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EDWARD D. HOCH

A CARL GRADER MYSTERY

THE TRANSVECTION MACHINE



The Transvection Machine

A Carl Crader Mystery

Edward D. Hoch



MYSTERIOUSPRESS.COM

O P E N  R O A D

INTEGRATED MEDIA

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FOR

BARBARA DEBEER

AND

NANCY SCHICK

—A CONTINENT APART

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1 VANDER DeFOE

HE HAD ONLY JUST reached his desk in the Cabinet Wing of the New White House when Maarten Tromp bustled in, carrying the Monday morning Space Dispatches, an expression of presidential consternation mirrored in his face.

“Vander, the president is quite displeased today.” When Maarten Tromp made an appearance usually meant the president was displeased, because his job as special assistant was to keep the world and Washington and especially the New White House running smoothly. If there was no crisis, Defoe rarely saw Maarten Tromp. He was likely to be off playing aqua-golf with the speaker of the house, or spending a quiet weekend overseas with his latest London mistress.

Vander Defoe, used to it all after only five months on the job, sighed and asked, “What is it this time, Maarten?”

“More trouble on Venus. A man named Euler Frost, an exile, has escaped from the maximum security prison there. They think he may be headed back to Earth.”

Defoe blinked and thought about it. “But how does this concern me? The secretary of extra-terrestrial defense can hardly bother himself with the doings of one man, even if that man is a dangerous criminal.”

“Frost has ties to the Russo-Chinese,” Tromp explained patiently. “And to a revolutionary group here on Earth. He was exiled to the Venus Colony ten years ago, and we don’t want him back now.”

“He should be easy enough to keep out,” Defoe replied. “There’s only one ship a week from Venus to Earth.”

Maarten Tromp drew himself up, seeming to grow taller as he took on the authority for his new pronouncement. In that moment, Defoe could almost believe that he really was a direct descendant of Maarten Harpertszoon Tromp, a seventeenth-century Dutch admiral who sailed with a broom at his masthead in token of his ability to sweep the seas. Both the insolence and the fatuousness of the admiral were in keeping with the Tromp that Vander Defoe knew so well.

“You’ve forgotten the transvection machine,” Maarten Tromp announced.

Defoe glanced down nervously at his hands, playing with the coins he always carried, making them multiply or disappear for his own amusement. He had indeed forgotten the transvection machine, the invention that had brought him from a tiny laboratory at the Kansas Research Center to his present position as secretary of extra-terrestrial defense. “Of course I haven’t forgotten it,” he grumbled defensively. “But the model on Venus is for test purposes only. You know it hasn’t been used to transvect a human being as yet.”

“But this man Frost could use it if he had to, couldn’t he? You told the president it was almost operational.”

Vander Defoe breathed a long sigh, deciding that life in the middle of the twenty-first century had problems all its own. “By almost operational, I simply meant that it was functional. I did not mean to imply the use of the word in its military sense—that is, on active service. The transvection machine on Earth has been used for a few experiments, but we have not yet transvected anything across outer space. As you’ll remember, a human being thus far has been transvected only a distance of 8,084 miles—from Washington to Calcutta—and even that was on an experimental basis. Millions more need to be spent before the transvection machine is in regular use.”

“But *could* he use the machine to escape?”

Defoe shook his head. “No. Tell the president there is no danger. First of all, our machine on Venus is not in the hands of the Russo-Chinese. I hardly think they would risk an extra-terrestrial incident simply to get one of their friends back to earth.”

That seemed to satisfy Tromp for the moment. He shuffled his feet uncertainly. “Very well, Vander. I knew you’d have an answer for him. I wasn’t really worried, but you know how I’ve backed you up through all this. It was I who got the president’s ear about the transvection machine in the first place, after I witnessed the test with the girl, and I who arranged for a test machine to be placed on Venus for your experiments. And you have the transvection machine to thank for your position in the president’s cabinet.”

“I know, I know,” Defoe replied with a tired voice. He was bored with the constant homage to Tromp’s position at the president’s ear.

Maarten Tromp started for the door. He paused with his hand on the push-plate and said, almost as an afterthought, “Maybe we can get together for a game of aqua-golf some weekend, Vander.”

“That would be fine, Maarten.”

“I’m shooting in the low hundreds now, you know. Beat the secretary of state last weekend.”

“Good for you.”

The door closed behind Tromp, and Vander Defoe sat for a long time in his chair, staring at the glowing radiant ceiling of his office. There was much to be done, and he knew he should be summoning secretaries and aides, but just then the powers of a presidential cabinet member seemed very far away indeed. He got up from his desk and walked to the wall, where a ten-color map of the USAC was prominently displayed. The United States of America and Canada—sixty-one states—comprised everything north of Mexico, with the exception of the tiny independent nation of French Canada. It was a vast land, almost as vast as Russo-China, and he was perhaps one of the twenty most important men in this land.

He’d come a long way from Kansas to Washington, a long way in a very short time. He wondered if he could ever go back. And wondering, felt the first faint cramps in his lower abdomen.

2 GRETEL DeFOE

SHE ROLLED OVER ON the wide white bed, propped herself up on one elbow, and studied the naked man kneeling above her. Hubert Ganger was far from being the greatest lover she'd known in her thirty-one years, but he would do. His slim body was still firm, without any of the middleaged flab men past forty so often acquired, and with his close-cropped blond hair and beard he looked no older than his own age. Best of all, he knew how to please a woman—something so many twenty-first-century lovers had forgotten. Yes, she decided, he would do. He could be trained.

“How was that?” he asked, with a scientist's critical eye toward his performance.

She smiled and allowed her eyes to close, purring softly. “Very good, Hubert. Now we'll try again, and I'm sure it will be perfect.”

“Again?” He frowned uncertainly. “I don't know if I ...”

She rolled off the bed and padded softly across the thick carpet to the closetier. In a moment she returned with the electric lance. “Here,” she told him, holding it out. “Put this on.”

“My God! I didn't think anyone used these outside of male whorehouses!”

She smiled at his naiveté. He had so much to learn. In a way she pitied the former wife she never met. The poor girl must have had a boring marriage. “In fact, my dear Hubert, these are used in all the most sophisticated circles. Let me take my laudanum tablet and we can begin again.”

She swallowed the tablet with half a glass of water, watching with some amusement while he strapped on the electric lance. Then, stretching out on the bed once more, she allowed the drug to work its wonders. First, as always, came the agreeable, pleasant sensation about the region of her stomach followed by a feeling of gay good humor. She was serene, she was assured, she was relaxed.

“Now!” she commanded the waiting man. “Now, now!”

Her mouth was dry, and warm. Her skin shimmered as if efflorescent, as if about to burst into a thousand blossoms. She was riding the crest of a great wave, feeling the fullness of supreme bliss. It was bringing her to a completeness, a passion, she'd rarely known before. In that instant all the nights of her life seemed to telescope into one. She remembered the first boy in high school, and the man who was a prostitute in New York, remembered her wedding night with Vander, and the first affair afterwards. She remembered Hubert, and the other two, and all the ones between, remembered them now in a single blinding orgasm that made her cry out in pain and fury and delight.

Later, when the tide of the drug had subsided and a bit of reason had returned, Gretel looked at him over the dull landscape of the sheets and said, “I do love a man with a beard.”

“I'm glad.”

“Now suppose we talk about killing my husband.”

Gretel had met Vander Defoe when she was just out of college, at an age when the glamour of being a scientist's wife was still capable of making a profound impression on her unworldly self. Defoe was twenty years older than she and perhaps a half-century wiser, but each of them seemed to fill a need in the other. For Gretel it was the exposure to a world of science and invention, the knowledge that she was sharing her bed and body with a man who had visited the Venus Colony last year, had dined with the president last month, had sipped cocktails with a Nobel Prize winner just last night. For Vander it was, perhaps, the eternal attraction of a young and vigorous female—someone to rescue him from the deepening depressions of middle age. His first wife had died in a freak accident on the sea-rail to Jamaica, and he was ready to marry again. More than ready, he needed to marry again.

There was no problem about children, because she fully shared Vander's support of government child clinics. Their life during those first few years had been all she'd dreamed it would be. Once, on vacation, he'd taken her to the Moon Colony for a week, as guests of the technician general at the laboratories there. She'd talked about it for a month on her return, filling endless boring luncheons with descriptions of the bleak lunar landscape and all that was being done by the USAC technicians to improve it.

And then there had been Hubert Ganger and his ideas for a transvection machine. Ganger and Defoe met at a seminar in Krakow on the subject of improved transportation methods, and they became immediate friends. Vander Defoe liked the theory behind the transvection machine—the idea of transporting objects and animals, and ultimately humans, through the air at the speed of light. It was a theory, he'd told Gretel, that could revolutionize transportation. It could even revolutionize warfare.

Defoe and Ganger had formed a corporation together, working out of leased space at the Kansas Research Center, and gone to work on the practicality of the invention. With colonies on the Moon and Venus, the government was especially interested in whether humans could be transvected not only between points on Earth, but through outer space as well. Defoe maintained they could be, while Ganger felt that his system was still theoretical, especially regarding outer space.

She still remembered the arguments they had over coffee, far into the night, with Ganger maintaining that the individual atoms of matter in outer space were too distant from each other for transvection to work there. "Your transvected object would simply disintegrate when it reached the limits of the atmosphere," he argued.

But Vander Defoe was firm in his beliefs. It was about the time of their split that Ganger was drawn to Gretel, perhaps because both of them were having increasing difficulty in living with the political aspirations of Defoe. His conferences with government officials, his journeys across the world—all the glamorous activities which had first attracted Gretel to him—were now beginning to pain her immeasurably.

She sought solace first in a variety of drugs, settling finally for the exquisite pleasures of a Japanese brand of homogenized laudanum tablets. Then there was an increasing variety of lovers among many of them friends and business associates of Vander Defoe. At last he'd had enough of it, and he ordered her from the house, in much the same way he'd ordered Hubert Ganger from the business they'd formed together.

Ganger used to tell Gretel, on those first early evenings of mutual sympathy, that Defoe would be helpless without him, that he could never build even a single transvection machine without Ganger's help. But Defoe had the laugh on both of them. Within a year, the transvection machine had been built and tested. A cigar box was transvected between rooms in a laboratory, a monkey was transvected from Boston to New York, and finally a young Chinese girl was transvected from Washington to Calcutta—a distance of over 8,000 miles. More than that, Vander Defoe had persuaded the government to let him place a machine in the USAC Venus Colony for experimental purposes. That was when the president had stepped into the picture, and offered Vander a newly created cabinet position as secretary of extraterrestrial defense.

The move was more political than practical on the president's part. Video newsmagazines had been full of details about the Russo-Chinese Venus Colony, which was larger and more successful than the USAC one. There were men and women living on Venus so long now that they'd taken out their newly ordained Venusian citizenship. And with no real ties to Earth, these people were being attracted to the Russo-Chinese Colony in increasing numbers, forming themselves into a force that might someday attack the USAC Venus Colony, if not the USAC itself. The president needed a dramatic move, a ploy to take the spotlight away from the Russo-Chinese successes, at least momentarily. He found what he wanted in the Department of Extra-Terrestrial Defense, with the newsworthy Vander Defoe as its secretary.

And so Defoe moved into a plush office at the New White House, and Gretel moved into a Georgetown apartment and filed for divorce. It was Hubert Ganger, though, who kept her from taking the final step toward freedom. He argued, in their newly found complicity, that Vander could be milked dry of the money he so rightly owed them both. And Ganger did more than argue—he supplied her with the weapon to use against her husband, the weak spot in his armor that even she had never suspected till then.

Gretel and Hubert Ganger did not become lovers at once. She had other men in her life, the high-placed officials whom she'd first met through her husband. But as her frustrations led her deeper into a dependency on laudanum, they led her also into the affair with Hubert Ganger. She'd known from the first that he would be a responsive lover, and she felt increasingly certain that he could be trained to perfection. With Hubert she could have the glamour of the scientific world that had first attracted her to Vander, and she could have much more besides.

But the game of bleeding poor Vander of his cash was tiring now. She wanted something more

something like the freedom to marry Hubert and travel far away. She dreamed sometimes of honeymoon by sea-rail, visiting all the remote island resorts one only read about. The casinos of the Canary Islands, the hunting preserves of Monrovia, the great sun mirrors of Easter Island. That was the life she wanted, and she could have it. She could have *all* of Vander's money.

But not by divorcing him.

"Killing your husband?" Hubert Ganger repeated. "You mean Vander?"

"He's the only husband I have at the moment."

"But darling, we don't kill the goose who's laying the golden eggs."

"We do if it'll get us all the eggs at one time. The government would have to hire you to finish work on the transvection machine, and you would get all that money, instead of Vander."

But Ganger shook his head. "I want to ruin him, not murder him."

"Haven't you ruined him enough already?"

"Not publicly. He still has his government position."

She smiled up at him, understanding the hatred if not the logic. "But don't you see? ..."

The buzzing of the vision-phone interrupted her and she rolled over on the bed to answer it, flipping off the vision switch first so she wouldn't be seen naked. "Hello?" she said, keeping her voice low and uncommitted.

She listened to the voice on the other end, saying nothing until a final, "Thank you for calling."

"Who was that?" Ganger asked.

She reached for another laudanum tablet, and then thought better of it. "Maarten Tromp, at the New White House. It seems that dear Vander has just been stricken with an attack of appendicitis. They're rushing him to Salk Memorial by rocketcopter, and he'll have a preprogrammed operation within the hour."

3 VANDER DeFOE

THE NURSE WAS YOUNG and blond and quite pretty, and her name was Bonnie Simmons—a good old-fashioned twentieth-century sort of name. She looked down at him on the operating table and checked the record sheet projected on the wall over his head. “Your name is Defoe, like in *Robinson Crusoe*,” she asked.

He had to smile at that, even through the gray cloud of anesthesia. “I didn’t think anyone read Defoe these days. He’s not exactly teleprinter entertainment.”

“We read his *Journal of the Plague Year* in medical school,” she told him with a trace of pride.

“Things have changed since my days.” He glanced up apprehensively, seeing the great stainless steel machine that was moving along an overhead track to position itself above his naked abdomen.

Nurse Simmons adjusted the focus of the record projector, checking over the coded details of his life and health. “Tell me, Mr. Defoe—or should I say Secretary Defoe—just when did the pain commence?”

He took a deep breath, fighting back the anesthetic. “This morning, about six or seven hours ago. There were just cramps at first, and a sort of general pain. I vomited once, about noon. Then, about an hour ago, the pain localized down here, on the right side. That’s when I phoned the White House physician, Colonel Phley. He did a fast blood count and found an increase in white cells.”

Nurse Simmons nodded in agreement. “That usually confirms a diagnosis of appendicitis. Too bad your parents didn’t have it removed at birth. Most people do now, you know.”

“They didn’t fifty-one years ago, I can tell you that!” He tried to move, tried to comfort himself, but it was impossible. “In an age when you can cure cancer with a simple injection, I’d think you could do something about my appendicitis.”

She smiled down tolerantly. “We *are* doing something about it, Secretary Defoe. We’re going to operate by preprogrammed tape. You’ve probably read about it. We use the system quite frequently these days for routine surgery, and especially for appendicitis—the commonest of all conditions requiring abdominal surgery.”

“You mean you and that ... that *machine* are going to operate on me, without even a surgeon? I *am* a member of the president’s cabinet, after all!”

Again the tolerant smile. “Mister Secretary, I’m well aware of your position. I’m aware also that you are the inventor, or coinventor, of the transvection machine. Surely one as machine-oriented as yourself should not fear the blandishments of a computer-controlled surgery machine. As a matter of fact, your operation will be performed by Dr. Ralph Cozzens—one of the finest abdominal surgeons who ever lived.”

“Who *ever* lived? But he is no longer living, is he?”

Bonnie Simmons made some slight adjustments above his head, lining up a series of sighting lamps until they formed a straight line down the center of his body. “Dr. Cozzens died in 2043, but he left behind a wealth of taped material,” she explained. “Complete operations, programmed onto tape for use by future generations. As long as the surgical technique remains the same, Dr. Cozzens and other fine surgeons will go on operating, even though they have been dead for ten or twenty or thirty years.”

“But isn’t it dangerous to have only a nurse in charge?” Despite the anesthetic, his wits were clearing. He felt as if his head and arms and chest were floating clear, somehow detached from the rest of his body. It was a not unpleasant feeling, reminding him of the time in his youth when he had received a spinal anesthetic for an operation on a broken leg that had failed to mend properly. He supposed they’d given him a spinal this time too, though the anesthesia guns they used these days were so painless as to be completely unnoticed.

“I resent that *only a nurse* remark,” she told him. “I took a special ten-week course in the surgeon’s machine, and I hold an operating certificate for it. But it really will be Dr. Cozzens who cuts into your abdomen, you know. Every move will be his.”

“Where is this master computer with the preprogrammed operation?”

“It’s located across town, actually, at the Federal Medical Center. But it could just as well be a thousand miles away. We use standard telephone lines for transmission.”

“And if the line goes dead in the midst of the operation?”

“Oh, we have a fail-safe mechanism. The entire operation must be received on our machine’s own tape before it begins cutting. That’s what’s happening now. See that glowing green light?” She patted the stainless steel monster above his head as if it were a living creature, a pet to be fed and watered and loved. “The actual operation might last anywhere from a few minutes to an hour or two, but all the programmed information is fed into our baby here in a matter of minutes. As soon as the green light goes out, we’ll be ready to begin.”

“Just how does? ...”

“Well, the trickiest thing about it, from the machine’s point of view, is the fact that the appendix is an extremely mobile organ, and can be found in any one of eight or nine different positions within the abdomen. But once it’s located, the rest is easy. This laser scalpel arm here will make the initial incision—either a McBurney or a Right Rectus—about two to four inches long. The diseased appendix is then delivered into the wound, its base is securely tied off, and the organ is cut across and removed. The abdominal wall is then closed with plastic stitches. As I say, it can be over in a few minutes with a little luck—if your appendix is where it’s supposed to be.”

At that moment the green light blinked out, and Nurse Simmons let out her breath. “Does that mean it’s ready?” Vander Defoe asked.

“It’s ready. Just a double-check to see it’s the correct tape. Yes, we’re ready to begin now.”

He saw the machine begin to move above him, saw the sighting lamps contract like some living weapon stalking its prey. "I ... I can't..."

"Do you want a general?" she asked suddenly. "You really don't need to be unconscious. It'll be over before you know it."

"I just don't want to look at that damned thing coming down on me!"

"Oh, very well! I'll put up a screen." She pulled a pale green curtain across his middle, effectively blocking out the operating area. "There! How's that?"

"Better," he mumbled.

"Now just let your mind go blank. Don't think of a thing. Or think of the weather. Think of your wife. Think of ..."

His wife. Gretel. Gretel in bed. Living, thrashing about like some tormented tidal wave. Gretel the untamable. Gretel the machine, with a soul like the stainless steel monster above his head. He wondered if she had initiated her current lover, whoever he might be, into the boundless joys of the electric lance. Surgery by machine, and sex by machine. Was there really much difference? Ah Gretel.

Ah ...

"My God! You're hemorrhaging! Something's wrong!"

"What?"

"Don't try to move!" She was pressing buttons, frantically trying to reverse the machine.

"What is it? What's the matter? I don't feel ..."

"I don't know," she gasped out, fully panicked now.

"I don't think I can ..."

That was the last he heard, as a great wave seemed to sweep over him. He was suddenly far away from here, far away from the automated operating room in a Washington hospital in the middle of the twenty-first century. He was in a field, a field full of daisies, and his mother was calling to him, calling from far away.

I'm coming, he thought. Yes, I'm coming.

Ah. Yes.

4 CARL CRADER

“THERE’S NO GETTING AROUND it, chief. Vander Defoe was murdered, and he was murdered by computer.”

Carl Crader stared across the wide desk at his assistant director. Earl Jazine was young, full of cool brash confidence in his own judgment that Crader couldn’t help but admire. He’d probably been like Jazine once himself in younger days, when the brash-ness of his manner had won him an audience with the president, and led to the establishment of the Computer Investigation Bureau. In those days of feuding government agencies and overlapping areas of responsibility, the birth of CIB as an independent agency reporting directly to the president had been a coup that made Carl Crader, in the words of one video, newsmagazine, “the most powerful law enforcement official since J. Edgar Hoover.”

As he approached his sixty-first birthday, there were days—more and more of them lately—when Carl Crader did not feel especially powerful. This was definitely one of them. The news of Vander Defoe’s death on the operating table at Salk Memorial Hospital had hit the New York headquarters of CIB like a bomb. First Maarten Tromp had been on the direct line, and then the president himself had come on the vision-phone, summoning Crader and Jazine to Washington by rocketcopter.

Now, staring across the desk at Jazine, Carl Crader had to admit it was their baby. “Murder or not, the computer certainly malfunctioned. It malfunctioned in such a way as to cause the death of a member of the president’s cabinet.”

Jazine grinned. “So he calls in the Computer Cops.”

Crader made a face. Jazine liked the term with which the world press had christened them some years earlier, but there was something about it which set Crader’s teeth on edge. “Computer Cops” sounded too much like one of those weekly video series which had been so popular in the primitive days of television. But they’d been saddled with it, much as Hoover himself had been saddled with “G-men” a century earlier.

“We’ll go to Washington,” Crader said with a sigh. “What choice do we have?”

“None.”

In actuality, it was one of the wonders of the twenty-first century that the headquarters of the Computer Investigation Bureau was not located in Washington. Only some fast talk by Crader picturing New York as the computer center of the world, had convinced that earlier president of the need for locating CIB there. He had a field force of ninety-five investigators and technicians under him now, all specialists trained in the highly sophisticated science of investigating computer crime. They had long ago outgrown their original quarters, and now occupied plushly efficient offices on the entire top floor of the old World Trade Center—a twin-towered goliath that had once been the tallest

building in the world.

The World Trade Center had been born in controversy during the late 1960s. The workers on the project were responsible in large part for the bloody “hard-hat riots” of the period, and its great size had even interfered with television reception for a time. Ironically, its status as the world’s tallest building had lasted but a few short years, when it was easily topped by an even taller Chicago structure. The building had fallen into disrepute during the trade scandals of the 1990s, and had finally been taken over by the federal government early in the twenty-first century. Although its flat-topped style of architecture had long ago faded from public favor, it was perfect for Carl Crader’s needs. On flight up from the CIB headquarters was the largest rocketcopter port on Manhattan Island, and Washington was less than a half-hour away.

Crader buzzed his secretary, Judy, and told her they were going to the New White House for a meeting with the president. She pouted a bit, as she always did at being left out of a trip, but finally appeared with his conference recorder.

“Have a good trip, sir,” she said.

“Thanks, Judy. We should be back by four.” She was a tall, sensuous girl with long hair that usually sported one of the newer shades of blond coloring. Government employees were forbidden to wear body stockings on duty, but she still managed to look quite sexy in an old-fashioned miniskirt.

“Say hello to the president for me,” she told Earl Jazine with a wink. They’d become more than friendly since Crader had used them together on an investigation last year, but he was not one to check into the private lives of his employees.

“I’ll do that,” Earl said, starting up the spiral stairway to the rocketcopter port.

Crader hefted his flightcase in one hand and followed along. On the flight deck, holding his topcoat against the wind, he could look through the haze to the distant towers of New Jersey. Far to the west, almost out of sight, he saw the flashes of mail rockets taking off from Nixon International Airport. Below, in the harbor, atomic liners glided toward the ocean. Watching them, marveling at their sleek beauty, he felt a moment’s sorrow at their passing. The sea-rails had all but replaced them now, and another of man’s dreams of progress was vanishing, just as the two-tracked train had vanished by the end of the last century.

The pilot nodded as they climbed in and let the seat arms close about them. “Good day for flight,” he said. “It’s sunny and seventy degrees in Washington.”

“Great!” Crader agreed. It was late October, but still beautiful weather. That, he supposed, was one more thing for which they could thank the machines. The use of giant sun mirrors, combined with selective cloud seeding and humidity control, had shortened winter in the northeast to a few short weeks of January and February. Barely ten inches of snow fell all year, except at the ski resorts in the mountains where snow-making had been refined to a fine art.

The rocketcopter rose straight up, like a shot, away from the roof of the World Trade Center, and

they were on their way. Jazine passed him a few reports on other matters—a computerized credit fraud they'd uncovered in California, some further troubles with thefts from computerized cargo at Nixon International Airport, even a report that Chicago high-school students had discovered a method of cheating on their computerized final exams.

“What about the SEXCO unit?” Crader asked, remembering one of their recent investigations. SEXCO was the Stock Exchange Computer, linking Wall Street with brokerage firms and individual clients around the world.

“No trouble with that, chief. All quiet on Wall Street.”

“You seem to have everything pretty much under control.”

Earl Jazine leaned back in his seat and closed his eyes. “No worries, except for this Defoe thing. Crader thought of something. “Did you take care of the race track people?”

“Not yet, but that'll be easy.” One of the tracks in the New York area had reported some tampering with their totalizator, with the result that bets on certain horses were paid off at extremely high odds. “Somebody's crossed a couple of circuits, that's all. I'll take a run out there tomorrow, Harry doesn't find anything.”

Crader nodded. “Keep on top of it.”

The pilot dipped the rocketcopter on an angle and pointed toward the ground. “Did you ever see traffic jam like that one?”

Below them, stretching perhaps fifty miles along the twenty-four-lane Jersey Turnpike, thousands of electric autos crept and crawled like tiny ants. Somewhere, perhaps back in Trenton, a master traffic computer had blown out, creating chaos.

“The age of the machine,” Earl Jazine observed, letting his eyelids drift shut.

“The age of the computer,” Crader corrected.

“Don't you think things were a lot simpler a hundred years ago, when all they had to worry about was air pollution?”

“The man who died yesterday—Vander Defoe—had an answer for all this. His transvection machine.”

Jazine opened his eyes. “Does it really work?”

“You saw the tests on video news. A girl was transvected all the way to India. And they've done it with animals too.”

“What's this word 'transvection?' I'm not up on the new science.”

Carl Crader smiled. “The science is new, but the name is very old. Transvection simply means the act of transporting through the air, especially of a witch by the devil. In simple words, a witch riding a broomstick is being transvected.”

“I see. If saints do it, they call it levitation, but with witches it's transvection.”

“Something like that, I suppose. Most authorities today believe that the witches of the Middle

Ages never did fly, of course, with or without broomsticks. They believe the whole thing was a dream or an illusion, perhaps even a drug-induced illusion. Early in our own century, when drugs like LSD were still popular, there were reports of men and women who thought they could fly.”

“But how did an idea like transvection ever survive into the twenty-first century?”

“It survived under names like ‘teleportation,’ or ‘astral projection.’ But while all those concepts are purely mystical in nature, Vander Defoe’s transvection machine is firmly rooted in science. His thesis is simple—if a body is made up of atoms, and these atoms have spaces between them, then the body can be broken down into those separate atoms, transported to any point at the speed of light, and reassembled—just like radio waves or television waves are transported and, in a sense, reassembled.”

“And will it work between planets?”

Crader shrugged. “That point is open to dispute. Some claim that atoms of matter cannot travel independently through the near vacuum of outer space and still reassemble themselves at their destination. Defoe was experimenting on that very problem when he was killed.”

“It’s still hard to believe.”

“Would nineteenth-century man have believed a landing on the moon? Would twentieth-century man have believed a colony on Venus? Or the past experiments in synthesizing new microorganisms and egg cells capable of living on the frigid surface of Mars?”

“It’s all beyond me, anyway,” Jazine said. “I’m a technician, not a scientist.” He glanced out over the waters of Chesapeake Bay. “Say, are we being transvected right now?”

“Not unless our pilot is a devil,” Crader said.

The pilot, whose name was Sonny, glanced back over his shoulder. “First time I’ve been called that.” After a moment he cut the rockets and started down. “New White House straight ahead. This is the best time I’ve made all month—just twenty-three minutes!”

Andrew Jackson McCurdy was the fifty-second president of the United States, the fifth president of the USAC, and the third president to reside in the New White House on the eastern edge of Washington. In a time of youthful world leaders, he was fairly old for a president—almost fifty—and his hair was streaked with a rarely seen gray. Political reporters accused him of cultivating a fatherly image, a throwback to twentieth-century politics, but McCurdy insisted he was only being honest with the public. Wigs and hair coloring were not for him, nor were the male cosmetics used by so many political figures.

He was a tall, handsome man, with a powerful handshake and a booming voice that sounded just right coming from a video screen. To have Andrew Jackson McCurdy’s face covering the entire wall of one’s living room as he boomed out a campaign speech was experience enough to sway even the most unconvinced voter. Although his New Federalist party had been out of office when the CIB was established, he both admired and trusted Carl Crader. When McCurdy took office there was

speculation that Crader might be replaced by a New Federalist, but he had weathered the initial storm to gain the new president's confidence. Now there was talk of his becoming a twenty-first-century Edgar Hoover, capable of serving any administration.

"Good to see you, Carl," President McCurdy greeted him, shaking his hand. "Thanks for coming so quickly."

"Anything my bureau can do to help," Crader assured him.

Their meeting was taking place in the presidential lounge, a sort of sitting room off the main executive office. Only Maarten Tromp was with the president, and he seemed more than usually nervous. Crader had never particularly liked the man, but in the messy world of Washington politics one never let his true feelings surface. Tromp was the president's special assistant, a man with great power in his own right, and he had to be respected for that if for nothing else. Crader had to admit that he was a good politician—shrewd, intelligent, calculating. And he never forgot anybody's name.

"Is it possible Vander was murdered?" the president asked, leaning back in his leather armchair. "Is such a thing *possible*?"

"There have been a few cases of computerized murder in the past," Crader admitted, "but none like this. A man in Denver was crushed to death by a construction robot a few years ago, and the technician who programmed the robot was convicted of the murder."

Earl Jazine, who'd been silent till now, interrupted at this point. "I agree that the surgical computer is probably responsible. But there was a human in the operating room with Defoe when it happened, wasn't there?"

Maarten Tromp nodded, licking his dry lips. "Nurse Simmons, a trained medical technician. The machines are never allowed to operate without a human's presence."

"And yet Nurse Simmons could do nothing to save Secretary Defoe?"

"Her story is that the computerized operation went wrong, that it somehow caused massive hemorrhaging which could not be controlled." Tromp looked away, showing some emotion for the first time. "Defoe was dead within sixty seconds."

"Can anyone bleed to death that quickly?" Jazine wondered.

"Gentlemen," the president interrupted, "I know you're anxious to get on with the investigation but I must ask to be excused from any discussion of the more technical details. There are other matters commanding my attention this morning, and I have a luncheon meeting with the governor of New Brunswick." Though he spoke pleasantly enough, Crader knew his remarks were something of a rebuke to Jazine and Tromp. Presidents only concerned themselves with the main issue.

"Any hint of a foreign plot, sir?" Crader asked. "Something tied in with the Venus situation?"

"That's always a possibility, considering Vander Defoe's position. He was about to begin experiments with the transvection machine on Venus, and it's possible the Russo-Chinese wanted that to fail. If the transvection machine could be made to work across outer space, the USAC could quite

possibly colonize the remainder of the planet before the Russo-Chinese expanded their own holdings

“There is one thing,” Tromp suggested. “When I spoke to Vander yesterday morning, before his seizure, I told him of a man named Euler Frost who had escaped from the maximum security prison on Venus. There was some fear he might have used the transvection machine to reach Earth, but Vander assured me the machine was not that far along in development.”

The president turned to his special assistant with an inquiring look, waiting for more. McCurdy did not like to be interrupted without good cause. “What about it?” he asked finally, a trace of annoyance creeping into his voice. “This man, this Frost, could hardly have reached Earth already. How couldn’t he be linked with Defoe’s death in any way, could he?”

“That’s just the point, sir—he could! An investigation of the escape now indicates it took place sometime over a week ago. The shuttle rocket from Venus takes only eight days at this time of year, so Frost could be here on Earth right now!”

The president turned once more to Crader. “I’ll expect your bureau to follow this up, Carl. If Defoe was killed, for a personal or political reason, I want his killer brought to justice. I’ve already ordered the Federal Medical Center to suspend all use of computerized operations pending the outcome of your investigation. I want results—and I want them fast!”

He smiled as he shook hands with Crader and Jazine and left the room. Already his mind seemed far away, perhaps checking the background for his next meeting. “He’s a busy man,” Jazine remarked.

Maarten Tromp nodded. “Too busy for one man. I often wish the dual presidency amendment had been approved.”

“Let’s get down to cases,” Crader said. “What do you two really think killed Vander Defoe? Who and who? Earl, back in New York you were convincing me it was murder by computer. Down here you seem to hint that the nurse could be involved.”

Jazine grinned. “Maybe I just want a chance to question her.”

Crader had trouble knowing when Jazine was kidding him, and just then he wasn’t sure. “What about you, Maarten? Do you really think this man Frost is a suspect?”

“Of course, or I wouldn’t have brought him up.” He drew himself up to his full height, a habit he had when his opinions were questioned.

“And that’s the only suspect you have?”

The presidential assistant shrugged. “There’s always his wife, I suppose. Isn’t there always a wife in murder cases?”

“What about his wife?”

“They’re separated. She has a lover.”

“Who?”

Tromp looked pained. “I’d rather not say. I’ve just heard rumors.”

Crader knew he only needed a bit of urging, so he urged. “Come on, now. In an investigation

this sort, rumors are often the most important things we have to go on.”

“Well, I’ve heard it was Hubert Ganger, Defoe’s former partner and codeveloper of the transvection machine.”

Crader nodded. “We’ll check it out. Now what about this man Frost? Can you give us a hologram and a description?”

Tromp nodded. “I have the file back in my office, if you’ll just follow me.”

Crader and Jazine went along, out of the relative plushness of the presidential lounge and into the sterile steel corridors of the New White House. Everything was bombproof here, stark and metallic and very functional. Crader admitted the necessity of it, after the White House bombing of 2018, yet he still remembered the old place with a certain national pride. He’d gone there as a child once, on his mother’s arm, and stood in awe of the East Room and the Rose Room and the rest as symbols of a way of life that had made the country great. Sometimes he still thought the true greatness of the nation rested in its past, rather than in the machine-oriented present.

Maarten Tromp’s office was wood-paneled, with a wall video screen and smaller units capable of monitoring all six networks at once. There was a teleprinter unit, and next to it Crader observed stapled copies of the three video newsmagazines. While Tromp went to get his files, Crader let his eyes wander over the extensive library of video cassette titles. *The Venus Colony*, *The Selected Speeches of Winston Churchill*, *The Computerized Macbeth*, *Stage Illusions of Twentieth-Century Magicians*, *The Inauguration of Andrew Jackson McCurdy*, *Sea-Rail Vacations*, *Containerization and the Metric System*.

“You have quite a variety of titles,” Crader remarked as Tromp came back to join them.

“I watch them sometimes on my lunch hour. Great diversion, really. Much better than the films the networks provide, though of course no one can beat the networks at news coverage.” He pressed a button on his desk and the wall screen flickered into life. “Just in time for the noon English-language report on the Russo-Chinese network. It’s usually quite interesting.”

The face on the screen was that of a familiar Oriental announcer, just beginning his newscast. After a few Moscow items, he reported, “From abroad comes word that the death of Vander Defoe, secretary of extra-terrestrial defense for the USAC, may not have been the tragic accident it first appeared. Rumors sweeping world capitals hint that Defoe might have been the victim of a purge by the New White House, brought about by his reluctance to pursue a hard line against the Russo-Chinese Venus Colony. ...”

“Rumors sweeping world capitals!” Tromp snorted. “Rumors dreamed up in Moscow is more like it! They’d love to make something out of this!” He snapped off the wall screen in disgust.

Carl Crader frowned and said nothing. Instead he bent over the file Tromp had produced, glancing at the hologram that showed a clean-shaven young man with a handsome face and deep-set eyes. “This is Frost?”

Maarten Tromp nodded. "Euler Frost, age twenty-nine, citizen of Venus."

Crader raised his eyebrows. "Isn't that a bit unusual? I didn't know citizenship was granted Americans."

"Frost was involved with a revolutionary group here on Earth. He was exiled to Venus ten years ago, and took out citizenship there, since he was not welcome back here. But he proved to be just as much of a troublemaker on Venus as on Earth. He was discovered living with a Russo-Chinese girl in the forbidden Free Zone between the two colonies. He killed a soldier who tried to arrest them, and caused quite a battle. The girl was killed by our people, and Frost was overpowered. He's been in maximum security prison there ever since—at least until his recent escape."

"And you think he's back on Earth?"

"He could be, even without the transvection machine."

"We'll check it," Crader decided. "I'll check Frost while you get over to the hospital and inspect that machine, Earl."

"Right, chief."

But something else was nagging at Crader's mind. "One thing, Maarten—if this Frost did make it back to Earth, do you really think his first act would be to assassinate Vander Defoe?"

Tromp raised himself up, putting on his act again. "The revolutionary group with which Frost was associated has declared war on computers and machines and data-collection in general. As inventor of the transvection machine, Vander Defoe would have been a prime target."

"But you said Frost was an exile for ten years."

"There is a transvection machine going through testing on Venus, remember. Defoe's name would be known there."

"All right," he said, shaking hands with Tromp. "You can assure the president that the entire resources of the Computer Investigation Bureau will be working on the case. If Vander Defoe was murdered, we'll find the person or group who did it."

"That's what we want," Tromp said. "Whether it's Frost or Defoe's wife or anyone else, we want them brought to justice."

Later, on the way back to the rocketcopter, Earl Jazine put their mutual thoughts into words. "Chief?"

"What is it, Earl!"

"I don't like that Tromp. Never did."

"Not too many people like him, Earl."

"Suppose the Russo-Chinese are right."

"What?"

"Suppose the president had Vander Defoe killed for some reason. Suppose he used Maarten Tromp to do it. Where does that leave us?"

“Well, Earl,” Crader answered, speaking slowly, “to be honest, it leaves us in a great deal of trouble. But I think you’re jumping to conclusions. There’s not the slightest trace of evidence that President McCurdy wanted Defoe removed. And even if he did, it would be much easier to fire him than to kill him.”

“I still don’t like it. There’s something funny about it. A man dies on an operating table, and everyone around the world immediately thinks he was murdered.”

“Even you thought that, Earl,” Crader reminded him.

“But *why*?”

“Because we trust in the machine. The machine is god today, and the machine can do no wrong. If the surgical computer killed Vander Defoe, it was programmed to do so. And that’s murder.”

“I suppose you’re right.”

Crader dropped a hand on his shoulder. “Get over to Salk Memorial and see what you can learn. I’m going back to New York and do a bit of checking on Euler Frost.”

“Where in hell’d he ever get a first name like that?”

“It’s a crater on the Moon, named after a Swiss mathematician. But that doesn’t exactly answer your question.”

“Good luck,” Jazine said.

Crader smiled. “You too.” He climbed into the rocketcopter with a wave of his hand. Twenty-seven minutes later, he was back in New York.

5 EARL JAZINE

SOMETIMES IT WAS A hell of a way to earn a living, like the two days he'd spent cramped up inside a computer at Internal Revenue, trying to figure out how it was approving certain fraudulent tax returns without question. Or the time he'd been caught in the middle of a Flippie riot while investigating the SEXCO affair.

But there were certain compensations, and Nurse Bonnie Simmons was one of them. Her youthful body was clearly outlined by the fabric of her jumpsuit uniform, and her smiling eyes immediately welcomed him into the fold. It was the sort of investigation he knew he was going to enjoy. "I haven't seen you around before," she purred. "Are you with the local police?"

He flipped open his case and showed her the bronzed aluminum Computer Investigation Bureau ID card. "New York, but we're a government agency. We specialize in computer crimes."

She bit at the skin of one finger, staring him down. "The Computer Cops—you're one of them!"

"I'm one of them," he admitted, glad that Crader wasn't present.

"They sent you all the way down here because of what happened?"

"That's right." They were in the administration office on the ground floor of Salk Memorial Hospital. Jazine had already talked to the hospital administrator and the chief surgeon, both of whom assured him that Vander Defoe's death could not possibly have happened. He was almost ready to give up the whole case and admit that Defoe was still alive. "Do you think it couldn't have happened too?" he asked Nurse Simmons.

"I saw it happen," she replied. "I'm the only one who did."

"Good! Then we've established that Vander Defoe is really dead, and that's a starting point."

"I hope no one's trying to blame *me* for what happened," she said.

"Suppose you tell me exactly what did happen."

"Well," she began, settling back in her chair, "it was late yesterday afternoon when they flew him in from the New White House. I'd come on duty at 4:00, and Secretary Defoe was admitted at 4:30. The examining physician in the emergency ward confirmed the diagnosis of the New White House doctor, and ordered an immediate operation to remove the patient's appendix. He was placed in my care at 4:55 P.M., and I dialed an emergency clearance to the Federal Medical Center across town."

Jazine had been making a few notes, and at this point he interrupted. "How many of the computerized operations had you assisted in previously, Bonnie?" The shift to a first-name basis came easily to him, as it had many times in the past.

She smiled and replied, "Dozens! I couldn't begin to count them! I received my certificate nearly a year ago, and I've had at least one a week since then."

"How many appendectomies?"

“Maybe fifteen or twenty. I could check my records if it’s really important.” She was biting the tip of her finger again, and he couldn’t decide if she was being nervous or sexy. “You see, the purpose of computerized operations is to help relieve the critical shortage of surgeons in this overpopulated world of ours. Naturally the surgeons are used for more serious operations—heart, liver, lungs, brain, stomach. Most surgery on the extremities is done by machine, and simple plastic surgery—rebuilding noses, enlarging breasts, and the like—is also computerized. Being such a common operation, appendectomies are included too.”

“You sound exactly like a training film, Bonnie. You remembered your lessons well.”

She blushed nicely and said, “Thank you, sir! We have to learn all this to put the patients at ease. Sometimes they’re almost frantic when they see little old me and that great big machine over them.”

“Did you ever have trouble with the machine before yesterday?”

She shook her head. “None at all. It’s a foolproof system, really.”

“All right,” he said with a sigh. “Please go on with what happened.”

“We chatted a bit, mainly to put him at ease. I kidded him about being named Defoe, like the author of *Robinson Crusoe*, and then I explained about the operation. He was quite interested, really—wanted to know just how the machine worked. I remember he asked me what happened if the telephone hookup to the master computer went dead during the operation.”

“What does happen?”

“Nothing. The complete taped program is transmitted before the operation ever begins. I lined up the sighting lamps on his body, adjusting the machine for his own particular measurements, and checked over the data on his health record. Then, as soon as the green light went out, signifying the entire program had been received, I began the operation.”

“What if the Federal Medical Center had sent the wrong program? Suppose they sent a leg amputation instead of an appendectomy—then what?”

“Well, first of all, leg amputations would not be performed by machine because of the danger of shock to the patient’s system. But I see your point. And there’s a double-check for that too. Each taped operation has its own serial number, and before I begin surgery I compare the number on the machine’s electronic readout with the number in the book. They have to match, and I have to press a button confirming that they match. Then we start.”

“I think I should see this marvelous machine,” Jazine told her.

“You’ve never seen one?”

“They’ve never needed a Computer Cop for one before.”

She rose from the chair, unwinding like some sleepy python. “Just follow me.”

I’d follow you anywhere, Jazine thought, but decided it was a little soon to put that thought in words. Perhaps later, after the business was attended to, he might invite Bonnie Simmons out for a little drink. “Nice hospital you’ve got here,” he said, making conversation.

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