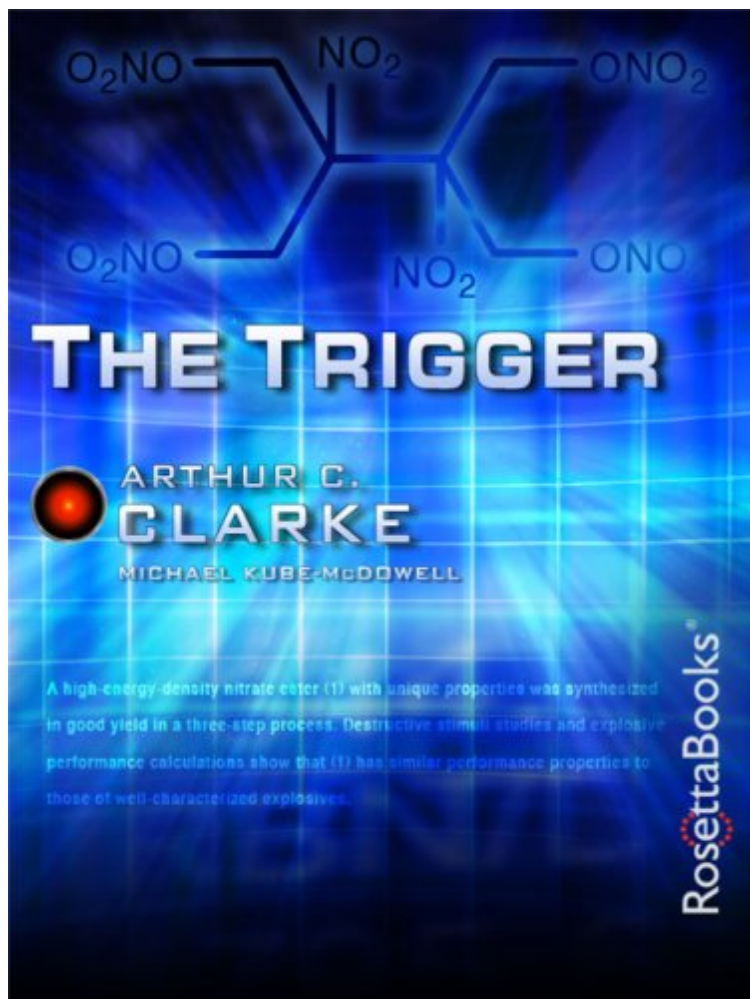


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The Trigger (Arthur C. Clarke Collection) (English Edition)



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurIn the middle of the 21st century, a team of scientists develops the ultimate protective weapon-a device that causes all nitrate-based bombs and explosives nearby to detonate automatically. It seems like a benevolent invention-one that will protect mankind against weapons of mass destruction. But as the scientists struggle to ensure their invention is used only for peaceful purposes, it becomes increasingly clear that even protective weaponry comes with its own moral trade-offs. Dr. Jeffrey Horton, the device's lead inventor, must fight to keep the weapon out of violent hands-and soon finds that not even those with the best intentions can be trusted. This riveting story of action, suspense, and science is sure to keep you on the edge of your seat-and turning the page.ExtraitAnomaly"Vox," Jeffrey Alan Horton said to his car. The voice-command indicator glowed on the instrument panel, and a heads-up menu appeared on the windshield. "News, national."... Attorney General John Woo is expected to release final plans for the twice-postponed

murder trial against Melvin Hills and eight other members of the 'God's Assassins' anti-abortion group. The defendants face five counts of murder in the deadly rocket attack on the Planned Parenthood facility in San Leandro." "We promise the defendants a fair trial, the court a safe trial, and the victims a just conviction." "The unusual virtual trial is expected to be conducted entirely on the high-speed G2Net, with judge, jurors, prosecutors, and defendants at widely scattered secret locations. In January, the first jury was dismissed when several members received death threats--" "Vox," said Horton. "News, local." ". . . Women's health services providers in the greater Columbus area were reluctant to discuss any additional security measures, but Deputy Police Commander Jeanne Ryberg promised 'maximum vigilance' throughout the high-profile trial." "We know what the Assassins are capable of, and we're not going to allow it to happen here. . . ."

"Horton sighed. The San Leandro trial hadn't even started yet, and he was already tired of hearing about it. But the story was receiving saturation coverage, and the only relief available was to stay away from broadcast media for the next month. "Vox. Radio off," he said, spinning the wheel for a right turn onto Shanahan Road. It was the time of year and the kind of clear Ohio morning when the sun rose directly over the east-west roads like an oncoming fireball, greeting drivers with a blinding glare. Squinting his sleep-cheated eyes and groping beside him for a pair of sunglasses that failed to manifest themselves, Horton was grateful when he finally turned in at the tree-lined entry to the Terabyte Laboratories campus. With a generous buffer of woods and meadow separating the research complex from the surrounding suburbs, the entrance to the complex looked more like the entrance to a park than to a world-class research center. To preserve the illusion, security at the perimeter was unobtrusive. There were no gates, no guards, no barriers--just a low-profile shadow-box sign. But appearances were deceiving. A hundred meters in, there was a pull-off lane for remote visitor screening. Just beyond that, a pavement sensor scanned the undercarriage of Horton's Honda Passport, and a roadside transmitter interrogated his radio-responder ID card. Horton knew from experience what would happen if he failed either check: just beyond the first turn, he would encounter a series of barriers rising from the driveway, and be intercepted by a canary-yellow security Jeep roaring down it. Anyone who tried to go farther, or to enter the campus cross-country, would be tracked by optical and thermal sensors and met by the drawn weapons of the professionally humorless security detail. At first, Horton had regarded the security diffidently. It jarred with Brohier's insistence on calling the Terabyte site a "campus," because fences and checkpoints had not been part of Horton's college experience at Stanford, or Purdue, or Tennessee State. But of late he had come to appreciate the quiet vigilance of the security staff--especially after the lab received one of "Ned Ludd's" package-bombs in a shipment of office supplies. Now Horton knew all the officers by face and first name, and they in turn lent a comforting presence when, as was often the case, he found himself keeping early, late, or weekend hours. The only trouble Horton had ever had with them was during his first winter at Terabyte, when, with his own car in for brake service, Horton tried to enter the campus on a Sunday in his girlfriend's untagged electric Saturn. His girlfriend--that was a construction Horton hadn't had need of in longer than he cared to remember. His last serious relationship had been with Kelly Braddock at Stanford. In a year and a half of dating, they had never quite gotten to the decision to live together, but between Kelly's brittle emotional defensiveness and her bold sexual openness, that relationship came to take up as much space and energy as his friends' live-in relationships seemed to. By the time Karl Brohier showed up at Horton's door, Horton was growing weary. He had begun to occasionally avoid Kelly, and to contemplate disengaging completely. Brohier's offer had resolved that problem, though not in quite the way Horton expected it would. A few weeks later, Kelly announced she had secured a fellowship at the University of Texas. That allowed her to leave Palo Alto a month before Horton did, thereby proving to herself that she had not compromised her independence by sleeping with him. They had said good-bye without tears or concrete promises. For a time, they had kept up with each other over the net. But netsex had proved a pale substitute for the real thing, and the real thing proved to have been the binding energy of their relationship. Absent lust, there was too little left to keep them from drifting apart, and within a few months, they were "old friends" on their way to becoming nodding strangers. Still, the disappearance of Kelly from Horton's life did deprive him of both an agreeable heat and a comforting unpredictability, and he made a few awkward and halfhearted efforts to replace both. Of his several relationships that first year, the one with Moira, the owner of the Saturn, had lasted the longest. An outgoing thirty-year-old Toledo native who lived in Horton's apartment building, she had some of Kelly's fire in a softer and more accommodating package. But she lacked Kelly's enthusiasm for independence, and her principal ambition was an old-fashioned one--to marry and have children. She waited only until the first afterglow to start musing aloud about buying a house together. When she learned that Horton did not share her ambition, she wasted no

more time on him. Since then, more by inertia than design, Horton had allowed his work to swallow him whole. His recreation was limited to occasional visits to a target-shooting range or IMAX theater, plus one weeklong hiking trip into a national park each year. His social contacts outside of work were limited to netchat and two or three family holidays at his parents' new house in Columbia, South Carolina. He told himself he did not mind his chaste bachelorhood, that the work was enough--but there was no one close enough to him to question it. He told himself he did not mind sleeping alone, eating alone, traveling alone--but the truth was that he also did not greatly enjoy it. He told himself that there would be more time, more laughter, a fuller life later, when he had had a chance to prove himself, when work and not-work came back into balance--but he had been telling himself that for nearly six years. His thirtieth birthday was now only a month away, and it had suddenly become possible to see himself still living this way at thirty-five, and forty, and beyond. The catalyst for all this melancholy, Horton knew, was the experiment scheduled for that morning. And the best antidote Horton could think of would be a little long-overdue success. * * *

At the end of the snaking driveway was the main parking area and the gate into Terabyte's compound. As an associate director, Horton was entitled to one of the parking spaces inside the wrought-iron fences. He pointed the Passport toward the gate, lowering the driver's window as he did. "Hello again, Dr. Horton," said Eric. The barrel-chested, gentle-voiced officer had been on duty when Horton left at 3 a.m. "Did that catnap do you any good?" "Not much," Horton said, making an effort to smile. "Have you heard anything about the status of the arrangements?" "I just talked to the boss. We'll be ready for you at seven-fifteen," said Eric. "Other than me and Tim, your team has the campus to itself. The site engineer will start taking down nonessential systems at seven. It'll be as quiet as we can make it for you." "Thanks," Horton said with a nod, and drove on. "Good luck!" Eric called after him. Horton grimaced. Luck. The team had had a bundle of it, all of it bad. The theoretical and design work on Baby had consumed nearly a year, and construction of the experimental apparatus had taken most of six months. Now, more than two years later, the rig had yet to successfully complete a single test series. There had been a fire, computer failures, power supply problems, and a series of puzzling bugs, leading to a major redesign of the detector, two partial rebuilds of the emitter, and replacement of most of the test and measurement gear. To be sure, the project was bleeding-edge, unmapped-territory work, and setbacks were to be expected. But even in the relaxed culture of Terabyte Labs, Horton was feeling pressure--most of it self-imposed. If he had spent the last forty months and fourteen million of Aron Goldstein's dollars chasing a chimera, it was up to him to make that assessment and close down the project. And if Suite 1 didn't produce some positive results soon, Horton might be forced to do exactly that, and admit that he had been wrong.

Revue de presse "[Clarke And Kube-Mcdowell] skillfully assess the tricky territory between individualism and collective trust." -- Publishers Weekly

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