

# Rebirth

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Do you know who I am?

I pace the room silently, turning every few seconds to stare at you. You don't see me. You are still in your unnatural, drug-induced sleep, blind and deaf to the world. Blind and deaf to me, like you always have been.

Two hours and it's all over.

For the whole of my short existence, you have been the centre of my life. You were the beginning, and will be the end of my purpose in being. I was created to serve you.

Are you worth it? All the effort that was put into making me, all those years of living, do they hold some meaning? I hope so. In the end it really doesn't make a difference, does it?

I wonder when you first found out about your legacy. Privileged baby, weren't you? Freeze-stored embryo clones aren't exactly standard procedure for a birth. Three embryos, no less. A huge supply of genetic material for regenerating organs. You could have lost two kidneys and a heart, your spinal cord and liver before you turned ten and your life would have been no different. Modern medical technology and oodles of Daddy's money made sure of that.

For a time it seemed as though the expense and hassle of three clones had been nothing. You were obscenely healthy for the first thirty years of your life. I've checked through your medical records and I know. Name: Alexander Cheng the third; Occupation: Entrepreneur; date of Birth: 24 January 2284 CE.

5 October 2361 CE. What category will that little piece of data go under? Date of death? Date of rebirth?

You were only twenty-five when you first found out about your three little embryos. Even then you looked to the future. You thought about death, thought about dying and living your life fully.

You were by no means the first man to conceive of a brain transplant, but you may be the first to do it successfully. What kind of man are you, that you had the determination and will to carry out your dream? It must have taken so much work to do what you had to do.

The politics for starters. How much money did it take to bribe all those politicians; convince the masses that you wanted to do was ethical? Countless numbers of lawyers worked on your lobbying. It was all done very discretely and carefully. On the exterior Alexander Cheng was that rare thing: an industrialist with a conscience, graciously working for the good of mankind. Beneath multiple layers of red tape, however, the very foundations of world society were being challenged.

Getting the laws against brain transplants and genetic modification changed was a long, painfully slow process. For an impatient man like you, the wait must have been excruciating. Then again, a man with your resources hardly needed to wait.

Even before the first debate on easing the GM laws began, you had the top biologists and doctors in the world working in your safe labs in Central Asia and South America. Hundreds of historians all over the world worked to dig up the old twenty-first century information about modified genes and the 'superclones' that ruled the earth in the 2160's

A mere brain transplant couldn't satisfy you, could it? An extra one hundred and twenty years of life weren't enough. Your new body had to be smarter, stronger and healthier than any ordinary human. You took chances to make sure that dream came true.

Too many chances. Within the first year of experiments, the first embryo you had defrosted had begun to fail, consistently rejecting any of the modifications they tried to add. At the end of two years, when the first proposal was made, it was obvious that embryo A1xC01 was useless for growing.

Publicity pressures forced you to halt operations for a while, until the furore about cloning died down and you were able to try again. This time, after thousands of relentless calculations and trials, the attempt was a little more successful. On August

the 14<sup>th</sup>, 2323, the baby A1xC02 was born after six months of gestation in vitro. And eliminated almost immediately after as a deformed failure.

It was seven years, three hundred genetics specialists, and a hundred million dollars later before you risked having me. The perfect clone at last, after all that time and energy spent.

By that time laws and opinions regarding clones had changed so much that instead of being shocked, the media hailed you as an innovator and a visionary. Politicians who would have condemned you for being egomaniacal a decade ago now called you a pioneer. All over the world and on the Moon and Mars colonies, the name of Alexander Cheng was celebrated.

Meanwhile, on a tiny island of the coast of Sumatra, Indonesia, a baby named A1xC03 was being brought up by a motley crew of geneticists and anthropologists.

They taught me to walk when I was only six months old. a year later, I could read. All through my childhood years, I was fed on tasteless, high-nutrition food, ensuring healthy organs and skin. I was trained to be as physically fit as the most accomplished Olympic athletes. Even my brain was enhanced to the utmost, although it was ultimately useless, the only part of me you couldn't take away.

In one hour and fifteen minutes, your body and my brain will die. Alexander Cheng the Third will be reborn and A1xC03 will cease to be.

I only have an hour of life left. Maybe I should be more upset, but I can't be. Was that part of the conditioning the scientists inflicted on me, the total lack of a self-preservative instinct? My overseers never made any effort to help me feel like a human being, whatever that is. I was just a body: a super intelligent, drastically modified body, it was true; but still a clone, a second rate human being.

I open my eyes. Forty minutes left. The Doctors are coming in, measuring a variety of clear fluid chemicals carefully. They inject them into the veins on your wrists and arms, sending you even deeper into slumber. There will be no pain for you.

There's a lady doctor coming towards me. She smiles gently at me, as one does to a child who can't understand what's going on. My pride does not balk at this. I have no pride. Clones are not supposed to have pride.

I am lowered onto a hospital bed. I shake my head firmly as I see the needle the woman holds. No drugs, I want to say. Let me feel something as I depart this earth, even if it is blinding pain as my skull is sliced apart.

Flurries of activity around me. Just before I am wheeled into the operation theatre, a short, skinny man rushes in. It's Mr. Kramer, your most trusted attorney. He is waving a sheet frantically as he tries to speak to a doctor.

The lady turns to him, frowning. They hold a hurried discussion. then she nods, and activity resumes.

My eyesight is almost twice as good as a normal human being's. Even from my position on the bed, I can read the contents of the letter Mr. Kramer holds.

My brain is not to be cast aside or taken apart for scientific research as I had expected. It will be stored in the cryo-chambers, along with the brains of the rich and ambitious, those that hoped to be reborn into another life.

There, together with the rest of the frozen heads, bodies and brains, I will wait until the next accident victim is declared brain-dead. Then I get the chance at life again, when my brain is transplanted into a new, fresh body, My only chance at life, because I know you do not consider my existence so far as life.

Why are you doing this for me? Is this your way of saying thank you? I don't know. Maybe I'll have a chance to ask you when it's my turn to be reborn.

Maybe you truly do believe what you said once in a television interview, that human life is sacred, and everyone had a right to live, if only for a few seconds.

I don't think I'll ever like you. But I can feel grateful.

They're getting ready to anaesthetize me. From this moment on, my body has ceased to be mine.

Take it Alexander Cheng. And do what you claimed you'd do if you ever had a second chance at life – try to make the world better for everyone.

The world goes dark.