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The Project Gutenberg EBook of All In The Mind, by Gene L. Henderson

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All in the Mind

By Gene L. Henderson

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When does life begin?... A well-known book says "forty". A well-known radio program says "eighty". Some folks say it's mental, others say it's physical. But take the strange case of Mel Carlson who gave a lot of thought to the matter.

Mel felt as if he were floating on clouds in the deepest, most intense dark he had ever experienced. He tried opening his eyes but nothing happened, only a sharp pain. Little bits of memory flashed back and he tried to figure out what could have happened, where he was.

The last thing he could remember was the little lab hidden back in the mountains in an old mine tunnel. Remote, but only an hour's drive from the city. What had he been doing? Oh yes, arguing with Neil again. He even recalled the exact words.

"Damn it, Mel," his partner had said. "We've gone about as far as possible working with animal brains. We've got to get a human one."

"We can't," Mel had disagreed. "There'd be enough of an uproar if the papers got hold of what we've been doing with animals. If we did get someone in a hospital to agree to let us use his brain on death, they would close us up tighter than a drum."

"But our lab's too well hidden, they'd never know."

"It wouldn't work anyway. The brain might be damaged for lack of oxygen and all of our work would go for nothing. Worse, it might indicate failure where a fresh, healthy brain would mean success."

"We'll never know unless we try," said Neil almost violently, dark eyes glittering. "Our funds aren't going to last forever."

Mel had turned his back and was leaning over the tank where the latest brain—that from a dog—was lying immersed in the life-giving liquid, a thin flickering line of light on the oscilloscope behind the tank the only indication that the brain was alive.

What had happened then? He thought hard, until a sharp pain and growing headache almost made him lose consciousness. Either he'd passed out or something had happened. Maybe the cave had collapsed the concrete walls of their lab, although he didn't see how that could have happened.

He became aware of voices, faint at first, then growing stronger. He strained to listen and just when it appeared that the words would become distinct enough to understand, they faded away. He waited hopefully until they came back. This time he could understand words and parts of sentences.

"... connect this first and...."

"No, be careful. Too much voltage would ruin everything and we'd have to...."

"Where does this connection go, here?"

The other voice boomed in then, deep vibrations feeling as if they would shatter his brain. There was a frantic quality in the words.

"No, no, you fool, don't...." A penetrating pain knifed through Mel's head and he tried to scream but heard nothing but a loud buzzing. He welcomed the loss of consciousness as it blanketed him.

He struggled back to consciousness once more, a voice calling over and over in a monotone. "Mel, Mel Carlson. Can you hear me, Mel? Mel, Mel Carlson. Can you hear me, Mel?" he listened intently, recognizing it as one of the first voices he had heard. He tried to move but could feel no response of legs or arms. It was like being buried alive and he tried to call out for help. He must have lost his voice because he could still hear the same call.

"Mel, Mel Carlson, can you...." It broke off abruptly, then came back triumphantly. "You do hear me, Mel, I can see."

Again Mel tried to call out, without success. The other warned quickly. "Don't

become alarmed. We're still working on your voice. Just try to rest." Mel suddenly realized that he'd been listening to Neil and a wave of thankfulness swept over him. There had been a cave-in then and he'd been injured. Neil was speaking again, a note of professional regret in his voice.

"I'm sorry it had to happen this way but there was too much tied up in the project to lose now." A growing realization and horror began to seep through Mel's mind. Neil continued, after a brief pause. "The sine wave jumped. I see you must realize now. I had to do it, Mel. After all, you aren't dead you know, just your body is gone. Your brain may live for hundreds of years. Why just think, you'll be able...." Oblivion again claimed Mel.



Once more Mel was floating on clouds and this time the sensation was exhilarating. He tried moving his arms and legs to see if he could swim through the velvety darkness but failed. A faint glow began to appear ahead of him and a low rumble of voices began to echo throughout his mind. Full realization of what had happened swept over him and he struggled to retain his sanity. The voices were louder and he recognized that of Neil, who was saying,

"... is conscious now. Easy on the voltage, remember last time." A brief pause, then louder. "Mel, I see that you hear me. Listen carefully. I've tried out several of my own theories, that's why you can hear. And, in just a moment, I'm going to give you eyesight. We're having trouble with a voice." The light began growing in intensity and hurt his eyeballs. Mel remembered then, depressed, that he had no eyes of his own. Even at the thought, he tried to shut his eyes which only caused his brain to ache more. He tried completely relaxing in an endeavor to capture the floating sensation once more.

"Ah, that's better," approved Neil's voice. "I see that the brain wave has smoothed down. If you'll just accept what's happened, Mel, we should be able to work together." Figures began to form in the white mist. As they became stronger but out of focus, he saw Neil bent over a control panel, carefully making adjustments and glancing frequently at the leaping line of green light across the scope in front of him. He felt a surge of hate sweep through his brain and saw the green line jump violently. Neil's hand jumped instinctively toward a red-covered switch. At the same time, he flashed a glance towards a tank that was barely within the range of Mel's vision. He realized almost at once that it

must be the same one in which his brain was resting. The full, sickening realization of what had happened hit him and he almost went over the black-out line. Then Neil's face loomed square in his direction and hate, the most intense he had ever experienced, brought the green line that represented his brain's output up to full level.

His brain sent impulses out to the nerve ends that had controlled his arms and legs. They felt as if they were still attached to him but paralyzed. His mind felt clearer and sharper now than it ever had before in his life. He determined to analyze his new mental capabilities carefully in the hope he would find a means of striking back.

During the next few weeks, only his hatred for Neil enabled Mel to keep his sanity. The first empty feeling that the future could hold nothing for him but horror gave way to planning and scheming. His mechanical voice was perfected, operated by the nerve ends of his brain, much as his original vocal cords had functioned. It enabled him to now assist in his own rehabilitation by suggesting improvements or solutions to mechanical aids he could control. The steady growth or realization of his mental powers were amazing to Mel. He realized that they must have been inherent and in his subconscious all of the time, only his loss of body brought them out now. That, plus the fact that he required practically no rest if the stimulants pumped into the tank were sufficient.



This last was the clue to his use by Neil. It became apparent that his erstwhile partner planned on using him to the fullest possible extent. First Neil brought in a problem concerning a new type of paint to absorb the rays of the sun and convert them into electrical energy. Not until he had studied the problem and given Neil the answer did Mel realize the full financial potentiality of his powers.

He immediately brought up the subjects. "What about our partnership agreement on profits?" he asked.

"Profits?" repeated Neil with a nasty smile. "Why? Where did you plan on going?"

For once Mel was glad that his voice was flat and devoid of all inflection. It kept the other from sensing the rage that made him want to do something violent.

"You know what I mean," he insisted doggedly. "Unless you want to admit murder, we're still partners."

Neil laughed and said, "That's right. Of course I can draw any and all funds that I need but if the authorities ever check on your disappearance, they'll find that a separate account has been opened in your name in the City. All you have to do is go in and withdraw it any time you want to." He chuckled, then grew serious.

"Don't get any ideas," he warned. "We've been spending most of the time during the past couple of months getting you in shape for your intended function and I'm going to bring more and more problems in to you." He explained further, "I've opened an engineering consultant service in the city and this paint formula alone will bring us all the business we'll need." He pretended to be busy at one of the computers being installed but Mel could see that he was glancing out of the corners of his eyes at the oscilloscope for indication of a brain reaction. Mel had learned several weeks ago that he could control the output of his brain and had been careful to conceal the fact from Neil.

His partner said, disappointment in his voice. "Doesn't my attitude bother you anymore?"

Mel's mechanical voice rolled out. "When you destroyed my body, you destroyed all emotions. If that's the way you want to do things, that's the way it'll be."

"But the ethics...."

"I know what would happen to me if you turned me over to the scientists. I'd be a freak and treated as such. I owe nothing to the world."

"Swell," enthused Neil, this time his face twisted into a grimace of pleasure. "I've got a lot of plans that you'll fit into."

Experiments had been made with muscular control and they discovered that Mel could govern an electrically powered table, controlled by short wave radio. Another "eye" that could swing in a 360 degree circle had been mounted on it and broadcast its information to Mel's optical circuit. A mechanical arm had also been installed on it and Mel spent long night hours when the lab was quiet perfecting his control over it. Before long, he was as much—if not more—proficient with it as he had been with his own arms. He began laying his plans.

The first thing he needed was a weapon. Getting his control cart out of the

cubicle was easy since Jenkins, the only assistant allowed in the entire laboratory, had left his key ring lying on a table one morning. It had been but the work of a moment to wheel over, pick them up and then conceal them. Jenkins had spent a frantic hour in search but finally went into the machine shop to make up a new set. He had first cautioned Mel against letting Neil know, almost fawning in his gratitude when Mel promised.

He searched the entire lab the first two nights but discovered that Neil had taken the revolver he had kept in a drawer of his old desk. It would take too long to try and machine another one, although their machine shop had proven its capability of turning out anything. A knife he discarded as too clumsy for his means of control. He then carefully considered steel darts shot from a tube by compressed air or carbon dioxide but reluctantly abandoned that idea also. Since he had a machine's limitations as well as advantages, he'd have to begin thinking less like a human. So, the first thing to base a weapon on would be the material most plentiful in the lab. That was—electricity.



Once determined on the line of his endeavors, he briefly marvelled again on the still unexplored potentialities of his brain. The weapon would be mounted on his own cart and electricity could either be broadcast or self-contained. For mobility, he decided on a power pack. The weapon itself evolved so easily that he wondered why no one had thought of it before now. Special type condensers built a battery charge up to over a million volts for a split second. This charge, invisible until it hit an object more solid than air, was contained in a very narrow beam by strong screens of opposite polarity. The entire sequence of operation was almost instantaneous, and the bolt was more in the nature of an electrical projectile than a continuous beam.

He decided that the unit, resembling a flashlight, could be mounted in a concealed spot under his "eye" so that it could be fired at whatever he might be looking at.

Now that he had a means of defending himself, Mel felt more at ease but at a loss for his next step. Merely eliminating both Jenkins and Neil would gain his revenge but what then? He could always notify the authorities but mentally flinched at exposing himself to the world as a freak and being at the mercy of the morbid curiosity of millions.

He had hardly begun to lay his plans before disaster struck. Neil came in early one morning and had Mel begin working on a problem concerning a new type of steel that would combine structural strength with the lightweight qualities of aluminum. Mel energized his calculators that were, electrically, practically part of his brain. He briefly wondered why Neil appeared so restless, wandering around the room with his hands behind his back, studying everything. Then the problem became so intriguing that he completely forgot that anyone was in the room.

His first inkling that anything was wrong was when Neil straightened up from the cart with a twisted smile on his face and exclaimed:

"Ha!"

Mel's first, startled conjecture was that the other had discovered the special weapon. He tried to rotate the lens so that the weapon would point at Neil but could see, by other stationary lenses in the room, that the one on the cart remained motionless. The same was true of the mechanical arm. In fact, the entire cart was dead.

"I pulled the main power fuse," said Neil, a slight smile on his face. "I suppose you thought you were getting away with it completely." Not positive as to how much his partner knew, Mel, decided on silence as his defense. The smile disappeared from the other's face and he continued, slowly:

"Something must be wrong with your reasoning. I knew something was up when the power company's statement showed an unusually high increase in power consumption. From there on it was easy to read the meters at night myself, and then the next morning. What were you up to anyway?" Mel still maintained his silence.

"Okay if that's the way you want it," said Neil more harshly. He walked to the end of the tank and Mel felt his brain telegraphing warnings to severed nerve connections not yet again in use. Neil reached out to a valve Mel recognized as controlling the minute amount of chemicals that served to nourish the cells in his brain. Relays were connected to it that also regulated the injection of oxygen proportionately into the fluid. He turned it slightly then began watching the oscilloscope closely. In a matter of seconds, Mel felt his usually sharp senses begin to dull. The oscilloscope blurred until, by great effort, he brought it into focus again. He saw that the height of the wavy line denoting the strength of his brain's output was abnormally low.

"Feeling all right?" asked Neil in mock anxiety. He turned the valve back to its correct setting and almost instantly Mel felt better. "That's just a sample of what can happen if you force me to it," warned the other. "A little more of a turn and that super brain of yours would be garbage. Only I wouldn't do that, of course. There are a few more experiments I want to make before your brain dies." Knowing the vicious nature of his partner, Mel decided to talk before the other goaded himself into some unplanned action.

"Don't forget the fable about the goose that laid the golden eggs," his voice rolled out. "There's still a lot I could do for you, you know—or *not* do." He saw with relief that the anger receded from the other's face to be replaced by a look of cunning.

"I almost forgot," said Neil. "I've another surprise for you." He went to a circuit near the master calculator that he himself had installed only several days ago. All the master components were open, a rheostat appearing to be the primary control. Mel had decided at the time it had to do with voltage regulation of the calculator since there had been trouble with it.

Neil placed his hand on it, then turned his head in the general direction of the tank and said, "Just in case you get ideas of not co-operating, I can use this for persuasion." He cracked the vernier just a trifle and agony knifed through Mel's brain. It receded, leaving a slight ache.

"Not much voltage," Neil was saying with satisfaction, "but, judging from the way your brain wave jumped, I don't imagine it felt very good, did it?"

"You win," was Mel's only comment, not wanting another jolt. Never before had he felt so helpless and completely at the mercy of another. He realized more and more that he had less defense than a new-born baby, which could at least kick and wave its hands. He could do nothing except try to retain his sanity and wait for his day to come....

"Good," approved his partner, his manner indicating that it was the most natural thing in the world that Mel should give in. "Just in case you forget, I think I'll keep the cart disconnected so that you can't do anything to harm yourself at night." His manner abruptly turned business-like. "Now then, that paint formula story got around and we've got a lot of business to handle. Most of it's routine for you but we'll drag it out and sock them plenty. A couple of items we'll copy after you've solved them and say it couldn't be done."

Mel missed the cart more than he thought he would. It was much like the time when, as a boy, he'd broken a leg and had to stay in bed for several weeks. He was forced to turn in on himself.

The real turn in the development of his mind, and above the level he had thought possible, came about as an accident one day. Resting, with nothing to do, he had the full room in vision with the stationary lenses. A flicker of motion caught his attention and careful waiting disclosed it to be a small mouse that had somehow gained access to the laboratory and then into his room. Welcoming any change in his routine, he watched as the small creature scurried around the room looking for something to eat. Several times Mel amused himself by causing his voice box to rumble, making the rodent scurry around madly for a hiding place until the imagined danger had passed. Eventually it became used to the noise and not even talking affected it.

It disappeared from sight for several minutes and Mel had just begun to wonder if it had a nest in the equipment when it reappeared on top of the calculator, near the electrical prod that Neil had used on his brain. Remembering the searing jolt it had given him, Mel watched anxiously as the mouse pushed an inquisitive nose into the still exposed components. He became more concerned as the animal became more intrigued. Not only was there danger that the mouse would push down on a delicate relay and close it, but he could conceivably short out the main power supply. The result wasn't pleasant to contemplate. If it didn't permanently damage some of his brain cells, the pain might drive him into insanity.

He tried shouting but the mouse paid no attention to him. He called for first, Jenkins and then Neil until he remembered that his partner had said they were going in after some special equipment. While he watched helplessly, the mouse stretched out and touched a relay point. Instantly pain knifed through his brain and he became aware of a roaring sound that he realized was his voice blaring out. The extra loud and continued blast of sound had caused the mouse to withdraw nervously from the relay. Something about it had made him determined, however, and as Mel was barely recovering from the first jolt, the mouse moved back. Mel wished desperately that the cart had been left in operation so that he might at least use the sound of motion or the mechanical arm to frighten his tiny tormentor from the vicinity of the relay.

He watched intently as the mouse came closer to the points, oblivious to everything else in the room. As it almost touched the points, a violent surge of hate coursed through his brain cells and he was surprised to see the mouse flung violently back down to the floor. It lay there motionless and he finally realized, with thankfulness, that it was dead. As the pain from the jolt subsided to the point where he could barely feel it, he began to wonder what had happened. The amount of voltage necessary to hurt him was so small that nothing beyond a direct short across the primary power would have affected the mouse. He began to analyze everything preceding the point where the mouse had been flung from the top of the calculator. A check and recheck brought the same answer, one that he had at first refused to believe—his thoughts had been responsible.

Further contemplation convinced him that, while his thoughts had undoubtedly been responsible, the mental power itself had not been enough, as pure, brute force, to accomplish the task, but must have struck at the rodent's brain itself. That would have been enough to convulse the animal's muscles and make it look at first as if some outside force had hurled it to the floor. The stolid Jenkins was somewhat perturbed when he found the dead mouse.

"But how could it get in here," he demanded querulously. Then, as if in sudden thought, "and what could have killed it?"

Mel suddenly decided that it might be better if the other were set at ease since even Jenkins could dissect it if he became curious enough and might find enough to make Neil suspicious.

"I saw it yesterday," he said. "I didn't say anything since it was interesting and was company for me. I noticed that it was moving more slowly today and seemed to be weaker. It must have starved to death. Nothing to eat in here, and he couldn't get out."

"Yeah," agreed the other, picking it up and throwing it into a wastepaper basket. The explanation had evidently satisfied him, since he went about his routine tasks.



After the excitement of his discovery had worn off, Mel began to cautiously test its potential. He carefully directed his thoughts at Jenkins and caused an instant reaction. For a brief moment, he felt a resilient pressure as if something were

pressing against his own brain. He instinctively pushed back harder and heard Jenkins yell as the opposing pressure collapsed. The assistant was leaning against a work table, a dazed look on his face.

"What happened?" Mel asked.

"I don't know," said the other, pressing a hand to the side of his head. "It felt as if something had hit me in the head, now it aches a little. Guess I'll have to do something about this cold." He left, still holding a hand to his head.

It was obvious that his newly discovered power could be dangerous so Mel proceeded with his experimenting more slowly. Jenkins was still his only guinea pig and he learned to gage just when the assistant's resistance was about to collapse and reduce the intensity of his own probing accordingly. He was disappointed to discover that either it was impossible to read another's mind or that he hadn't discovered the method. However, he could roughly direct the other's actions. Jenkins had been becoming increasingly nervous so Mel became even more subtle in his experimenting. He'd wait until the assistant was idle and then either make him cross his legs or put one or the other of his hands up to scratch his head. He finally became so smooth and accurate in his control that it lost most of its interest as a means of recreation.

He began to extend his range. Wood and concrete offered no impedance at all. Metal, with the exception of aluminum, cut the intensity roughly about half. Jenkins was in Mel's room when he first probed Neil's brain. His partner's mental resistance was much higher and he pressed slowly but methodically so that the break-through would be controlled. To his surprise, he found that Neil's brain was much easier to control than that of Jenkins had been.

It was about this time that he found he was beginning to master the sharing of his host's eyesight. While he might not be able to read another's mind, it would be a big help to know what someone else was doing or what he was looking at. He tried searching outside the building but found nothing, other than an occasional small spot of resistance that would probably indicate a small animal. This wasn't surprising since the lab was hidden in caves in a secluded canyon that had no attraction to the casual wanderer.

His next concentration was on the animals he encountered every so often. His first few attempts resulted in sudden and complete collapse of resistance and he sadly concluded that his control had been too powerful and resulted in their death. He tried more carefully and was overjoyed when he established contact

with their visual senses. The sensation was almost as over-powering as if he had suddenly gained eyesight of his own. For the first time in months, he revelled in seeing the country around the outside of the lab and never before had he thought it so beautiful. Once, while in control of a rabbit's mind, he saw an eagle flying overhead. He quickly transferred and, before the bird flew far enough away to make control impossible, he enjoyed the far-reaching vision of the bird's eyes as it swept on towards some hidden nest. He could even see the city in the distance.

Several times he neglected to notice Neil's entrance into the room, so absorbed did he become in his newly discovered, if second-hand, freedom.

"What's happened to you anyway?" demanded his erstwhile partner one day after he had had to repeat a question. "Half of the time lately you're lost in a world of your own. What're you up to anyway?"

"Nothing," replied Mel, suddenly alert to any new danger, although confident he could take care of himself now. "I was just going over some new equations I've been formulating as a hobby. Now that you've taken away my cart, there isn't much to keep me occupied you know. You don't begin to bring enough problems. What's wrong?"

Mel wished that he could read the other's mind since Neil began to act evasive. He laughed with a false heartiness. "Wrong? Why I've—we've—" he corrected, "—already made a fortune on a couple of our own patents as well as commissions from project solutions. Someone might get suspicious if we did too well or too much."

This made sense but Mel couldn't resist digging. "You mean that your past record of success as measured against your supposed one now might make the police ask questions?" he asked. The other remained silent so he pressed the attack. "Or are they already wondering why I haven't been seen for so long?"

"There were a few questions at first," admitted the other, "but I think I've satisfied them all. However, I've been thinking that it might be a good idea to move you somewhere else."

"But hardly anyone knows the lab exists," protested Mel.

"The power company does, even if the meters are way down the road. We should've planned on our own generators from the first. Then there's the deed recorder. This land is in both of our names you know."

"It'd still be a tremendous project," pointed out Mel. "You couldn't begin to keep the new location secret because you'd need help in moving me. One little slip and it'd be all over."

There was an upward curl to the other's lips that Mel didn't like. "Oh, we'd have to be careful," he admitted. "Luckily the time delay wouldn't hurt any, there's so much money rolling in." He hesitated for a moment, as if in thought, then concluded, "In fact, there's no project on now unless you have a private one of your own. It might be a good idea to plan on the move right away."

"I still don't like the idea," stated Mel flatly. "I'd like to think it over for a couple of days."

"Think it over all you want," said Neil with a grin. He walked to the calculator and patted it near the jolter. "Only don't forget I don't have to ask you." He waited almost hopefully but Mel said nothing, content with the feeling of power and knowledge that, so long as he was prepared, the other could do nothing immediate to harm him. The time had come for action, however.

Mel kept mental contact with his partner after he had left. Neil went directly to the office and unlocked the center drawer of his desk. He then began pulling out papers and scanning them rapidly, placing some back and keeping others out. Mel gasped to himself when he saw the bank statement and the amount of money deposited under the name of the partnership. That in Neil's personal account was large but it was perfectly obvious, according to dates Mel could see through the other's eyes, that the transfer of funds had not been underway for long. As it now stood, they were both practically millionaires but he knew Neil wouldn't be satisfied.

Watching through the other's eyes, Mel had his vision switched from the desk to the door. He saw that Jenkins had just entered, mouth moving. He thought he could read his lips just enough to make out his own name. Jenkins appeared to stop and listen to Neil, then his facial expression changed as his lips protested over something. Mel's vision then switched to another desk drawer that had been opened and he saw his missing revolver nesting in it. Neil withdrew it and pointed it at Jenkins. The assistant stepped back, hands up as if to ward off a blow. Then a placating, if anxious, smile spread over his face and his mouth

worked rapidly, too much so for Mel to read any words. Whatever had been said, it appeared to satisfy Neil since he lowered the revolver.

Mel broke contact and came back to his own room and stationary video scanners that served as his eyes. Jenkins came in and his manner made it plain to Mel that he was laboring under an intense pressure. He began puttering around the work table, gradually making his way closer to the tank housing Mel's brain.

"Jenkins," said Mel, purposely extra loud.

The assistant jumped nervously, dropping a piece of metal he had picked up.

"Yes," he almost quavered.

"Have you ever thought how it would be to be condemned to a life like mine?"

"No-o-o, not especially. Why should I?"

"You helped put me here, you know."

"I was only following orders, I—"

"All right, all right. I know how Neil can force a person to do something. But you could help me, you know."

"How's that?" suspiciously. "I'm not going to tell anyone, if that's what you're driving at."

"No, I'm not trying to get you to do that. All I want is the fuse replaced on the cart. Then it would feel as if I were moving around and break up the monotony. This is worse than any solitary cell in prison could ever be."

"No," refused the assistant flatly. "It wouldn't do you any good anyway. It's just —" He stopped, hand going to his mouth as if he had said something he wasn't supposed to.

"How's that, Jenkins?" reminded Mel as gently as he could. "What's supposed to happen?"

"I don't know," replied Jenkins sullenly.

"Put a fuse back in the cart," directed Mel. At the same time he applied pressure almost to the breaking point against the other's mind.

"No!"

He knifed through to the other's brain with ease and just enough power to accomplish his purpose without harming Jenkins. This was the most complete control Mel had ever attempted and Jenkins' legs moved spasmodically as though he were a puppet on strings. There was horror in his bulging eyes and sweat began breaking out on his forehead. Relentlessly he was forced towards the cart until at last it had been reached.

"Jenkins," said Mel as low as he could. "Can you hear me?" A slight twitch of the head was the only indication that he could, so Mel instructed,

"There's a spare fuse near the holder, Jenkins. Take it out and place it in the primary circuit. Do that and I'll let you go. If need be, I could kill you now. The fuse, Jenkins." He relaxed his hold slightly but Jenkins made no attempt to comply. Mel continued,

"Remember the dead mouse, Jenkins? I did that. The fuse, before I lose my patience." He applied more power until the other's hand began moving unsteadily towards the cart. As he withdrew slightly, from mental contact, Jenkins continued his task and in a moment Mel was able to move the cart. He had momentarily forgotten Jenkins until he became aware that the assistant had let out a yell of terror and was rushing for the door. Mel watched with amusement, knowing that he could have stopped the other with hardly a strain. Just before he reached the door, it opened and Neil appeared. Jenkins came to a halt and stared in terror at his employer.

"Well," said the other impatiently. "What's been keeping you, Jenkins? Did you —"

"No, he didn't," answered Mel. At the same time he caused the cart to move sideways and swung the video scanner until it was staring directly at Neil.

"Well," said the latter accusingly, switching his gaze to the terrified Jenkins. "So this is how you follow out orders."

"He made me do it, boss. He made me," babbled Jenkins as Neil, face set with determination, drew his revolver from a pocket. Before the astounded Mel could do more than gaze incredulously, there were two sharp cracks and Jenkins slowly

placed his arms around his stomach and rocked back and forth in agony, before toppling over to the floor to lie motionless.

"Now you," said Neil, swinging his revolver towards Mel's tank. Mel frantically stabbed at his partner's mind but could feel no pressure. Another shot rang out and he felt a numbing pressure seemingly from every direction that could only mean it was against his physical brain itself. The shock forced him to use every bit of power he possessed to keep conscious. Neil had lowered the revolver a trifle and was saying in a superior tone,

"Whatever you did to Jenkins, it's only hastened the inevitable, if that makes you feel any better. I'd have had to get rid of him too, once you were disposed of."

He began raising the revolver again and the dazed Mel instinctively relayed power to the cart. The eye had been pointing directly at Neil and the only sound that indicated the energy gun had been set off was a slight hiss. The effect on Neil was not only instantaneous but horrible to see. His body appeared to swell until he looked bloated, then disintegrated.



Mel felt himself becoming weak and hastily brought the cart over to examine the damage the one shot had done to him. Almost fearfully he scanned himself and saw, with relief, that the shot had penetrated the tank and was letting the life-giving liquid escape onto the floor. A quick glance into the tank showed that the lead pellet had missed his brain but the pressure on the liquid had caused him the initial pain.

He directed the cart over to the work bench and brought back a tapered piece of wood. The arm placed it into the hole and then applied pressure until the trickle had stopped. It would do until he could effect a permanent patch. He began to feel stronger almost immediately and knew that the automatic features of his metal "body" were renewing the liquid at top speed.

Using the cart, he first checked the supply of chemicals, fed as needed into the tank, and saw that there was a sufficient quantity to last him for at least a month. He thanked the good fortune that had allowed Jenkins to put the cart into operation before it was too late. Without it, his end would have been as certain as if Neil had been successful in killing him.

His first task was to construct several more carts, each complete with video scanner. One of them was larger than the other. Its first task was to dispose of the two putrefying bodies. Working almost 24 hours a day, he hooked an inter-communications system to every room of the underground lab and directly into his system. Even the telephone was connected to it so that, if necessary, he could answer it or make a call.

The day finally arrived when there was no more he could do. The entire lab was almost like a steel and concrete body, so thoroughly had its every function been integrated as part of his brain. The decision he had been almost frantically avoiding could no longer be put aside. He had approximately a week in which to decide. It would be simple to call the police and in turn let them notify the various scientists as to his position.

He dreaded the thought of the circus that the lab would become. Erstwhile friends would troop in to look at him with morbid curiosity. Then when his potential became known, tasks would be assigned. There was a definite possibility that he would be moved, even at the danger of injury to himself. Countless thousands would demand it and their will would be obeyed unless the curtain of national security could be drawn across him.

One day was spent in contacting the animals outside the lab and revelling in flight for awhile. Then he sped through the countryside, first with a coyote, then with a deer. There was a possibility that if the scientists moved him, his new tank would be shielded so that it would be impossible to enjoy himself as he now was. All in the name of science of course.

On the other hand, if it were possible to have all supplies delivered to a nearby point where he could pick them up, he could continue his present method of existence. His mind jumped eagerly from problem to problem which he could undoubtedly solve for the benefit of mankind. The present patents in the partnership's name would bring enough money indefinitely to pursue them since much could be done by pure thought.

There was the survival phase first. He would devise an electronic blanketing ray that would dampen all atomic explosions. Then he could turn to the health of people all over the world, wipe out diseases. All this would depend, of course on his being able to remain undisturbed and that might tax his powers to their utmost. He wondered if it would be worth the effort.

Finally he had less than three days left, which narrowed the safety margin to the

lowest point he cared to think about. He opened the telephone circuit and heard the operator say, "Number please."

He hesitated briefly, then said,

"The Waring Chemical Supply House, please." His order was soon placed and, afterwards, he felt almost as free and elated as when, as a boy, school had let out for the summer. The manual dexterity of the metallic fingers he had constructed would enable him to write checks with his own signature. A faint idea had even tickled his curiosity and he felt certain that he could grow cells within a couple of weeks. From there, he could work on a body for himself, one even more efficient than the old one Neil had destroyed.

A human in the lab at that moment would have been startled. As near possible as it was for any wheeled vehicle to do so, he had several carts almost doing a jig in the main office. His new life had just begun.

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