

The Template

by W. A. Power

The chart beside Room 16 read:

Stein. F. (Mj.)

- re-dev class priority 1
- cerebral template
- No visitors allowed.
- Release - undetermined
- Ref: Victor MD

Frank slowly raised himself from his hospital bed and shuffled his way over to the vacant chair. His strength gradually was returning. This was the first time that the Major had managed to leave the warm comfort of his morphine-like sleep capsule. His new limbs struggled to maintain vertical. In spite of a persistent headache and debilitating vertigo, sitting was much easier than standing for Frank. The chair gave him the needed support.

As he sat upright, he reasoned that his convalescence had been unusually long. His hospital time of 6 weeks was illogical for a simple re-development. A confidential government order had sent Frank into replacement surgery, again. He knew the routine. But, this time, he had been quarantined. His isolation had been interrupted with frequent cerebral electrode placements and replacements. Looking down at his legs, he examined for the seam. No signs of patchwork stitches were detected. Frank only experienced mental side effects. It was odd why his new limbs caused temporary mental catatonia.

Retro-fitting was common for all mercenary soldiers of his rank. Transplants came from many sources -- an arm here, a kidney there, a new Mylar sheath, a new 3D printed heart, clones were becoming more common. Each copy functioned wirelessly without any signs of rejection. Major Stein was not the man he used to be. Each conscription guaranteed his evolution. This time both legs were overhauled thanks to an anonymous clone. Six weeks for a simple bionic replacement was too long. Had there been a rejection factor that had delayed his hospital stay?

Frank's beautiful mind saw patterns and formulas everywhere. He calculated that his cumulative transformation had reached 98.4%. His new legs had pushed the figures upwards considerably. He pondered the remaining 1.6%. What was left of his own human anatomy that would warrant this remainder? What would be his next transforming operation, his next fate? What was left of his body to endure the focus of the beam? The laser streams were always ready for the next patient. Frank had been told that each episode showed recuperation and healing was actually becoming easier. Each subsequent hospital admission was routine. Each new biometric transformation was showing positive results. Flesh was being replaced with growing bio-carbonate veneer. His nervous system was giving Frank's physician

the biggest challenge. Doctor Victor was chief surgeon who gained employment by "the company" at the medCentre. He had perfected polymer muscles and ligaments that regenerated at the cellular level. Dr. Victor's surgical regime in biomechanics confirmed "the company's" revolutionary investment and its unknown budget. Doctor Victor with Major Stein promised to be lifetime partnership, contracted for life. Doctor and patient were symbiotic. Neither knew who their employer was. They only knew that "the Company" issued remuneration to their accounts, automatically. The contract was opaque. Frank, the soldier, was becoming the ultimate creation of Victor, the scientist.

The "medCentre" had been built by business money, as was its chief surgeon. War and hostility had become big business in a desperate global economy. The field of Bionics had perfected the engineering systems and medical technologies of the 21st Century. But, by the 22nd, civilization had unfortunately not advanced socially. Pockets of barbaric aggression and petty issues existed worldwide. Mercenaries, like Major Frank Stein, were deployed to these enclaves. The noble nature of humanity was being replaced with "cyborgs" who were assigned to these areas. At the turn of the century, specific entities had been chosen as exceptional sentient humans. They were conscripted as crusaders. World governments had deemed certain humans as biologically indispensable. For whatever reasons, these humans were deemed fit to undergo six-stage re-developments. Frank was one of those chosen few. He was a hired human soldier. He reported regularly to a medically-specific centre for his scheduled bio-mechanical-organic transforming. The regime was repetitive, logical and calculated. Like other mercenaries, Frank had no national or party allegiance, no personal investment. Frank's designated role was to serve, protect and survive in an ultimate economy. "The company" came first and the benefits to the planet were secondary. In truth, the medCentre had become a dehumanizing factory with an army hospital facade. Cyborgs were created for a fabricated Crusade.

Whatever the role, be it soldier or mercenary, each crusader was a hired hit man recruited from specific combat criteria. The re-development spectrum covered all modalities: emotional, social, environmental, spiritual, physical and mental components. This medical facility produced bio-sentient machines using human components. It charted, it planned and it executed each operation with laser precision.

Above the entrance a formula
was inscribed simply

"S>P"

It is roughly translated as:

"...the sum is greater than the parts".

At every stage of transformation, each recruit neared perfection on his journey to becoming a 100% cyborg. Parts were harvested, cloned, and implanted. It was all part of an undercover veiled medical/business mission. Covert experimental procedures were fulfilling a macabre mandate. Mass propaganda was coordinated to scientifically seduce a desperate population.

Frank's intelligence was sensing everything. His brain saw the signs of his own re-development, but he also saw horrific trends unfolding.

Frank pondered his own stages; he was becoming increasingly agitated with the thought of his remaining 1.6 %. He recounted each of his five previous re-developmental modalities. Each involved replacing an aspect of his humanness. "The company" was charting the road towards a cyborg army, fully capable of being dispatched and teleported to any global location of political dissension. Politics would pay the price for neo-mafiatric protection, for global salvation.

"The company" was cashing in on society's desperation and fear. Nations were turning more and more to a mechanized fighting force. Drones ruled the sky; mercenaries occupied the land masses. They had become hired international peacemakers (or warmongers), all in favour of the company's profit margin.

Frank knew his role was set to unfold in the grand scheme. He was becoming a fully-functioning cyborg. His identity was evolving with each re-developmental operation. His own alterations were fulfilling "the company's" recreational plan and mirroring the changes in society. It was not world it used to be.

Staring out his window, his logic and reasoning abilities began to process his situation. Each stage had brought new realizations. Major Frank had earned the reputation for "connecting the dots", deploying strategic manoeuvres, analyzing and synthesizing any situation. His keen mind was respected in many deployments where ever he had been previously dispatched. His forethoughts began to unfold into a sobering plan. He was discovering his true fateful destiny. He also saw how society was changing. He was part of the whole. His brain was next to be cloned, at all costs.

Frank drifted in and out of focused thoughts. He became distracted by a flickering to his right, by the window.

A tablet magazine had been left to solar charge on the sill. The glowing screen hypnotically caught his attention. Whether it was deliberately placed there, or whether it was casually forgotten or discarded by a former patient, this chance encounter made a life-changing epiphany for Frank. Glowing numerals displayed on the plasma. What specifically caught his retinal sensors was the highlighted line --

1818 AD

"A Modern Prometheus"

-- 19th century revisited.

The literary talents of Mary Shelley had caught the attention of Frank's new civilization. Shelley was the favoured writer with a new global readership in Frank's 22nd century. Her visionary literary talents had become relevant posthumously. Her imaginations had become reality fiction. Her words on paper had transcended into electrons of intelligence glowing far beyond

their original concepts. She wrote about a mad alchemist who created a "monster" from "useable" body parts. All parts were organic, all were from diverse humans with only vague DNA compatibilities. It is said that Shelley was the first true science fiction writer in her era. Advance two hundred years and her fiction had become fact.

A 21st Century editor and artist by the name of Brian Aldiss argued in his day that Shelley's status should be considered. Shelley's document, "The Modern Prometheus", was the first true science fiction story. Aldiss reviewed that, unlike in previous stories written by now forgotten authors, Shelley did not resort to fantastical elements resembling those of later science fiction writers. Instead, her central character "makes a deliberate decision" and "turns to modern experiments in the laboratory" to achieve fantastic results. Shelley's Dr. Victor Frankenstein had that very real deliberate character.

The laboratories in medCentre had created a history of noteworthy "fantastic results by Doctor Victor, who had overseen the Major's ongoing experiential in transformations. Frank was a living example of those carbon-based successes.

Thoughts began to crystallize in the Major's mind. Mental re-development was Frank's next fate. His destiny was a sobering idea in the hands of Dr. Victor. A complete lobotomy was to be the Major's final replacement. The human brain occupies 1.6% by weight of the total body mass. He visualized all the future cloning procedures that would be performed of his brain. Clonic reproductions of his brain would occupy many mercenary's skull. The company had planned this all along, to implant copies of Major Frank Stein's mental re-development into other cyborgs. The assembly line was Frank's final fate. Carbonite copies of his brain would be made and copied. "The company" would mass produce the last essence of the human specie, as its last deliberate decision in the hands of Doctor Victor.

Like using an ancient copier machine to make duplicates, triplicates, etc... "the company" would reproduce, ad infinitum, Frank's brain, tissue by tissue. The 3-D printer would be infused with protoplasmic "ink".
Bring on the clones.

One severe question formulated in Major Frank Stein's brain, "Was this company on the verge of creating a monster army of crusading clones similar to Shelley's vision, only en masse with his brain, his intelligence?"

At that very moment, Dr. Victor entered Frank's hospital room. His routine was repetitive, but necessary. The doctor needed to check in on his patient, his cyborg, his creation, his template.