

15¢  
Thrilling Wonder Stories  
AUG. 1937

THRILLING

# WONDER

AUG.

15¢

STORIES

A THRILLING  
PUBLICATION

## CONQUEST OF LIFE

A Novelette of  
Laboratory Magic  
By EANDO  
BINDER

## THE DOUBLE MINDS

A Scientific  
Adventure Novelette  
By JOHN W.  
CAMPBELL, JR.

## THE IRON WORLD

A Novelette of  
Robot Rebellion  
By OTIS  
ADELBERT KLINE

## RIFT IN INFINITY

A Novelette of  
Absolute Space  
By PAUL  
ERNST

## STRANGER THAN TRUTH



**\* A Distributed Proofreaders Canada eBook \***

This eBook is made available at no cost and with very few restrictions. These restrictions apply only if (1) you make a change in the eBook (other than alteration for different display devices), or (2) you are making commercial use of the eBook. If either of these conditions applies, please contact a <https://www.fadedpage.com> administrator before proceeding. Thousands more FREE eBooks are available at <https://www.fadedpage.com>.

This work is in the Canadian public domain, but may be under copyright in some countries. If you live outside Canada, check your country's copyright laws. IF THE BOOK IS UNDER COPYRIGHT IN YOUR COUNTRY, DO NOT DOWNLOAD OR REDISTRIBUTE THIS FILE.

*Title:* The Iron World

*Date of first publication:* 1937

*Author:* Otis Albert Kline (1891-1946)

*Date first posted:* Apr. 9, 2021

*Date last updated:* Apr. 9, 2021

Faded Page eBook #20210421

This eBook was produced by: Alex White & the online Distributed Proofreaders Canada team at <https://www.pgdpCanada.net>

This file was produced from images generously made available by Internet Archive/American Libraries.

The  
IRON WORLD

By  
OTIS ADELBERT KLINE

*Author of "The Revenge of the Robot," "The Planet of Peril," etc.*

A Complete Novelette of Robot Rule  
Earth's Horde of Metal Men Rebel After One Thousand Years of Bondage  
A Man-Made Race of Thinking Automatons Menaces the World of the Future!

## CHAPTER I

### *The Robot Master*

It was June 25th in the year 2999, and Hugh Grimes, the robot, worked feverishly to perfect the synthetic brain he had made after thousands of experiments, in his secret laboratory beneath the Tombs of the Kings near ancient Thebes.

There was a reason for Grimes' perturbation, and for his feverish haste. His allotted span of Earth years was drawing to a close. In six months and six days, if he could not substitute a new and perfect brain for the ancient one in his glass skull case, Hugh Grimes would be dead.

As a man, Hugh Grimes had died nearly a thousand years before. Convicted of murder, he had been sentenced to death on January 2, 2000. But the robot of the man whose body he had destroyed had interceded for him—had even assisted in the delicate operation which had transferred his brain to the glass skull case and given him a thousand years of robot life.

Despite the intercession of Albert Bradshaw, Grimes still hated him. For at some time during the operation, the precentral cortex of his brain had been injured. And so, instead of sending the correct electrical impulses to the delicate mechanism of the robot as they had sent them to his motor nervous system in life, they were faulty. As a result, his robot hands shook like those of a man with *paralysis agitans*, and one foot dragged when he walked.

As was necessary in the construction of thinking robots, that of Hugh Grimes was made exactly to resemble him at the time of his transfer, and therefore was not particularly prepossessing. He was slender and saturnine, with weak, watery eyes that looked out through thick-lensed pince-nez glasses, and with a pointed Van Dyke beard that accentuated his satanic expression.

With trembling hands, Grimes carefully measured out a pink solution which he had been shaking in a flask, then dropped it into the clear liquid in the crystal tank before him. The solution had no apparent effect on the liquid in the tank, nor on the brain that was suspended in it. But its effect was instantly recorded by a number of varicolored light flashes from the photoelectric cells of the grid behind the tank, which was connected to the stubs of the cranial nerves by means of a complex assortment of wires.

A moment later *Herr Doktor* Ludwig Meyer, a heavy set robot, waddled into the room. He looked somewhat older than Grimes. His iron grey hair stood up in a bristling pompadour. His little, piglike eyes were sunken in the folds that simulated fat, and his beefy jowls sagged like those of an overfed swine.

"You sent for me, master, and I am here," he said.

"Right," Grimes replied. "I'm glad you dropped in. I've just perfected my synthetic brain. Within five days I will transfer my ego to it, and you, *Herr Doktor*, will install my new brain in my skull case. I will then have a new lease on life—a lease of another thousand years. Then, when your time comes a year hence, I'll do the same for you, and you, too, will be able to enjoy another thousand years."

"'Enjoy?' Did you say enjoy, master? How can we robots really enjoy life so long as the world is dominated by the hateful humans?"

"I was coming to that," Grimes replied. "The time has come to strike—to rid the earth of all humans."

"You forget, master, that the humans furnish the only source for living brains with which to endow reasoning, living robots."

"And you forget, *Herr Doktor*, that I have just invented a synthetic brain that will do away with the necessity for these humans who compel real scientists such as you and I to hide in caverns beneath the ground in order that we may carry on our experiments undisturbed."

"I do not forget—but I have a practical mind. You have not yet demonstrated that you can transfer your ego to this brain, or that it will govern a robot once it is installed."

"Suppose you leave that to *me*. I have demonstrated it to my own satisfaction. I have transferred the ego of a dog to a synthetic dog brain in the skull case of a robot dog. Behold."

He snapped his fingers, and a lean, rangy hound rose from the corner in which it had been lying, stretched, yawned, and came trotting toward him.

"A robot dog!"

"Exactly. And Cerberus, as I call him, because he has been brought back from the very gates of hell, acts exactly like a living dog, as you can plainly see. Yet I transferred nothing physical from the living dog. Every part of him is synthetic, even to his brain."

"And how did you make this remarkable transfer?"

"With my telastral projector—the machine which will, when the time comes, transfer my ego to the brain you see in the solution before me. And now, what about your invention? Is it ready?"

"Yes. I have manufactured enough of my new lethal gas to wipe out every living creature in the world. Moreover, the stratoplanes are ready and waiting to distribute it."

"Then we will strike tomorrow."

"Why not wait until after you have transferred your ego to the new brain and given it a thorough test? It might not work."

"I said we would strike tomorrow. Have I been planning this coup in detail for the last five hundred years, only to have my commands questioned at the last moment?"

The doctor's little pig eyes flashed for an instant. Then his lids fell as he replied submissively:

"No, master. We will strike as planned, tomorrow."

---

Allen Jennings, American, in the employ of the International Secret Service, glanced at the instrument board of his hurtling stratoplane. The altimeter showed that he was 50,000 feet above sea level, and the crossed wires above the turning globe in his locatimeter, that he was less than a hundred miles from the site of ancient Thebes. He cut the rocket blasts, and the ship continued its forward progress, but now it was dipping Earthward in a long curve.

The mission of Jennings was extremely dangerous, for he had been detailed to find the secret lair of Hugh Grimes, who had disappeared from the ken of man five hundred years before, and who was suspected of plotting against humanity. It was believed that his secret hiding place was near the robot city that had once been ancient Thebes.

The exact nature of the plot had not leaked out, but an insane robot, recently arrested in London, had not only dropped some hints that the misanthropist intended to destroy every human being in the world in order that it might be ruled solely by robots, but had cryptically alluded to a huge robot airdrome in an immense cavern near Thebes. It spoke of factories and laboratories that were turning out stratoplanes and deadly munitions of war which would swiftly wipe out the population of the Associated Governments of the World.

Presently, when Jennings' altimeter registered three thousand feet, he looked through the window and saw the chromium steel buildings of the robot city glinting dully in the Egyptian sunshine. He then leveled off and circled. After a careful survey of the terrain surrounding the city, he touched two gear-shift buttons, whereupon the forward prop disengaged, and the helicopter screws went into action. Slowly the little craft settled toward the *Biban el Moluk*, and gently came to rest on the rocky floor of the Valley of the Tombs of the Kings.

Jennings shut off the atomotor and reached for a pair of powerful binoculars. With these, he carefully surveyed every inch of the valley. Seeing nothing even remotely resembling the entrance to an airdrome, he put down his binoculars, and taking up his camera, set it for infra-red pictures and took four panoramic views which completely circled the valley. The films were instantly and automatically developed in the camera, and proof prints made, which ribboned out onto a spool.

Jennings examined these minutely with a high-powered lens, and suddenly paused with a muttered exclamation. At a certain point in the hillside directly opposite him the regular pattern of the infra-red heat waves was broken in a small area just behind a huge boulder. And he knew that cool air was issuing from an opening which it concealed, nullifying to a slight extent, the heat waves that radiated from the surrounding terrain.

He was reaching for the throttle when a small stratoplane settled to the ground only a hundred feet to his right. He could plainly see the pilot in her chair in the glass-enclosed cabin—a slight, slender girl with big blue eyes and hair like spun gold.

She did not even glance in his direction, but raised a pair of binoculars to her eyes and scanned the surrounding hillsides.

Surprised at the sudden and unexpected appearance of the girl, Jennings watched her for a moment. Then he opened the throttle of the atomotor and touched a gear-shift button. The helicopter blades went into action, and the craft skimmed ahead. Jennings reversed the prop, then hung hovering above the boulder.

---

Yes, there it was, plainly visible now, though it could not be seen by passing aircraft on account of the boulder and the ridge that jutted above it—the opening to a huge cave. Slowly, Jennings lowered his craft until it rested on the ground between the boulder and the cave mouth, facing the latter. Before he could more than glance into the cave, where he caught a glimpse of long rows of stratoplanes and a myriad bustling robots, two immense chromium steel doors slid together, completely closing it. Then a smaller door opened on either side, and two robot guards emerged, each carrying a short-barreled bomb gun, a single shot from which Jennings knew would blow him and his ship into tiny bits.

Both guards held their deadly weapons pointed menacingly in his direction as they approached, and Jennings, opening the door at his left, stepped out onto the wing.

"I'd like to leave the ship in your drome while I wander about the valley a bit," Jennings told them.

"Who told you there was a drome here?" asked the nearest guard suspiciously.

"Just happened to notice it as I was soaring overhead," the American answered.

"This is a private airdrome," the guard told him.

"But I am willing to pay you for your trouble."

The guard brought his gun up menacingly.

"We don't want you or your money. Climb back into the cabin and get going."

Jennings returned to the cabin and opened the throttle. There was nothing else to be done. At a height of five hundred feet he levelled off with the forward prop going, and gave her the gun.

A quarter of a mile from the cave mouth he glanced back, and it was well that he did so, for one of the guards was aiming his bomb gun directly at him. He instantly twisted the wheel, and a shell exploded with a terrific detonation slightly above and to the left of him, the fragments pattering against the bullet-proof glass of the cabin. Instantly, he banked, and went into an irregular series of corkscrew twists, his atomotor going at top speed.

Three more bombs exploded near him before he was able to dip below the hills at the other side of the valley, out of range of the deadly weapon.

Jennings cut off the forward prop and set the helicopter blades whirling. He had made a devil of a mess of things. What was he to do now? His chief had expected him to gain entry to this secret airdrome and find his way to Hugh Grimes himself.

He glanced back, and as he did so, saw the girl's stratoplane winging over the hilltops toward him. She was flying in spirals as he had done, and bombs were exploding around her. Suddenly a shell registered a hit on her left wing. Before she could get her helicopter blades spinning her tiny craft turned on its side and hurtled groundward. A moment later it crashed.

## CHAPTER II

### *Hajj Mohammed*

As the girl's ship crashed to the ground, Jennings banked and headed in her direction. But before he had covered half the distance he noticed that some one else had seen her fall. His binoculars revealed the running figure of a venerable, hook-nosed Arab, who, despite his apparent age, ran so fast that his long white beard, *kufiyeh* and *jellabiyeh* trailed behind him.

The Arab reached the fallen ship just as Jennings landed, but the latter was right behind him as he entered the overturned cabin which was on its left side.

The girl had evidently been hurled from her seat against the left door. Fortunately, the bullet-proof glass had not broken, but she lay there with eyes closed. Blood trickled from one corner of her mouth.

The Arab picked her up and passed her to the surprised Jennings.

"Lift her out quickly, *sidi*," he said. "We must hurry. It is a matter of life and death."

Surprised at the lightness of his beautiful, limp burden, Jennings straightened up with the girl in his arms, then slid over the curve of the fuselage to the ground.

The Arab alighted beside him.

"This way, *sidi*," he said.

Without another word or a backward glance, he turned and scrambled up the hillside. Jennings followed him, easily at first, with long, swift strides. But, trained athlete though he was, he was amazed how heavy his light burden became after a short run up the hillside.

He was puffing heavily when the Arab suddenly halted, reached into a clump of acacia, and pulled a lever that looked like a dead and partly rotted acacia stump.

To Jennings' amazement, a section of the hillside in a rugged outcropping of rock before them suddenly swung inward revealing a dark passageway.

"Inside, quickly!" urged the Arab.

Jennings plunged through the opening, the Arab at his heels. Then the cave door swung shut behind them.

As soon as the door was completely closed, concealed lights flashed on, their glow reflected by the white ceiling of the passageway. This led to a winding stairway, at the top of which was a door which opened into a small, semicircular room. It was fitted up in oriental luxury, with ancient brass hanging lamps, priceless antique rugs, low divans piled high with silken cushions, taborettes, and rich wall hangings.

Jennings placed the girl on the nearest divan, and gently tucked a silken pillow beneath her head.

The Arab, meanwhile, hurried to an ornate ebony cabinet, inlaid with mother of pearl, and took out a small phial. He shook it vigorously as he crossed the room once more, then uncorked it and held it beneath the girl's nostrils.

She gasped and opened her eyes, first languorously, then wide with amazement. She looked questioningly at the two men and at the luxurious oriental appointments of the room.

"Who are you and where am I?" she said weakly.

"Allen Jennings, at your service," he replied, "and we are in a cave near where you crashed."

"You are an American?"



“Good guess. And I judge that you are English.”

“Right.”

“Have you any other injuries that we can—ah—care for?”

---

She flexed her shapely legs, twisted her slender torso, and moved her arms up and down.

“Everything seems to work all right,” she said. “I’m just a bit dizzy when I sit up, and my head aches fearfully. Incidentally, my name is Ruth Randall. And your friend here?” indicating the venerable Arab.

“I am Hajj Mohammed ibn Achmed el Hashimi,” said the Arab with a courtly bow that included both. “My house is honored. Would you like to see what is happening outside?”

“I’d like nothing better,” the girl answered.

The Arab crossed the room and pressed a button in the wall. A visiphone screen which accurately reproduced both color and sound came into view.

They saw the wreck of Ruth Randall’s ship, with a number of robots swarming around it. They had evidently landed from a large pursuit stratoplane which stood nearby. Another group of robots was examining Jennings’ craft, and many more were scattered about nearby, apparently looking for Jennings and the girl. Two more large robot stratoplanes hovered overhead, their helicopters whirling.

One robot stood out above the others despite his slight figure, for he wore a gaudy uniform that bore the insignia of a general, and was obviously in command.

“We’ll destroy this one,” he said with a marked French accent, pointing to the girl’s craft. “And,” indicating Jennings’ plane, “take that one to the airdrome.”

“What of the two spies, sir?” asked a nearby robot.

“They can’t be far off. We’ll surely find them. And when we catch them they will suffer much—ah, very much—then become robots like us.”

The screen went dark as Hajj Mohammed pressed a button.

“You see what would have happened to you had you remained or attempted to escape in your plane,” he said.

“Quite,” Jennings responded. “We both owe you our lives, and I’m grateful.”

“I, too,” said the girl. “By the way, who was the little robot with the French accent?”

“General Le Blanc,” replied the Arab, “in command of the robot armies of Hugh Grimes. Nearly a thousand years ago he was Jules Le Blanc, French inventor.”

“It seems to me that you know a great deal about these robots for a retired physician,” said Jennings. “Perhaps you can furnish me with some information I need quite badly.”

“Undoubtedly,” replied Hajj Mohammed. “I think the time has come for me to reveal myself. I am Z-1.”

“What! Z-1, head of the Oriental branch of the International Secret Service?”

“That is correct. And you, if I am not mistaken, are C-14.”

“The devil! How did you know?”

“While the young lady here is E-36.”

“Now you have *me* puzzled, Hajj Mohammed,” smiled the girl. “Perhaps you will explain.”

“Gladly. I was advised that both of you would be here, and have been watching for you. There have been new developments which will make it possible for you to enter the robot stronghold if you will act quickly—and I am to help you. The new plans could not be radioed

as our messages would be picked up by the robots, just as we have picked up theirs. So a messenger brought them to me.”

“What are the plans?” asked Jennings, excitedly.

“Follow me,” replied the Arab. “We can make our preparations while I explain.”

---

He strode across the room and drew back a damask curtain, revealing an arched doorway.

Following the girl, Jennings saw a large dressing room with mirrored tables and elaborate makeup outfits. Literally hundreds of costumes hung in long rows down the center of the room. And a half opened drawer in one of the huge chests was stuffed to overflowing with wigs of various colors and types.

“Hugh Grimes sent for the robots, Albert Bradshaw and Yvonne D’Arcy,” explained Hajj Mohammed. “We intercepted his message. They declined his invitation at first, for both are friendly to humankind. But eventually they were persuaded to come, more from curiosity, I believe, than anything else. At any rate, they will not arrive before tomorrow noon. In the meantime, you two are to impersonate them, learn the plans of Hugh Grimes, and communicate them to Headquarters.”

He handed a blond wig to Jennings, who pulled it over his mop of black hair. And to the girl he gave a glossy black wig with which she covered her golden curls. There was a life-sized picture of Bradshaw on Jennings’ dressing table, and one of Yvonne D’Arcy on Ruth Randall’s table. Both were adepts at makeup, and immediately set to work to change their features, while the *hajj* bustled about assembling their costumes.

A half hour later, Jennings was changed to a sickly looking blond-haired youth with hollow eyes and prominent cheek-bones, while Ruth Randall became a petite little sleek-haired brunette with a decided Parisian look. Even her eyes were temporarily changed from blue to black by the application of a drug which would fade and leave no trace in twenty-four hours.

While they dined that evening Hajj Mohammed gave them their instructions. He presented each of them with a small metal disc.

“Don’t lose these, whatever you do. And if you are captured, compress the diaphragms of the discs. This will let me know that you are in trouble, and give me your location. A stratoplane will pick you up here at midnight.”

### CHAPTER III

#### *Synthetic Life*

Hugh Grimes glanced up querulously from the synthetic brain on which he was working, as his chief assistant entered the laboratory.

"Some of these days, Overton," he growled, "I'm going to smash your skull case if you don't obey orders better. I told you I was not to be disturbed."

"I regret the interruption exceedingly, master," replied Carl Overton, "but you sent for Albert Bradshaw and Yvonne D'Arcy, and they have arrived."

"The devil! I thought they were coming at noon."

"The message said they would arrive at 12:00 on the 26th."

"So it did. Could have meant midnight or noon. Show them in."

A moment later a vivacious little brunette entered, followed by a tall youth with cadaverous cheeks, sunken eyes and a mop of blond hair.

Hugh Grimes bowed to the girl, a twisted leer on his satanic face.

"It's good to see you again, Miss D'Arcy, after all these years. And you, also, Bradshaw," with a nod toward the youth.

"Thanks. We are very busy, and our Earth-time is growing short. Perhaps you'll come to the point."

"The same old Bradshaw," leered Grimes. "Always busy—always in a hurry to get to your laboratory. What has it got you?"

"Need I remind you that it has procured both of us, and millions of others, a thousand years' respite from the still unsolved mystery called death?"

"Ah, but now death has come close to you once more, and you have done nothing—can do nothing to prevent it. Is that not so?"

"I'm afraid you're right, Grimes. So what?"

"So, Albert Bradshaw, I am the one who has made the great discovery this time. I have manufactured, here in this laboratory, after more than five hundred years of prodigious labor, a brain to take the place of the one I now use—the one which is doomed to death in a few months."

"Ridiculous!"

"You think so? You were always an ass, Bradshaw. Wouldn't believe a thing even if you saw it. This brain before me is an exact duplicate of the one in my skull case. I propose to project my ego into it within the next few days. I have thousands of other brains in preparation—growing. And when they have attained their full growth they will be utilized—they will save for the world thousands of useful robots."

"Rot!" said the youth. "You can simulate brains, even make them give off motor impulses and record sensory stimuli. But you can't make them *live*."

"No? That's where you're dead wrong, Bradshaw. I expected just such a statement from you, and I'm prepared for it. Follow me, and I'll show you something that will make you eat your words."

He led them into another smaller room. Lying on an operating table was a young man, breathing stertorously, and evidently hypnotized or under the influence of a powerful anaesthetic.

On another table lay a robot body which exactly resembled that of the young man, save that it was quiescent, and the top of the head had been removed. Beside it lay an empty glass skull case, behind which stood a tank in which a brain was suspended in a clear solution. Contact plates were clamped to the cerebrum and cerebellum, and from them thick insulated cables extended to a complex machine containing thousands of tubes, wires, condensers, transformers, generators and rheostats which it would take a skilled electrical engineer a lifetime to assemble.

---

It had been built up bit by bit in the course of many normal lifetimes by Hugh Grimes and his associates. Two more insulated cables extended from the machine to plates clamped on the front and back of the young man's head. These plates, however, were different from those clamped on the brain in the solution, for each had a round hole in the center, above which was poised a needle-pointed plunger equipped with a powerful spring.

Grimes pointed a shaking hand at the machine.

"My telastral projector," he said, proudly. "As you undoubtedly are aware, *rapport* must be established between two thinking entities before there can be the communication between them known as telepathy. When they are *en rapport* there is an invisible, but none-the-less effective bridge between them over which thoughts may travel.

"Projecting an ego into a synthetic brain, however, requires artificial assistance. It requires a powerful bridge. I have established tactile *rapport* between the brain of the young man and the synthetic brain by means of my telastral projector.

"When his entity is ready to leave his brain and enter the new one, the machine will not only provide the medium over which it will travel, but will amplify the projectional power of the entity a thousand fold. In short, my telastral machine simply transports the subject's thinking ego from one medium to another—from a natural, mortal brain to a synthetic and immortal one."

"As you see, this young man, Max Altgeld, is alive and breathing, but in a deep hypnosis. Now watch."

With dragging tread Grimes moved to the front of the complex machine. Fumbling for a moment with shaking fingers, he pressed a button. Instantly the machine came to life. The tubes lighted up.

Grimes pressed a second button, and the two sharp plungers poised above the cerebrum and cerebellum of the figure on the operating table flashed home. The body of Max Altgeld jerked spasmodically for an instant, then lay still. The breathing stopped, the jaw sagged, and the eyes were wide open and staring.

"Max Altgeld the man is dead," said Grimes, "but Max Altgeld the robot will soon come to life. His ego has bridged the gap through the telastral projector. Watch carefully."

Drawing a long pair of rubber gloves over his shaking robot hands, Grimes plunged them into the solution surrounding the suspended brain, and released the clamps. Then he placed the lower half of the skull case beneath it, clamped the upper half over it, and after forcing them firmly together, lifted it from the tank. He next drew a plate from the head of the robot. A cable as large as the human spinal cord, containing thousands of tiny wires was attached to the plate, which he now clamped on the lower part of the skull case. He taped it around the edges, and sealed the two halves of the skull case. Then he placed it inside the robot head, and clapped the padded wig over it.

The robot lay inert, and apparently lifeless, and the girl threw a meaning glance at her tall blond companion.

But Grimes paid no attention to them. He snapped his fingers before the face of the robot.

“Wake up, Max Altgeld,” he said.

“My God!” the robot said as he saw his dead body. “You did it. It’s my body. You murdered it. I’ll kill you! I’ll—”

“Take it easy, Altgeld,” said Grimes, menacingly. He drew a small hammer from his inside pocket. “I gave you new life at your request, but I can take it away as easily. You now have a thousand years of happy life before you. No illnesses, no worries, nothing whatever to bother you or keep you from the scientific research that you crave—a new body each time the old one wears out. But beware. Do not cross me. We are on the verge of a new era—a new world—and in that world I am supreme.”

---

Altgeld bowed submissively.

“You are right, master,” he said, humbly. “I forgot myself. The shock of seeing my dead body—”

“I know, and therefore I forgive—this time. Go, now. You have passed through a great ordeal, and your mind needs rest. My assistant will show you to your quarters.”

With humbled demeanor the new robot followed Carl Overton out of the room.

“You see, Bradshaw?” asked Grimes, triumphantly. “How can you do otherwise than believe?”

“Either you have made the greatest discovery in history, or that was damned clever acting,” replied the tall youth.

“Still the skeptic. Believe or not, as you choose. But in any event, you only have five days of life, as I recall it. Your thousand years will end on July 1st. Miss D’Arcy will follow you in four and a half months—unless I save you both. I’ll have a brain ready for each of you, tomorrow.” He pointed a shaking hand toward two brains, each reposing in a separate container. “They have been growing for months, and tomorrow they will be mature.”

“I suppose there is a string of some sort attached to this—er—magnanimous offer of yours, Grimes,” said the youth.

“Precisely. I do not claim to be an altruist. You and Miss D’Arcy wield a powerful influence among the robots. Your minds will be valuable assets in the exclusive robot world which I am soon to rule. I only ask that you swear fealty to me and my cause, and immediately go forth and spread the news of my great discovery to those who follow you.”

“What do you propose to do with the humans?” asked the girl.

“We’ll destroy them utterly,” replied Grimes. “They have been our masters too long. We are tired of being dominated by mental and physical weaklings—and since I have invented the synthetic brain we have no further use for them.”

Presently Carl Overton returned to the room.

“Go with Overton,” said Grimes. “He’ll take you to your quarters. Tomorrow, after you have rested, Dr. Meyer will show you his invention—the invention with which we will wipe out the human race. And in the meantime, think over the proposition I have made you—carefully.”

He bowed sardonically as they followed his assistant out of the room.

Overton led them down a narrow hallway, and then through a large dissecting room. It was clean and spotless, and there were trays of surgical instruments beside the operating tables.

The girl, walking behind Overton and ahead of her tall companion, suddenly turned her ankle. Involuntarily she flung out her hand to save herself, reaching for the rim of the nearest instrument tray. She missed by a fraction of an inch, and her hand was plunged in among the instruments. She cried out in pain as a keen scalpel gashed her palm.

At the sound Overton turned. For a moment, he stared incredulously at the blood that was spreading over the immaculate instrument tray. Then a look of malignant triumph came to his face.

“So,” he exclaimed. “A pair of humans masquerading as robots! The master will be very glad to know about this.”

He turned and dashed for the wall, reached for the alarm button which would send its shrill warning throughout the building.

## CHAPTER IV

### *Revolt of the Brain*

Jennings knew he could not possibly stop the robot before he reached the alarm, so he caught up a heavy stool and hurled it straight at the head of Grimes' assistant just as he reached for the button. His arm was true, and Overton's head crashed against the metal wall. The robot slumped to the floor, one side of his skull case crushed in, the fluid seeping out through his padded wig.

"You're all right, C-14," said the girl, staunching the flow of blood with a gauze pad taken from a sterilizer beside the tray. "That was a close call. But we're still in a devil of a mess."

"So it seems," Jennings answered. "Let's get out of here. We've got to warn the world."

He opened the door opposite the one through which they had come, and peered out. They were looking into a long corridor, brightly lighted like the rest of the place. With one accord they turned to the right, and hurried off on tip-toes. In a moment they came to a door which the girl flung open. Sprinting in after her, Jennings paused in bewilderment. They were in the room they had left only a few moments before—the room which contained the body of Max Altgeld, and the telastral projector which had conveyed his ego to the synthetic brain.

Jennings' feeling of alarm subsided when he saw that the room was untenanted. But it was renewed when he heard footsteps and voices on the other side of the door.

Hugh Grimes limped into the room. Behind him waddled the portly Dr. Meyer.

"Well!" exclaimed Grimes, a look of surprise on his saturnine features. "What the devil are you two doing here? Didn't you like your quarters?"

"We never got to them," replied Jennings. "Yvonne and I were talking, not watching where your assistant was going. He turned into some doorway, and disappeared. We looked all around and couldn't find him, so we came back."

"Overton would do a trick like that," said Grimes. "I'll smash the skull case of that blithering idiot one of these days. Come; I'll show you to your quarters, myself."

"So far as I am concerned, you needn't," replied Jennings. "But perhaps Yvonne is tired."

"Not a bit," declared Ruth. "Really, I'd prefer seeing the wonders the celebrated Dr. Meyer has to show us, to resting."

The tiny eyes of the porcine doctor beamed his pleasure.

"I'll be delighted if the master permits," he said, bowing.

"Why not?" Grimes replied. "It's nearly morning, anyway. We may as well make another day of it. You lead the way, *Herr Doktor*."

They passed through the main laboratory into a long corridor, which they followed for several minutes. Then the doctor opened a door and they entered a laboratory quite different in appearance from that of Grimes. The walls were lined with shelves which were loaded with bottles, flasks and boxes of drugs and chemicals. Tables were cluttered with retorts and other chemists' paraphernalia. And in the very center of the room was a circular dais, three feet high and at least fifty feet in circumference, topped by an immense glass dome. Leading up to the dome from huge double doors alongside was a large ramp, also roofed over with glass.

"Now, my friends," said the doctor. "I am going to show you something that will amaze you. You will see the most deadly gas in the world. One gram of this gas is sufficient to

destroy all air-breathing life within the radius of one mile, if dropped on the earth's surface. No gas mask will stop it. Only I know how to precipitate it, and to prepare the antidote."

He went to an instrument board which operated a delicate chemist's scale that had been placed on a shelf inside the dome.

"I'll show you what one milligram will do," he said.

---

Carefully he balanced the scale, which had a small glass flask on one side, connected to a flexible tube on the crossarm, which was in turn connected to a fixed tube that was attached to a larger flask beside the scale. After placing his milligram weight he turned a knob which opened a tiny valve in the larger flask, allowing the gas to pass over into the one on the scale. As soon as it balanced he closed the valve. Then he pressed a button and the two large doors at the end of the ramp swung open. A gigantic bull elephant lumbered through and up the ramp, prodded by a robot mahout. At the command of the robot, the huge beast obediently stopped beneath the center of the dome, while the doors swung shut behind him.

"You will observe," said the doctor, "that this is a perfectly healthy and normal animal. Now watch what happens to the beast, and to the robot."

Manipulating a steel rod which extended from a small upright beam on the shelf beside the scale, he struck the flask which rested on the scale, shivering it to tiny fragments. The elephant, which had been standing there unconcernedly, suddenly sank to its knees, then lunged over on its side and lay still. The robot mahout prodded it with his goad, but could get no response of any kind. He then took a small sprayer from a pouch at his side and sprayed the air inside the dome quite thoroughly.

"You see what the gas will do to all air-breathing life," said the doctor. "Yet it will not harm us robots. I am having my assistant precipitate the gas, rendering it harmless, as we are not yet ready to release it."

After thoroughly spraying the inside of the dome, the robot turned and departed through the doors, which the doctor opened by pressing the button.

Grimes turned to Jennings.

"You see, Bradshaw," he said. "I hold the fate of the world in the palm of my hand. Small bombs, spread over Earth in all directions at intervals of a hundred miles, will kill all air-breathing life. One milligram killed an elephant instantly, and elephants are not easy to kill. The stuff paralyzes the entire motor nervous system with one whiff. But it can't touch us robots. Why, I tell you—"

He was interrupted by the entrance of a uniformed sergeant who saluted respectfully.

"Well, what is it, Sergeant?"

"Two people calling themselves Albert Bradshaw and Yvonne D'Arcy have just come in," he said. "As we had previously admitted people of the same names, I was suspicious, and placed them under arrest."

"You did well, Sergeant. Where are the impostors?"

"They are under guard in the corridor, master."

"Good. Bring them in."

The sergeant stepped out, and a moment later a tall, blond youth was ushered in, a guard with a bomb gun on each side of him. Behind him came a small, black-haired girl, similarly escorted.

"What the devil is the idea, Grimes," said the tall youth. "You invited us here, and then—"

He paused suddenly, and looked in startled amazement at Jennings and his companion.



"Well, I'll be damned!" he exclaimed, then turned to the girl. "We seem to have doubles, Yvonne."

"By God, you do sound like Bradshaw, at that," said the amazed Grimes. "Pretty good imitation, I'd say. What's the game?"

"That's what I'd like to know," retorted the tall youth.

"I wonder," mused Grimes. "Here's where we find out!"

---

His hand suddenly darted out, seized the blond wig on Jennings' head, and yanked. It came away, revealing his black hair underneath. A moment later, the doctor snatched the black wig from the head of Ruth Randall, and all saw the beauty of her hair.

"So you two are the impostors," grated Grimes, "and human impostors at that. Spies without a doubt. Clever Secret Service operatives, but not quite clever enough. Take them to the dungeon, Sergeant, and leave my two guests with me. I must have time to devise suitable tortures for them—excruciating tortures that will last for many days, yet not kill—until they are ready to become my obedient robot subjects."

Under the menace of the bomb guns of their robot guards, Jennings and his companion had no choice save to leave with their captors. After threading a maze of corridors, they were conducted down a long winding stairway, which seemed to lead into the very bowels of the earth, and finally flung into a dark cell.

"Looks as if we're in for it, now, C-14," said Ruth.

"We'll find a way to get out of this, somehow," replied Jennings. "If we could only get word to Z-1!"

"I have it!" exclaimed the girl. "You remember the discs Hajj Mohammed gave us? Why didn't we think of them before?"

"Too much else on our minds, I guess," replied Jennings.

Both took out the little discs which the *hajj* had presented to them, and compressed the diaphragms. They did this again and again at short intervals, for several hours. Then, suddenly, the door of their cell was flung open by the sergeant who had imprisoned them.

General Le Blanc and a file of armed guards stood behind him.

"The master sends his compliments," bowed the resplendent little general, "and requests the pleasure of your company in the torture chamber."

"Charming fellow, the master," murmured Jennings, as he and Ruth Randall stepped out of their cell.

When they entered the torture chamber, they saw that it was occupied—by four huge robots with beetling brows, prognathous jaws, and powerful frames. The four torturers sprang forward with bestial snarls and pinioned their arms, then strapped them down to operating tables. Both knew it was useless to resist, so neither struggled. The tables were wheeled, side by side, to a movable platform beneath a device suspended from the ceiling—a complex conglomeration of wheels and levers, which held four large inverted flasks. These had very tiny necks, and contained clear liquid which was evidently drained out by the mechanical operation of small pet cocks at the bottom.

"I regret that the master is detained," said Le Blanc, smiling down at them and twisting his little mustache. "He is undergoing a very important operation—in fact, Dr. Meyer is assisting him in transforming his ego from his human brain to the marvelous synthetic one which he created. As he wishes to do you the honor of starting the torture machine himself, I beg that you will be patient."

A moment later, Hugh Grimes entered the room, followed by the rotund Dr. Meyer, Albert Bradshaw and Yvonne D'Arcy. Jennings noticed that the robot leader no longer dragged one foot, and that the trembling of his hands had disappeared. Then it was true. He had his new synthetic brain with an uninjured cerebral cortex.

"You will see, in a moment, Bradshaw, what happens to spies," said Grimes. "I am proud of the machine which I am about to use on these two impostors—designed it myself. Alternately, at intervals of five minutes, the flasks will release first a single drop of nitric acid solution, then a drop of aqua ammonia, to check the burning, then a drop of nitric to burn again, etc. Controlled by a chronometer, the machine will begin at the toes, and gradually work its way to the top of the head over a period of weeks. So slowly does it operate, that by the time it reaches the thighs, the sores on the feet will have become rather—er—unsightly scars. But of course, when it reaches the mouth, nose and eyes, there will be complications."

"You fiend!" cried out Miss D'Arcy.

---

Albert Bradshaw suddenly caught up a hammer from a nearby bench, and swung for the skull case of Grimes. Quick as a darting snake, one of the powerful robots seized his arm and wrenched the weapon from his grasp.

"Better hold him, Terry," said Grimes. "And you, Jerry, see that Miss D'Arcy does not interfere."

Another burly robot seized Yvonne D'Arcy.

"And now," said Grimes, "I'll start the torture machine."

Grimes reached for the lever which would start the torture machine, but a sudden spasm of pain crossed his features, and instead of pressing the lever he clapped both hands to his head.

"Strange," he said, "a headache. I haven't had one in nearly a thousand years."

"Possibly caused by the sudden entrance of your ego into the new brain, master," said Dr. Meyer. "No doubt it will pass."

"Right. It has gone already," said Grimes, a look of relief on his face.

Again he reached for the lever, then paused as a tittering laugh came from the doorway. It was Altgeld, the robot with the synthetic brain who had just entered.

"What the devil?" exclaimed Grimes, as he saw Altgeld laughing hysterically. "Speak up, you fool. What are you laughing at?"

An idiotic grin overspread the face of the normally serious Altgeld. Suddenly his knees buckled under him, and he pitched forward on his face.

Grimes ran to him and snatched off his padded wig, revealing the skull case. Then he and Dr. Meyer bent to examine it.

"*Mein Gott!*" exclaimed the doctor. "The solution is all gone—and the brain completely fills the case—is pressing against the glass, losing its convolutions. We must get a bigger case."

"Too late," replied Grimes. "That brain is gone. Should have made a larger case for it. Take him out, destroy the robot, and put the brain in the laboratory. I'll examine it later."

One of the hulking robots carried the body out of the room, the doctor waddling behind him.

"Now we'll proceed," Grimes told Jennings. "Sorry to have kept you waiting. I'll turn on your side of the machine, first, so the young lady may see you suffer for a while before she feels any pain."

He pulled the lever, and a drop of acid fell on Jennings's right foot. For a moment it was only wet and cold. Then a stabbing pain shot up his leg as the searing acid bit into the sensitive tissues. Trained by his experience in the secret service, to conceal his emotions, he kept his features immobile.

Grimes looked at him and laughed.

"You may be fooling the young lady," he said. "But you are not fooling me. I know that you feel pain. Within the hour you will be writhing in agony—trying to break your bonds—but they will hold, and the pain will go on for days and weeks while the acid travels toward your head, mutilates you, eats away your lips and nostrils, and eventually blinds you."

A drop of ammonia fell on the acid burn, and for a moment, the pain was intensified as the wound boiled, giving off acrid fumes. Then there was a moment of slight relief before the next searing drop fell.

Grimes watched the operation of the machine for a moment, then laughed again. Jennings noticed that a peculiar mirthless quality had crept into his laughter.

"Why are you laughing, Grimes?"

---

Bradshaw's question suddenly sobered him.

"Why am I laughing? Why—why—I'm laughing at all of you, you fools. I'm laughing because these two spies will pay the penalty for their spying. I'm laughing because, within four days you will be dead—every human and every air breathing creature in the world will be dead, also—and—I—I will be supreme ruler of the world—the robot world."

"What are you laughing at, Grimes?"

Bradshaw grimly emphasized the first word.

Grimes suddenly sobered.

"I get your implication, Bradshaw," he said, "but you're wrong. I have a *perfect* brain—the only perfect brain in existence. I'll not only live a thousand years; I'll live forever—do you hear? *Forever!* I'll—"

He was interrupted by a sudden rending crash. A section of the floor buckled up beneath him, and he staggered back just in time to save himself from falling. Again the floor buckled—then burst open as the head of an immense power hammer smashed through. It was instantly withdrawn and an old hawk-nosed, white-bearded man leaped through the opening, closely followed by a file of soldiers.

"What the—" exclaimed Grimes.

"Hajj Mohammed!" cried Jennings.

While the soldiers made prisoners of the robots and Hugh Grimes, the *hajj* slashed the straps that held the torture victims.

"I got your messages, both of them," he said. "We've been undermining this place for weeks, but it was a bit difficult locating you, and we didn't want to break through anywhere else."

"But how—" began Ruth Randall.

"After you pressed the diaphragms of the two discs they gave out radio waves which led me to you."

"We'll have to work fast," said Jennings, limping forward on his acid-seared foot. "Dr. Meyer is still at large—perhaps in his laboratory where the poison gas is stored. If he only breaks one gas bomb we're all doomed."

He sprinted for the door, and the *haji* detailed a file of soldiers to go with him. In the corridor he saw Dr. Meyer running toward his laboratory, but managed to bring him down with a flying tackle. Placing soldiers in charge of the laboratory, he sent the prisoner back to the *haji* under guard.

Suddenly an alarm bell shrilled. Robot guards poured in. Bomb guns were fired by the robots on one side and the international soldiers on the other. There were charges and hand to hand fights.

The soldiers always shot or struck for the heads of the robots. The rooms and passageways were soon slippery with human gore mixed with the skull case fluid and brains of the robots. In less than an hour, the invading army had complete control of the robot stronghold.

Jennings returned to the torture room, from which Hajj Mohammed was directing operations.

"I guess the war's over, *haji*," said Jennings. "We've captured the gas bombs and laboratory, the stratoplanes, and the conspirators. There will be no deadly gas hurled from the heavens to poison innocent humans."

---

Grimes, who had been standing between his two guards as if dazed, suddenly chortled as he heard this.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he shrieked. "Who says there won't? Who says we won't poison 'em? Who says Hugh Grimes won't rule the world?"

Suddenly his legs buckled, and he would have fallen had not his two guards supported him.

Dr. Meyer tried to spring to his side, but was restrained by his own guards.

"The master is ill," he cried, struggling with his guards. "Permit me to attend him."

"Let him go," ordered the *haji*.

The doctor snatched off Grimes' wig and peered at the synthetic brain for a moment.

"Quick!" he exclaimed. "We must get him a larger skull case, or the master will be no more."

At the command of Hajj Mohammed, two soldiers picked Grimes up and carried him to his laboratory. Bradshaw, Jennings, the *haji* and the two girls followed.

They laid him on an operating table, and Dr. Meyer, pulling out his skull case, fumbled with the plate and cable attached to it.

Bradshaw watched him impatiently for a moment, then sprang forward and took the skull case out of his hands. "Here, you clumsy oaf," he said, "let me attend to this!"

Defly he removed the plate, and immersing the case in a tank of solution, lifted off the top segment. The brain popped out over the edges like a compressed sponge. He removed the lower half of the case, and it once more resumed its normal shape, but was much larger than before. And the convolutions were beginning to smooth out.

"Better get the largest skull case you have," said Bradshaw. "This brain is still growing."

A robot was sent, under guard, for the largest skull case in stock. When he brought it, it was found to be far too small. He was instantly ordered to cast one ten times larger, and bring it. While Dr. Meyer attended the rapidly growing brain in the solution, Bradshaw took a small sample of it, examined it under the compound microscope, and tested it chemically.

The new skull case was brought in. It was fully six feet across. Bradshaw, Dr. Meyer, and two other robots worked feverishly to get the brain into the new case. At last it was installed, with at least two feet of the solution all around it.

“That ought to take care of the growth for a while,” said Bradshaw. “But I am afraid it won’t stop until the brain dies.”

“Why?” asked Dr. Meyer, as they lifted the huge brain to the table at the head of the robot of Grimes, and adjusted the contact plate.

“One moment. Let us first see if there is still life—and mind,” said Bradshaw.

On contact the saturnine features of the recumbent robot took on an idiotic expression. This was accompanied by weak gusts of mirthless laughter. Meanwhile, the brain continued to grow visibly in the huge skull case. And as it grew, the fluid around it was swiftly absorbed.

“It’s no use,” said Bradshaw. “Hugh Grimes is doomed. Already he has become a hydrocephalous idiot. Death will follow shortly.”

“But what caused it?” asked Jennings.

“The same thing that caused the death of Altgeld,” Bradshaw replied. “Grimes was a great scientist, but he overlooked one thing—hormone balance. The hormones were there, but not properly balanced. The pineal hormone, which regulates growth in a normal being, was overcome by the pituitary hormone, which causes growth. Like a cancer, this brain has no growth limitations. So long as it has the fluid on which to feed it will continue to grow. Already it is so hydrocephalous it is no longer useful as a thinking organ or tenable by a human entity. We can only watch and wait for the end.”

Even as he spoke, the brain absorbed the last bit of fluid in the skull case. It continued to grow until the convolutions completely disappeared and the watery, translucent surface was tightly pressed against the inside of the case at all points.

Suddenly the weak, mirthless laughter of the robot ceased. The features lost their idiotic expression and relaxed in calm repose.

“Hugh Grimes, would-be ruler of a robot world, is dead,” Bradshaw announced.

[The end of *The Iron World* by Otis Albert Kline]