

KEEP YOUR HEAD

Ever since the head transplant, I haven't been feeling myself, well that's not surprising. My number is 4442, and they have removed my sense of smell. So I can't tell you what the room I am confined to smells like, maybe it has no smell, but I can't tell you that either. Nothing particularly memorable about my number, except for some reason I keep saying it over and over in my head, my new head to be accurate, and it feels like it has made a groove in my new brain and my tongue feels rough, a bit like it has been rubbed against a sharp tooth filling relentlessly. 4442, 4442, 4442...4442 is not my name, just my number. My name is, well, let's leave that for now. I don't want to tell you my name. There's no big secret, it's just that it feels strange to say my name. My name feels theoretical. I wonder what part of me is represented by my name. I need time to adjust myself to some of these things.

They confine me in this sterile room. I don't mean sterile as in there is nothing much in it, although that is true as it happens. No, it is 'sterile', as in bacteria-free, I hope. I can't be exposed to any germs or viruses. The anti-rejection drugs are severe and have knocked out my defences. It is the only way to stop my head from attacking my body. It is the complete opposite of other transplants, like in the case of liver, lungs, heart etc. where the danger is that the body rejects the new organ. Not in my case. The danger is the new head will initiate an all-out attack on my body. 4442.

My wife has visited twice. It is a whole ordeal. She must be stripped and scrubbed from head to foot and dressed in sterile clothing. They allow me sexual contact with her but with surgical gloves and a sterile condom. We are not allowed to kiss for obvious reasons. Besides, she breathes through a mask attached to a tube that supplies her oxygen from outside the room.

The earlier numbers died, swift, ugly, and excruciating deaths. It was only as they neared the first thousand that things started working better, and the mortality rate declined. 4442, 4442. The first attempts were crude and experimental—the heads won.

I feel sad and lonely, and alien most of all. They tell me it's normal but what's normal? How normal can anyone be with someone else's head on their shoulders or someone else's body under their head? And how do they know what's normal? They have still got their own heads. It started to occur to me the other day, how do I know the doctors and surgeons have their own heads? I can't stop the tears, even though they aren't technically my tears.

After the first one thousand or so, they started to get much better results, and I have every chance of surviving. I use the word 'surviving', and I use the personal pronoun 'I' but that is arguable. It is debatable just which 'I' I am and 'survival'? The best that can be said is that I am not dead, at least not in the traditional sense, but do 'I' any longer exist, am 'I' dead? Or am I not dead? 4442. My original head is dead. Four thousand four hundred and forty-two. It hasn't escaped my notice that 4442 ends with forty-two—the famous Douglas Adams number signalling the answer to the big question. I've never been superstitious, but I am now. Is that me or him?

I have been experiencing some odd thoughts. I don't know if they are my thoughts, though. There's not much to do here, and I don't feel like reading or learning anything. I'm feeling, well it is difficult, but I feel antagonistic, but this makes no sense. My brain, that is my old brain, died. It grew one of the terminal tumours that started spreading through all populations several years ago. They recommended a head transplant as a matter of some urgency. I feel resentment toward my old brain, as though it was weak, not tough enough, and succumbed to the tumour. Like it didn't bother to put up a fight, like it knew it could be replaced, so it didn't try.

I don't know whose head I got. They don't tell you. You can't know whose kidney or liver or heart you get, so why would they tell you whose head you're getting? They remove your face and surgically impose it on your new head so you look the same, with the proviso your new bone structure will be different from your old bone structure and, therefore, while you look near enough the same there will be subtle differences. Differences that remind you, you aren't you. These differences are affecting my wife too. I can tell by the way she looks at me. I think my nose is bigger, which might be ironic, given I can't use it to smell. I have different coloured eyes. Mine were brown, and now I have blue eyes. These things are not important, they say. You are alive, and you look pretty close to yourself. But when I look into a mirror, I don't see me....[Continue reading in The Writer's Lair. Subscribe FREE HERE.](#)