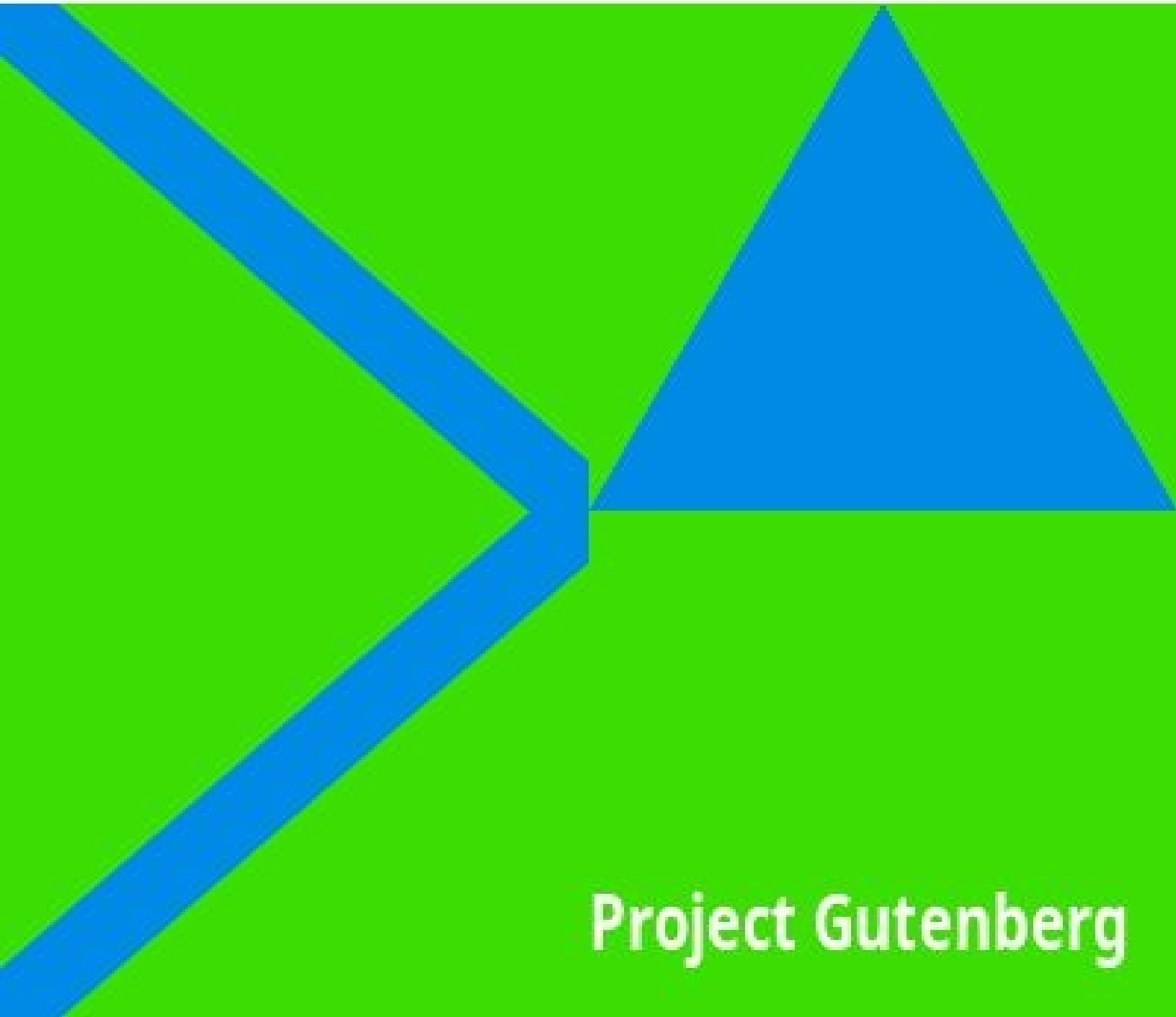


Man Made

Albert Teichner



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**MAN
MADE**



By
ALBERT R. TEICHNER

A story that comes to grips with an age-old question—what is soul? and where?—and postulates an age-new answer.

IF I listed every trouble I've accumulated in a mere two hundred odd years you might be inclined to laugh. When a tale of woe piles up too many details it looks ridiculous, unreal. So here, at the outset, I want to say my life has not been a tragic one—whose life is in this day of advanced techniques and universal good will?—but that, on the contrary, I have enjoyed this Earth and Solar System and all the abundant interests that it has offered me. If, lying here beneath these great lights, I could only be as sure of joy in the future....

My name is Treb Hawley. As far back as I can remember in my childhood, I was always interested in astronautics. From the age of ten I specialized in that subject, never for a moment regretting the choice. When I was still a child of twenty-four I took part in the Ninth Jupiter Expedition and after that there were many more. I had a precocious marriage at thirty and my boys, Robert and Neil, were born within a few years after Marla and I wed. It was fortunate that I fought for government permission that early; after the accident, despite my high rating, I would have been denied the rare privilege of parenthood.

That accident, the first one, took place when I was fifty. On Planet 12 of the Centauri System I was attacked by a six-limbed primate and was badly mangled on the left side before breaking loose to destroy it. Surgical Corps operated within an hour. Although they did an excellent prosthetic job after removing my left leg and arm, the substituted limbs had their limitations. While they permitted me to do all my jobs, phantom pain was a constant problem. There were new

methods of prosthesis to eliminate this weird effect but these were only available back on the home planets.

I had to wait one year for this release. Meanwhile I had plenty of time to contemplate my mysterious affliction; the mystery of it was so great that I had little chance to notice how painful it actually was. There is enough strangeness in feeling with absolute certainty that a limb exists where actually there is nothing, but the strangeness is compounded when you look down and discover that not only is the leg gone but that another, mechanical one has taken its place. Dr. Eric, who had performed the operation, said this difficulty would ultimately prove a blessing but I often had my doubts.

He was right. Upon my return to Earth, the serious operations took place, those giving me plastic limbs that would become *living* parts of my organic structure. The same outward push of the brain and nervous system that had created phantom pain now made what was artificial seem real. Not only did my own blood course through the protoplasmic but I could feel it doing so. The adjustment took less than a week and it was a complete one.

Fortunately the time was already past when protoplast patients were looked upon as something mildly freakish and to be pitied. Artificial noses, ears and limbs were becoming quite common. Whether there was some justification for the earlier reaction of pity, however, still remains to be seen.

My career resumed and I was accepted for the next Centauri Expedition without any questions being asked. As a matter of fact, Planning Center preferred people in my condition; protoplast limbs were more durable than the real—no, let us say the original—thing.

At home and at the beach no one bothered to notice my reconstructed arm and leg. They looked too natural for the idea to occur to people who did not know me. And Marla treated the whole thing like a big joke. "You're better than new," she used to tell me and the kids wanted to know when they could have second matter limbs of their own.

Life was good to me. The one-year periods away from home passed quickly and the five-year layoffs on Earth permitted me to devote myself to my hobbies, music and mathematics, without taking any time away from my family. Eventually, of course, my condition became an extremely common one. Who is

there today among my readers who has all the parts with which he was born? If any such person past the childhood sixty years did, *he* would be the freak.

Then at ninety new difficulties arose. A new Centaurian subvirus attacked my chest marrow. As is still true in this infection, the virus proved to be ineradicable. My ribs weren't, though, and a protoplasmic casing, exactly like the thoracic cavity, was substituted. It was discovered that the infection had spread to my right radius and ulna so here too a simple substitution was made. Of course, such a radical infection meant my circulatory system was contaminated and synthetically created living hemoplast was pumped in as soon as all the blood was removed.

This *did* attract attention. At the time the procedure was still new and some medical people warned it would not take. They were right only to this extent: the old cardioarterial organs occasionally hunted into defective feedback that required systole-diastole adjustments. Protoplasmic circulatory substitutes corrected the deficiency and, just to avoid the slight possibility of further complications, the venous system was also replaced. Since the changeover there hasn't been the least trouble in that sector.

By then Marla had a perfect artificial ear and both of my sons had lost their congenitally diseased livers. There was nothing extraordinary about our family; only in my case were replacements somewhat above the world average.

I am proud to say that I was among the first thousand who made the pioneer voyage on hyperdrive to the star group beyond Centaurus. We returned in triumph with our fantastic but true tales of the organic planet Vita and the contemplative humanoids of Nirva who will consciousness into subjectively grasping the life and beauty of subatomic space. The knowledge we brought back assured that the fatal disease of ennui could never again attack man though they lived to Aleph Null.

On the second voyage Marla, Robert and Neil went with me. This took a little political wrangling but it was worth throwing my merit around to see them benefit from Nirvan discoveries even before the rest of humanity. Planetary Council agreed my services entitled me to this special consideration. Truly I could feel among the blessed.

Then I volunteered for the small expeditionary force to the 38th moon that the Nirvans themselves refused to visit. They tried to dissuade us but, being of a much younger species, we were less plagued by caution and went anyway. The

mountains of this little moon are up to fifteen miles high, causing a state of instability that is chronic. Walking down those alabaster valleys was a more awesome experience than any galactic vista I have ever encountered. Our aesthetic sense proved stronger than common sense alertness and seven of us were buried in a rock slide.

Fortunately the great rocks formed a cavern above us. After two days we were rescued. The others had suffered such minor injuries that they were repaired before our craft landed on Nirva. I, though, unconscious and feverish, was in serious condition from skin abrasions and a comminuted cranium. Dr. Eric made the only possible prognosis. My skull had to be removed and a completely new protoskin had to be supplied also.

When I came out of coma Marla was standing at my bedside, smiling down at me. "Do you feel," she stumbled, "darling, I mean, do you feel the way you did?"

I was puzzled. "Sure, I'm Treb Hawley, I'm your husband, and I remember an awful fall of rocks but now I feel exactly the way I always have." I did not even realize that further substitutions had been made and did not believe them when they told me about it.

Now I *was* an object of curiosity. Upon our return to Earth the newsplastics hailed me as one of the most highly reintegrated individuals anywhere. In all the teeming domain of man there were only seven hundred who had gone through as many substitutions as I had. Where, they philosophised in passing, would a man cease to be a man in the sequence of substitutions?

Philosophy had never been an important preoccupation of mine. It was the only discipline no further ahead in its really essential questions than the Greeks of four thousand years ago. Oh certainly, there had been lots of technical improvements that were fascinating but these were peripheral points; the basic issues could not be experimentally tested so they had to remain on the level of accepted or rejected axioms. I wasn't about to devote much time to them when the whole fascinating field of subatomic mirror numbers was just opening up; certainly not because a few sensational journalists were toying with dead-end notions. For that matter the newsplastics weren't either and quickly went back to the regular mathematical reportage they do so well.

A few decades later, however, I wasn't so cocksure. The old Centaurian virus had reappeared in my brain of all places and I started to have a peculiar feeling about where the end point in all this reintegrating routine would lie. Not that the brain operation was a risk; thousands of people had already gone through it and the substitute organisms had made no fundamental change in them. It didn't in my case either. But now I was more second matter than any man in history.

"It's the old question of Achilles' Ship," Dr. Eric's told me.

"Never heard of it," I said.

"It's a parable, Treb, about concretised forms of a continuum in its discrete aspects."

"I see the theoretical question but what has Achilles' Ship to do with it?"

He furrowed his protoplast brow that looked as youthful as it had a century ago. "This ship consisted of several hundred planks, most of them forming the hull, some in the form of benches and oars and a mainmast. It served its primitive purpose well but eventually sprang a leak. Some of the hull planks had to be replaced after which it was as good as new. Another year of hard use brought further hull troubles and some more planks were removed for new ones. Then the mast collapsed and a new one was put in. After that the ship was in such good shape that it could outrace most of those just off the ways."

I had an uneasy feeling about where this parable was leading us but my mind shied away from the essential point and Eric's went relentlessly on. "As the years passed more repairs were made—first a new set of oars, then some more planks, still newer oars, still more planks. Eventually Achilles, an unthinking man of action who still tried to be aware of what happened to the instruments of action he needed most, realized that not one splinter of the original ship remained. Was this, then, a new ship? At first he was inclined to say yes. But this only evoked the further question: when had it become the new ship? Was it when the last plank was replaced or when half had been? His confidently stated answer collapsed. Yet how could he say it was the old ship when everything about it was a substitution? The question was too much for him. When he came to Athens he turned the problem over to the wise men of that city, refusing ever to think about it again."

My mind was now in turmoil. "What," I demanded, "*what* did they decide?"

Eric's frowned. "Nothing. They could not answer the question. Every available answer was equally right and proved every other right answer wrong. As you know, philosophy does not progress in its essentials. It merely continues to clarify what the problems are."

"I prefer to die next time!" I shouted. "I want to be a live human being or a dead one, not a machine."

"Maybe you won't be a machine. Nothing exactly like this has happened before to a living organic being."

I knew I had to be on my guard. What peculiar scheme was afoot? "You're trying to say something's still wrong with me. It isn't true. I feel as well as I ever have."

"Your 'feeling' is a dangerous illusion." His face was space-dust grey and I realized with horror that he meant all of it. "I had to tell you the parable and show the possible alternatives clearly. Treb, you're riddled with Centaurian Zed virus. Unless we remove almost all the remaining first growth organisms you will be dead within six months."

I didn't care any more whether he meant it or not; the idea was too ridiculous. Death is too rare and anachronistic a phenomenon today. "You're the one who needs treatment, Doctor. Overwork, too much study, one idea on the brain too much."

Resigned, he shrugged his shoulders. "All the first matter should be removed except for the spinal chord and the vertebrae. You'd still have that."

"Very kind of you," I said, and walked away, determined to have no more of his lectures now or in the future.

Marla wanted to know why I seemed so jumpy. "Seems is just the word," I snapped. "Never felt better in my life."

"That's just what I mean," she said. "Jumpy."

I let her have the last word but determined to be calmer from then on.

I was. And, as the weeks passed, the mask I put on sank deeper and deeper until that was the way I really felt. 'When you can face death serenely you will not have to face it.' That is what Sophilus, one of our leading philosophers, has said. I was living this truth. My work on infinite series went more smoothly and

swiftly than any mathematical research I had engaged in before and my senses responded to living with greater zest than ever.

Five months later, while walking through Hydroponic Park, I felt the first awful tremor through my body. It was as if the earth beneath my feet were shaking, like that awful afternoon on Nirva's moon. But no rocks fell from this sky and other strollers moved across my vision as if the world of five minutes ago had not collapsed. The horror was only inside me.

I went to another doctor and asked for Stabilizine. "Perhaps you need a checkup," he suggested.

That was the last thing I wanted and I said so. He, too, shrugged resignedly and made out my prescription for the harmless drug. After that the hammer of pain did not strike again but often I could feel it brush by me. Each time my self-administered dosage had to be increased.

Eventually my equations stopped tying together in my mind. I would stare at the calculation sheets for hours at a time, asking myself why x should be here or integral operation there. The truth could not be avoided: my mind could no longer grasp truth.

I went, in grudging defeat, to Erics. "You have to win," I said and described my experiences.

"Some things are inevitable," he nodded solemnly, "and some are not. This may solve all your problems."

"Not *all*," I hoped aloud.

Marla went with me to hospital. She realized the danger I was in but put the best possible face on it. Her courage and support made all the difference and I went into the second matter chamber, ready for whatever fate awaited me.

Nothing happened. I came out of the chamber all protoplast except for the spinal zone. Yet I was still Treb Hawley. As the coma faded away, the last equation faded in, completely meaningful and soon followed by all the leads I could handle for the next few years.

Psychophysiology was in an uproar over my success. "Man can now be *all* protoplast," some said. Others as vehemently insisted some tiny but tangible

chromosome-organ link to the past must remain. For my part it all sounded very academic; I was well again.

There *was* one unhappy moment when I applied for the new Centauri Expedition. "Too much of a risk," the Consulting Board told me. "Not that you aren't in perfect condition but there are unknown, untested factors and out in space they might—mind you, we just say might—prove disadvantageous." They all looked embarrassed and kept their eyes off me, preferring to concentrate on the medals lined up across the table that were to be my consolation prize.

I was disconsolate at first and would look longingly up at the stars which were now, perhaps forever, beyond my reach. But my sons were going out there and, for some inexplicable reason, that gave me great solace. Then, too, Earth was still young and beautiful and so was Marla. I still had the full capacity to enjoy these blessings.

Not for long. When we saw the boys off to Centauri I had a dizzy spell and only with the greatest effort hid my distress until the long train of ships had risen out of sight. Then I lay down in the Visitors Lounge from where I could not be moved for several hours. Great waves of pain flashed up and down my spine as if massive voltages were being released within me. The rest of my body stood up well to this assault but every few seconds I had the eerie sensation that I was back in my old body, a ghostly superimposition on the living protoplast, as the spinal chord projected its agony outward. Finally the pain subsided, succeeded by a blank numbness.

I was carried on gravito-cushions to Eric's office. "It had to be," he sighed. "I didn't have the heart to tell you after the last operation. The subvirus is attacking the internuncial neurones."

I knew what that meant but was past caring. "We're not immortal—not yet," I said. "I'm ready for the end."

"We can still try," he said.

I struggled to laugh but even gave up that little gesture. "Another operation? No, it can't make any difference."

"It might. We don't know."

"How could it?"

"Suppose, Treb, just suppose you do come out of it all right. You'd be the first man to be completely of second matter!"

"Eric's, it can't work. Forget it."

"I won't forget it. You said we're not immortal but, Treb, your survival would be another step in that direction. The soul's immortality has to be taken on faith now—if it's taken at all. You could be the first *scientific* proof that the developing soul has the momentum to carry past the body in which it grows. At the least you would represent a step in the direction of soul freed from matter."

I could take no more of such talk. "Go ahead," I said, "do what you want. I give my consent."

The last few days have been the most hectic of my life. Dozens of great physicians, flown in from every sector of the Solar System, have examined me. "I'm leaving my body to science," I told one particularly prodding group, "but you're not giving it a chance to die!" It *is* easy for me to die now; when you have truly resigned yourself to death nothing in life can disturb you. I have at long last reached that completely stoical moment. That is why I have recorded this history with as much objectivity as continuing vitality can permit.

The operating theatre was crowded for my final performance and several Tri-D video cameras stared down at me. Pupils, lights and lenses, all came to a glittering focus on me. I slowly closed my eyes to blot the hypnotic horror out.

But when I opened them everything was still there as before. Then Eric's head, growing as he inspected my face more closely, covered everything else up.

"When are you going to begin?" I demanded.

"We have *finished*," he answered in awe that verged upon reverence. "You are the new Adam!"

There was a mounting burst of applause as the viewers learned what I had said. My mind was working more clearly than it had in a long time and, with all the wisdom of hindsight, I wondered how anyone could have ever doubted the outcome. We had known all along that every bit of atomic matter in each cell is replaced many times in one lifetime, electron by electron, without the cell's overall form disappearing. Now, by equally gradual steps, it had happened in the

vaster arena of Newtonian living matter.

I sat up slowly, looking with renewed wonder on everything from the magnetic screw in the light above my head to the nail on the wriggling toe of my left foot. I was more than Achilles' Ship. I was a living being at whose center lay a still yet turning point that could neither be new nor old but only immortal.

THE END

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