

## DeadboyDonner and the Filstone Cup

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I am standing in front of Vindy's and cannot read the racing stix because of the brownout which is the worst I can remember, when Crash Callahan comes by and the light is not so bad that I cannot see the bulge beneath his racing jacket, a thing I suspect to be malignant though not a tumor .

"I am looking," he tells me, "for Deadboy Donner and Painted Evelyn, and I will be most grateful for any information on their whereabouts."

I shake my head, not because I do not know but because I do not want to tell him that I have seen the pair less than half an hour ago and they are doubtless even now sharing a cavort at Metal Eddie's and perhaps a drink or several. This is because Crash, while a first-class racing pilot of the sun clipper variety, is often strung out on various chemicals and is known on these occasions for antisocial behavior , such as sending people outside our orbiting habitat for views of Earth, Moon, and stars without proper attire for comfort. So I tell him only that they have come and gone, but I know not where. This may seem more trouble than one should care to take for the Deadboy , who, to be fair about such matters, resembles Crash himself more than a little on the matter of public relations. But my reason is not only good, it is overwhelming. Namely, my personal finances should wax and brim very soon, but only if the Deadboy remains among the living long enough to collect on a promise from that strange dark power which rulesUpper Manhattan .

Donner, like Crash, had been a racing pilot who wound up fairly regularly in the money, earning along the way good returns for those such as myself who follow these matters and occasionally make a small wager. He had copped every sun clipper Classic but the Filstone Cup, and that was the one which did him in. There had long been a nasty rivalry between Donner and Crash over that race, till Donner's immune system got fried during a solar flareup two years ago, along with the rest of the entrants—it being a bad year for that sort of thing. Crash was not running on that occasion, and so he is hale. Though the next year, Donner—who had kept going on drugs—placed, while Crash did not even show. That should have been it, however, because even the drugs could not get Donner through another year and give him a last crack at the Cup. So he elected to become a deadboy .

Donner had himself frozen, which is a low-overhead operation here, merely involving closing the door and opening the windows, so to speak. His intention was to be brought around a few days before this year's Classic, and be given a temporary fix to get him through it. His experience being what it was, he was thinking this might be his year of the Cup.

But lo, long before the time he is to be roused, I begin seeing him about town. And I know something strange is afoot because he avoids me with considerable ingenuity and speedy legwork. Not that we normally say more than a few words to each other, but now even these are missing. For a Saturday and much of a Sunday, that is. I manage to be blocking his way when he comes out of a restroom on Sunday evening.

"Hi, Donner," I say loudly then.

"Uh, hi," he answers, his eyes darting. Then he sees a way aroundme, takes it and is gone, out the door and off towardForty-second Street , where he turns and vanishes. Could be he forgot something, I am thinking. I promise myself to ask around about him, but I do not because the next day I see him again and not only does he greet me first but, "Did you see me anytime this weekend?" he asks.

"Only last night," I tell him, scratching my head and wondering whether his neurology is burned out, also. But he smiles—possibly having heard of the peculiar occurrence which brought me to Upper Manhattan, where I await the running out of certain statutes—and when he tells me, "I would like to talk to you of matters which would benefit both of us in a financial fashion," I am willing to give his nervous system every consideration.

Over lunch in Vindy's he tells me of his troubles as I have just related them, and I nod every now and then to be polite, while I wait for him to talk about the money. Instead, he continues on beyond the point of being frozen, "... And I awaken," he tells me, "in this place which is like the inside of a videogame, leading me to believe that I have passed on and the next world is a kind of Cyberbia . There are all these algorithms putting the make on pixels, and programs champing at bits and sub routines moving about in simpleminded, reliable ways, as is their custom. The place is not unattractive, and I am watching, fascinated, for I know not how long. Finally, a sort of voice asks me, 'Do you like what you see?'

"At this, I am sore afraid," he goes on, "and I ask, 'Are you the Deity?'

"'No,' comes the reply, 'I am the Ality .'

"It turns out," he tells me, "that I am a guest of the artificial intelligence which has run our entire satellite for upward of a generation now, and while it seldom has much to do with individual people it has grown interested in me. This is because I am hooked up to a special monitoring and alarm system, designed to bring me around in time for the next race. This system does more than that, however, after the Ality tinkers with it. It provides access.

"'I have digitized you and brought you here for a reason,' it tells me. 'You are interested in winning the Filstone Cup, are you not?'

"'Indeed,' I reply, 'and more than somewhat.'

" 'WouldI be safe in saying that you would do anything for it?'

"'This does not sound like an exaggeration,' I answer.

"'Look around you. Would you go stir crazy in a place like this?'

"I give my attention to the central precincts of Cyberbia . While I am about this, it adds, 'For if you were willing to put in a little time here, I could guarantee you the Cup in this year's Filstone Classic.'

"'I am taken,' I reply, 'by the great beauty of your operating programs, not to mention some of the subroutines.'

"And that is how we come to make our deal," Donner tells me. "It seems the intelligence is a fan of the human condition, and has grown very curious what with having spent all these years as an observer. It has been hot to try it out for some time, but the opportunity had not presented itself till now. So when it offers to train me for its job with the understanding that I will runUpper Manhattan on alternate days while it vacations in my body, I am interested. Especially when it points out that it receives and relays all of the monitoring signals during races and could make certain that mine say I win the next Filstone Cup."

"But your body is ailing," I observe. "What fun would this be for it?"

"That is another inducement," he explains. "It says that much could be done to improve the medication I receive while ambulant, and it will institute a new treatment program for me and buy me considerable extra time without pain. Even sparing it half of my days until the race, I will come out ahead. Then I can hibernate again after I win, until perhaps someone comes up with a cure."

"This does not sound like a bad deal at all," I observe. "Especially the part about the race."

He nods.

"This is why I tell you," he explains. "For I want you to manage my betting for me with some of the unregistered, off-track people such as Blue Louie, who give better odds."

"But of course," I tell him. "Only one thing bothers me. Is it not hard being a stand-in for an artificial intelligence? I ask only because my life depends on the support systems."

He laughs.

"Perhaps for some it would be," he replies, "but for a natural intelligence I seem to have an aptitude for this sort of business. I find myself actually liking the work, and I even modify a routine or two for the better."

"'You are not bad for a NI,' the AI tells me when we change shifts and it checks over the first day's work. 'Not bad at all.'"

"Which is more than I can say for the AI, when it comes to being human. I wake up and find it has left my body dead tired and with a world-class hangover. Most of my first day being human again is spent recovering from this. I am even feeling too crummy to call my lady, Evelyn."

"I hook up to the monitoring equipment before I go to bed that evening, like I promise. When we switch over later on, we have a little conference wherein we brief each other on the day's events."

"'Go easy on the body,' I say, 'for it is the only one we have between us.'"

"'I am very sorry,' it replies. 'But this being my first time out and all, it is hard for me to judge things. I will try to be more careful in the future.'"

"But, alas, an AI is not always as good as its word," he tells me. "A couple of turns later I come back to cracked ribs, assorted bruises, and another hangover. It seems it had been drinking at Hammer Helligan's and had gotten into a fight. Again, it apologizes, explaining it is still having some difficulty judging human reactions, and saying it feels particularly badly about things when it sees what a fine job I am doing as substitute AI. Well, I am not about to back out at this point. So I tell it to go easy on the booze and other substances and I head off to work. I continue to streamline operations, realizing that if I trusted my opposite number more I would not mind running the show for even longer periods of time. But the AI gets me into enough trouble on our fifty-fifty timesharing setup—for the following week I realize that I have contracted clap, and it is not I who have been up to anything which might result in this condition. Once more, it claims to be sorry. I tell it it had better remember to take our medication which it has prescribed, or I may reconsider our entire deal."

"So what happens?" I ask.

"It behaves," he replies. "For several days now it seems to have kept our nose clean. I am feeling much

better, the race is next week, I am all registered and I will be sailing *Hotshot III* to victory and glory and money."

So I lay his bets and I lay my bets and I await the race with the honest pleasure of a man who knows that the fix is in.

Then he begins avoiding me on a steady basis. I know better than to try talking to him on alternate days, for I know that that is when the AI is in charge—and though I approach it once and it lets me buy it a drink, it grows most upset when I let it know that I am aware of its pact with Donner. Then several days pass, and the race is nigh, and Donner will not give me the time of day if 6:47 will save my life, though I see him and Painted Evelyn nearly everywhere for a time. I begin to grow suspicious, and then alarmed. Then Crash Callahan comes by and asks after them. I suspect they are at Metal Eddie's, but I do not think they will appreciate the surprise Crash represents with the bulge beneath his jacket there in the middle of the brownout, and so I shake my head.

"... I know not where," I tell him.

"You do not understand," he tells me, "what is happening."

"That is possible," I answer. "Likely, even. For this man has led a strange life of late."

"Stranger by far," he tells me, "than you may think. For he is not the person he seems to be."

"Of this I am aware," I agree, "though I am curious how you come to know it."

"I know it," he replies, "because I am Donner."

"You look more like Crash," I answer.

"Crash is responsible for the brownout," he says, "for he cannot run a power grid any better than he sails a racing clipper. It is all very simple."

In that I do not think so, we wind up in Vindy's, where he says that he wishes to charge some elaborate dining on Crash's account. When I question the fairness of this he points out that half of the food is going to wind up in Crash's belly and the rest may be viewed as pre-race entertainment—Crash being a last-minute entry in this year's Filstone Classic.

"I do not think you believe me," he says, "for I am not at all sure I would. But because I desire your cooperation, I will explain. I am inhabiting the body of this lower life form because it is the only one I can get my hands on, on the spur of the moment. You would be surprised how difficult it is to find a body when you really need one. Fortunately, Crash is given to many vices. So of course I take advantage of this."

"Even now," I say, "I do not understand."

"It is very simple," he replies. "One day I get much on top of my work as substitute AI, so I decide to look myself up. I chase my credit trail around town. Then I set about infiltrating everything electronic in Blue Louie's Drugs, Alcohol & Electronic Vice Emporium, which of course is the legitimate cover for his gambling operation, for that is where my latest charges come from. There, through the burglar alarm camera, I see myself sitting at the bar with my lady Evelyn, who seems to be enjoying herself more than a little. This, you must admit, is a low trick, making out with my girl while using my body, perhaps not yet

even fully recovered from a certain embarrassing social condition."

Unless, of course, he catches it from her, I am thinking. For she has always struck me as a hard and calculating lady. But I do not say this to Deadboy Donner in Crash Callahan's body, in case he feels that I do not trust artist's models and perhaps wishes to introduce me to skydiving of the orbital variety. So, "This is distressing," I say. "What do you do then?"

"I fear that I let my temper get the better of me," he answers, "and I overplay my hand as is sometimes the case when someone else in your body is romancing your girl."

"I cut," he says, "simultaneously, into the nearest speaker and vidscreen. I identify myself and then I flash upon the display field a series of circuits with slash marks through them, suggesting that I am contemplating Alicide unless it quits conning the lady. It rises and attempts to depart the establishment in a hasty fashion, an action I foil by closing the automatic door before it and continuing our conversation by means of another speaker, nearby. I suggest an immediate rendezvous at the interfacing equipment back in my apartment, failure to comply with which suggestion I will consider a breach of our contract. Then I open the door and let it go."

"Is there not a nasty paradoxical dilemma here?" I ask.

"Oh, Blue Louie is somewhat upset with my arguing through his sound system and flipping on and off the lights, the dance-floor strobes, the blenders, the shakers, the cash register drawers, the icemaker and such to emphasize my points. But when I explain a little of what is going on and ask him to keep an eye on Evelyn for me while I deal with a welshing intelligence construct, he is happy to oblige."

"I do not mean problems with Blue Louie," I say, "who is occasionally a gentleman. But it occurs to me that you cannot hurt the AI while it is in your body without harming yourself, and if you let it return to the grand system of Upper Manhattan it will be practically immortal there."

"These are not matters I have neglected thinking over," he replies, "and there are more ways to deal with artificial welshers than one may suppose at first glance. I assume the AI wishes to be reasonable, however, and come to some final understanding, since we both occupy awkward positions."

"So what does it say when you have your meeting?" I ask, for he has paused for dramatic effect and several mouthloads of chicken cacciatore, and I wish to seem interested in his problem as we are heavy betting partners as of several days now.

"Nothing," he answers a few swallows later. "For it does not show for the meeting. It decides to head for cover and lie low for a time."

"This seems very foolish," I observe, "when it knows that you are in a position to follow its electronic tracks throughout the city."

"Nevertheless," he replies. "It may feel it still knows a few tricks I do not, though it only postpones the inevitable. I locate it within a few blocks, and then I decide to come looking in the flesh—using Crash's flesh."

"A question occurs to me," I say, "not knowing anyone who has ever done a hit on an AI. What happens if you take it out? I understand it coordinates everything from banking to the disposal of solid wastes."

He laughs.

"Theoretically, this is true," he tells me. "However, making Upper Manhattan a smart city is actually a gimmick to balloon the rents, back when they are setting things up. Having held the job, I can tell you there is really very little to do once you get things to flowing smoothly. In fact, it is having all that time on its hands which I think caused the AI to start daydreaming of the pleasures of the flesh and results in our current problems."

"But Crash is in there running things while you use his body, I observe, "and this brownout is a big pain, not to mention being hard on the eyes. If it is such an easy show to run, why is he having this problem?"

"This is because Crash, who is a jerk," he says, "cannot keep from fiddling with the controls. It is what makes him a second-rate pilot, also. If he would just leave it alone it would fly itself."

"I see, sort of. By the way, how did you wind up in his body?" I ask.

"Oh, he switches from chemical stimulants to those of an electrical nature for some time before a race," he explains. "I discover that the brain hookup for this is sufficiently invasive to permit access of the sort the AI pulled on me in my deadboy days. So I digitize Crash while he is turning on, explain that it is a necessary borrowing and park him in Central Processing. I also tell him to keep his hands off the controls. You can see how much good that does."

The brownout had vanished a few minutes earlier, with light-levels returning to normal, then flaring to the point where many bulbs blow. After a while, the brownout returns.

"You mean the system would be better off without Crash in there?" I ask.

"Of course, and the same can be said for most places. But I have to leave him somewhere while I borrow his rig.

"So," he finishes, "I know the AI is in the neighborhood. If you believe my story, I want anything you might know on its whereabouts. If you want more ID, ask me anything only Donner would know."

I ask him how much money he gave me to spread around on him in the Filstone, with Blue Louie and some others. In that he knows all of the amounts, and how much is laid at what odds, I suggest he check out Metal Eddie's, about which I hear the AI in the Dead-boy bod comment to the Painted Lady a little after the brownouts begin.

He does not catch them at the metalman's, however. Or, rather, he does and he doesn't. He finds them there, but the AI departs by a side exit and leads him on a chase, both of them careless of all bodies in the vicinity as they discharge with great noise and small accuracy the weapons they have with them. A half hour of this and the AI has vanished. The constabulary is spreading its net by then, but Donner slips through before it is tightened.

It is not until that evening that I see him again. I am talking to Blue Louie about the race, startoff time for which is only hours away when we emerge from Earth's shadow and catch the solar wind, and I am speaking of the possibility of a scratch on the part of Donner, though no official mention of this has been made. I am saying that if this happens and the owners of *Hotshot III* bring in another pilot, my bet should be considered off, because I was betting on the man and not on the ship. But Louie is shaking his head and producing slips saying "Hotshot III" with my signature on them.

About this time, the Deadboy in the Crash bod comes running in and says that he must use an

electrostim helmet quickest.

"Now, Crash, do you think this is wise," Blue Louie inquires, "indulging yourself so close to a race and all?"

"It is not an indulgence that I seek," he replies, "but a bridge through the interface to a place where I can track down a weasel."

We go to a booth in a back room, Donner signaling that I should accompany him. And I wait till he plugs in, tunes up, goes glazed in the eyes, and runs off through fields of induction.

He is gone for several minutes, then his voice comes through a nearby speaker.

"Turn it off," he says.

I do this and he slumps. He had wanted me there for this purpose. Often, these devices are used with a timer, but he could not limit his stay in this fashion.

"Tell Blue Louie," the bod says to me, "to send back a brew, for I am in need of such refreshment."

I do this, and Blue Louie comes back himself, along with Painted Evelyn, on whom he is keeping an eye and also his hands.

"Crash, it is not good for you to mix the liquid with the electric," he tells him, "especially this near to racetime, for you will mess up the odds."

"Nevertheless," the Deadboy in the Crash bod states.

At this, Blue Louie nods, gestures to Painted Evelyn and gives her a small pat on her rearmost anatomy as they depart for the front of the establishment. I see that Donner notes this, for his eyes follow, but he says nothing.

A little later, the drinks have come and we are alone again. The Deadboy takes a big swallow, then says, "Two surprises awaited me in Cyberbia. First, I am attacked by Crash—"

"Attacked? In that state?"

"Yes, but he is no tougher there than he is in the flesh. He feints once with a digitized left, then throws a right at you, and that is all he's got.

"I speak metaphorically," he adds. "At any rate, he starts putting these electronic moves on me and insisting on the return of his bod, when I am there only to try running down my own. I am forced to deck him and stash him in an electronic slammer of my own design before I can continue the hunt for the AI in my bod."

"And that is the second surprise," he finishes. "Although I search all of Upper Manhattan in a great variety of subtle ways I am unable to turn up any trace of my kidnapped self."

"This is most frustrating," I say, moving to the screen on the wall nearby and fiddling up exterior shots. Predictably, most channels seem occupied with the gossamer lineup for the upcoming regatta. "It occurs to me that if you do not get to your ship soon," I tell him, "you may not be ready for takeoff."

"They will not let me in *Hotshot III* in this bod," he states. "But—" Then he stares at me. Then at the lineup. "Someone is in that clipper!" he cries, as it is jockeyed around a bit. "The AI knows the system has no senses to look into the clippers! So that is where it takes itself!"

He puts down his beer and rises.

"Excuse me. I have business to finish," he says.

"You just said they will never let you aboard *Hotshot III*," I tell him, indicating the insert of the advancing terminator and the digital countdown beneath it. "And there is very little time, anyhow."

"Then I run it down in the *Redhound*," he says, pointing to Crash's ship, adrift at its moorings. "For no one can keep me off of that one."

"But, Donner," I say, "what will you do if you catch it?"

"I will make it pay," he replies.

Then he rushes out.

In the days that follow I attend to the screen with the attachment of a lamprey to its rock. The race goes on for the better part of a week toward a distant multipurpose satellite which also serves as finishing beacon. There, the racers are met by a number of con-ac skipjacks which convey them home in great haste, the clippers being collapsed and drawn back by tugs. I am mainly concerned that Donner, in his rush to run down and pay back the AI which has stolen his bod, may win the race in *Redhound* thus costing us both. But surely and even so, he would not be so foolish as to kill the AI, I tell myself—despite his bod being pretty much used up—and face homicide charges for doing himself in.

It seems an incredible dead-heat finish, from the pictures that come in from a camera on one of the skipjacks. But its monitoring is complicated by the fact that *Hotshot III* suddenly tacks to starboard in terms of the ecliptic and *Redhound* does the same near at hand as if trying to crawl all over the other vessel.

Maintaining a certain rigidity of attitude, *Hotshot III* crashes into the satellite buoy. *Redhound* fires a line, changes tack after it connects, veers off, then drops sail. It fires its small emergency braking jets then, a disqualifying act if on the wrong side of the finish line. Two of the skipjacks maneuver in that direction on their ion motors, but a spacesuited figure is already crossing on

*Redhound's* line toward *Hotshot III*, which, I am fairly certain, reaches the buoy somewhat after *Redhound* passes it.

The cameras never show what happens following the entry of Deadboy Donner in the Crash bod into the wreckage. We lose the picture during a blackout which follows amid multiple systems failures which are largely attributed to sunspots. Later, however, comes the official announcement that Donner has brought *Hotshot III* in first, shaving a bit of time from the record while about it. Unfortunately, he is not available for the victory dinner, as he perishes at the finish line in the process of colliding with the buoy. He will, however, be refrozen, flat EEG or not, since he is officially a deadboy anyway and his bill is paid up for cold quarters.

So, when I see Donner in the Crash bod to pay him the money he has made by betting on his Deadboy



bod in *Hotshot III* under the direction of the runaway AI, he is with Painted Evelyn, who gives me a smile, with which she is usually sparing except when she wants something.

Then I ask Deadboy Donner in the Crash bod what happens out at the buoy, and he tells me that he gets there too late for retribution as the AI has patched into the satellite's broadcast system and transmitted itself back to Upper Manhattan. He is not up to abandoning both bods there in a damaged clipper to pursue it, so his revenge must wait upon his return to town. When he gets back, however, and finally has a chance to check out the system, there is no AI—or NI either—running the show. It is as deserted as Miss Blooming Orchid's establishment following a raid. Even Crash Callahan is gone. "I do not understand this any more than I understand how *Hotshot III* came out in the Winner's Circle," he says, "when *Redhound* was clearly ahead at the finish line."

"But for this part we should be thankful," I say, "for we collect on all our bets."

"True," he replies. "But I am the actual winner of that race."

"And that is what the record shows," Painted Evelyn says. "Deadboy Donner wins the Filstone Cup."

"I do not complain over this," he says, "though it is an odd way to do it."

At that moment Painted Evelyn allows as she could use a brew, and Donner disengages his hand from hers and goes to fetch one for her. She studies me then.

"You know?" she asks.

I nod.

"Partly, it is the business about the times," I say. "*Red-hound* comes in first. Then you change the record, for it does him more good that way. You, too, since you are with him now. What I do not understand is why."

"I might just say that we had a deal, and I am only keeping my part of it."

"But there is more to it than that. Like why does he find the system empty, and why are you here? And where is Crash?"

"Crash is no more," she replies. "He gets free of the knots Donner ties him in, and when I come back he jumps me. As he is trying to do me in, I return the compliment. I crash Crash."

"Then why are you not back in the place where you are impregnable and powerful and—"

"But I wanted the flesh," she says, "though I do not realize my mistake right away. Then I see that I would much rather be a woman than a man. This is why I am seeing Painted Evelyn so much at first. I learn quickly that she might be interested in life in the system. Donner, who has an aptitude for this, seems attracted to people of a similar sort.

"And vice-versa," she adds.

"You mean...?"

"Yes, I am here because I have a crush on him, and Evelyn dwells in silicon castles, reviewing the troops

binary-stepping by, building up personal trust funds..."

I nod.

"She always was a calculating woman," I say. "But why is it Donner does not detect her presence when he visits the system on his return?"

"I move her out temporarily."

"Where to?"

"Donner's Deadboy bod," she says, "which is hooked up to its monitors by then, and deserted."

"That clears up many details," I say, "and almost satisfies me."

"So, we would both appreciate your keeping this to yourself," she says, "until I find the best time and the best way to explain matters to Donner."

"You are still in touch with her?" I ask.

"Oh yes. It is easy to reach her," she says, as Donner rounds the corner bringing their drinks.

I must say that Painted Evelyn does a much better job than Crash Callahan in the AI business, for we have had no more brownouts, shortouts, or switched calls since she took over. It is good, too, having gotten her private number from the AI, so that I can call her every now and then, until such time as the AI levels with Donner. For I have had two big winners so far this month, and she is about to give me my third.