Irredentist?"

"I was; but I got to thinking of all the horrible things we do for political reasons and—and I got to wondering if it was worthwhile. I decided it wasn't."

"When did you start wondering?" he asked.

"Just after—" She halted, flushing crimson.

Randall grinned. "So marrying me would be a horrible thing?" he said. "I feel sorry for you."

She kept her head averted as he moved toward her. Then she pointed to the door. "Look! He's coming out of it."

Randall covered the guard with the pistol.

"Get up!" he ordered.

The guard looked around for his gun, then got slowly to his feet. Randall motioned to the table. "You won't need it," he assured.

The two doctors and the guard in the second group shot down, were reviving and Randall forced them into a line. There was a short wait for the third man to revive, then Randall cleared his throat.

"I'm only a rocketman," he said, "but after seeing a few of you fellows who are supposed to have brains, I think I'm pretty good in that line too. I'm top dog now, and I intend to stay on top. You poor morons who are all brains haven't got sense enough to run things, so I'm taking over.

"You, Dr. Brophy, would have a Science Board of Three to rule the world. I'm not denying that they couldn't. But it wouldn't be much of a world when they got started. Haven't you any respect for a thing called liberty, or pursuit of happiness, to say nothing of life? Shut up! Of course you deny you'd have a machine world. But you would!

“And you, Dr. Torvald . . . You are an Irredentist. You want the good old days. You think today with today’s science, but you’re living in the past. Have you ever stopped to think what those good old days were? Sure, some men had more liberty. But all civilization is, is giving up some of the smaller liberties so that you can guarantee everyone the greater ones. Your kind of liberty would be a jungle. The world has gone beyond that. Take your choice! It doesn’t matter which you choose; the fact remains. Remember all the little wars that nations used to have, and the big ones? God! Even the Air Chief was a blessing when you consider them. He wasn’t so bad in some ways. This central authority of Yss has possibilities of lifting the whole world to a new high. He wouldn’t; I will!”

He stopped to look at them. Then he continued: “Remember, Brophy—there would be no organized science without a central authority. And you, Torvald, remember that there can be no liberty or happiness without some guarantee that the strong guys won’t step all over the weak ones.

“You both better quit living in your little ivory towers. You’re a couple of hundred years behind the times. There’s only one way to prevent hell from breaking loose, and that is for all of you to play my game. I will take the place of the Air Chief and be the central authority—call it the executive branch. Maybe we can make it elective afterwards!

“But, Brophy—there will be science, organized science. And we will give most of the results to the world, not hide them. We will only keep that knowledge we need to keep Yss in control—by force, if necessary.

“And you, Torvald—you and others like you will be sent out into the world to organize elections. For a certain number of people—say, ten million—there will be one representative in the world-lawmaking body. And a judicial will be elected. Well? . . . What is your answer?”

“How are you going to do all this?” growled Brophy.

“Hell, man! I am the Air Chief—as long as I choose to be, and as long as you support me.”

Still they hesitated. Torvald glanced at the guards. “I think we could trust you. If not, we can pull you down. Your intelligence isn’t as great as the Air Chief’s. You’re vulnerable. It is agreeable to me.”

“And me,” echoed Brophy.

They looked to the guards. The guards hesitated. No one seemed willing to speak.

“We could kill them,” said Randall and smiled when Pat’s hand gripped his arm, “but those outside would do the same to us, if we come out without them. Right?” he asked, turning to them.

“Right,” agreed one of them. “Orders were that we come out of here with the Air Chief in his new body, or that they shoot us down.”

TORVALD started to speak, but Randall waved him to silence. Then he faced the guard who had spoken.

“We can’t give you anything you haven’t always had,” he admitted. “You’ve always had your jobs and your paydays. You’ve always been able to go out and blow your pay on a hell of a time, or have a family and raise that family as you wanted to. Sure, I know that. That’s called liberty. You have it now, but there are millions like you that haven’t. We all have a chance at liberty and a new world, and you will not lose what you already have. You will be giving others liberty like that. Are you going to pass up that chance?”

“Or are we all going to leave this room together and consider, and make others consider, the operation was a complete success—only one of the patients died? It is up to you . . . Take your choice. But do it quickly.”

The guards looked at one another.

“It’s better than dying.”

“Let’s give it a whirl.”

“Okay with me. I got a kid brother who couldn’t make the guards.”

Randall straightened. He felt taller without the strain of doubt. “Then it’s settled,” he said, starting toward the door. “Let’s go!”

“Wait a minute!” said Dr. Brophy. “We’re good surgeons here, but our patients don’t get up and walk away from us after a brain transplantation. You have to be sick for awhile, and there will have to be a scar.”

“That is easily fixed,” said Torvald tersely and the guards grinned.

Wrane Randall stepped back, unwilling, but he was greatly overruled. In a moment he found himself lying on the table again. Patricia Holden was standing near his head, ready for business and smiling with enjoyment. He looked up at her.

“It’s a bad habit you’re forming,” she advised unsympathetically.

Randall glared at her as Torvald approached with the anaesthetic.

“Do you remember what I said about doing my own chasing?” Randall asked her, and she nodded,

flushing. “Well,” he advised, “you better start running now, because while my intentions are strictly honorable, I think I’ll start off with a good spanking.”