

## THE CURIOUS CASE OF THE AMAZING LIGHT AND THE BANK HEIST

By  
John P. Seiler

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The starship was coming into view on the War Bird's scanners. It was a lonely merchant ship, unarmed, unaware of their presence, and robotically operated. It had been traveling from Xonie to Alpha. Centuari II. Although it had good scanners, they did not have the range of the War Bird's. The robot operating the merchant ship could not detect their ship, and would not know what to do if it did.

"I want you to just disable the ring drive. Fire a lasbeam at the tail of the ship." The captain said "At the same time, fire a beam towards the bridge. I want them both to hit at the same time. I do not want any hyperspace messages sent."

"Aye" said the weapons officer as he depressed firing studs on his console."

"Sparks, monitor all hyperwave communications bands and let me know if any distress signals are sent."

They continued to watch the visiscreen. They could see the lasbeam hit the tail of the ship the same time the other beam hit the bridge. The merchant ship came to a dead stop in space. Their radio operator indicated that no transmissions had been sent from the merchant ship.

"Take a boarding party over to the merchant ship. See what this little darling has for us. I want to know the contents of the hold. Our information was that it was very valuable to the Emperor." the captain said as he puffed on his short black pipe.

The boarding party put on their spacesuits and left the War Bird. They boarded the crippled merchant ship. A few minutes later the word came back. It was just as they had been told. The hold of the ship contained close to a million pounds of Xonie's neer-tobacco. This neer-tobacco was a condiment tobacco used in many popular blends across the empire. It is very similar to a tobacco from Old Earth named "perique", which was a highly praised condiment tobacco. The loss would be a blow to the emperor, or at least so the representative from House Chesterfield had told them. They figured the emperor would go to any length to find the pirated tobacco.

The captain listened to the report. "Take the vessel in tow. We will return to our base. Let me know when you are ready for us to leave."

The captain decided to start composing his message to the emperor. It would be short, sweet, and simple.

*Emperor Leopaldo,  
I have taken the robotic merchant ship X2045 bound from Xonie to Alpha Centuri II. The contents of the hold are most delectable. You have two choices; either send me a ransom of 20,000 solaris or I will smoke all the tobacco myself.*

*If I keep this fine tobacco, then what will the rest of your empire smoke?  
You can contact me through the X-9J procedures.*

*Yours truly,*

*Captain Mondure*

He re-read the message and passed it over to his executive officer. “What do you think, Dirk? I think he will pay the ransom. It is a small price to pay. Xonie’s condimental tobacco is rare and I don’t think he will want to upset all the pipe smokers.”

“I think you are right sir. We have the ship in tow and are ready to depart.”

“Ok, send the message and let’s go. It will be a while until they can send someone to investigate.” The captain said as he tamped and relit his pipe which had gone out.

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Nick Reardon had been working at Castle Pesaro when he was called by Varten von Eckman. He had been told of the capture of the robotic merchant ship by the nefarious pirate, Captain Mondure. Varten and Emperor Leopaldo had decided to send in an Empire Intelligence Service (EIS) team to find the pirated tobacco, re-take it and dispose of the pirates. They would have backup from the Empire Naval Service. Nick was to head towards the Xonie sector in a needle drive ship. Once there, he would be the advance person to size up the situation.

Nick had headed to the spaceport on Hayden. He was to meet Doctor Paschak of the Bureau of Naval Ships. He had been told that the needle drive ship at his disposal was of a new design. Dr. Paschak met him when his aircar arrived.

“As I was telling you, this ship is a new version of the one you used before. You do not have to really do anything; the robot pilot does it all. The robot pilot will calculate all you jump times, velocities, and coordinates. It will watch after you, cook for you, and can even do your laundry.” Dr. Paschak said.

“I’ll believe it when I see it.” Nick said “I don’t know if I like being left in the hands of a robot”

“You have nothing to fear. This robot, by the way, whose name is Phipps, was programmed by one of our best, Swiftie Vann. She is at the forefront of biorobotic engineering. Phipps was specifically programmed to be compatible with you, Nick. If it were not for this emergency, you would be out on a test cruise for the ship.” Dr Paschak replied.

“I don’t have time to argue. I am going to go onboard and get going.” Nick said “If I have any problems, I will just have to do the best I can.”

“Good by Nick, and good luck. Give me a full report when you return.” Dr. Paschak said.

Nick boarded the needle drive ship. He tossed his meager kit bag in the sleeping area and headed forward. Conditions aboard a two-person needle ship were quite austere. He strapped himself into the pilot’s chair when suddenly he heard a voice “Hi Nick, welcome aboard.”

“Who is that?”

“It is I, Phipps, the robotic pilot of this heap, and you are Nick Reardon, my passenger.”

“Let’s get things straight, Phipps, I am the commander of this needle ship. You are the ship’s operating system. I tell you where we are to go, and you get us there. You got that?”

“Yes I do. By the way, Dr Swiftie said to say ‘hello’ to you when I meet you. She also said to tell you that she likes you very much, but you are now second place in her life to her husband, Gene.”

“Swiftie was a fine girl.” Nick said “I can’t believe that I am talking to a robot?”

“Well you are, and that is one way we communicate, beside my other sensory inputs. I have the jump information from the Hayden computer. We are heading to Xonie. I have the jump coordinates, so why don’t you just sit back and we will get going. We have the tower’s clearance to leave in five minutes. Once we get into space, it will take about 6 hours until we get out of the system and can make our first jump. So why don’t you sit back and relax.”

Nick strapped himself into the G-couch for liftoff. In five minutes they took off and were headed towards Xonie. Nick was sitting when Phipps informed him that he had some communications to read. “You know Nick, Dr. Swiftie told me a lot about you. I want to let you know that I like the aroma of a good pipe.”

“Perhaps I will have a pipe after dinner. We have about 5 hours until the first jump. I think I will take a short nap. Wake me two hours before jump time.”

Nick went to the sleeping area. He took out of his kit bag the only pipe he had packed, a common neer-briar hawkbill. He had also brought some pseudo-tobacco. He laid down and took a short nap.

The next thing he heard was an alarm. “ it is time to get up, Nick.”

“Hunh? Oh, it’s you, Phipps. Thanks for getting me up.”

“We have two hours until jump time. I have made a No. 3 Spacer meal for you. It is all set out on the bridge.”

“Uh, thanks Phipps. I am sure I will enjoy it.” He said as he thought pseudo-beef pot roast with fixings. It is just what I wanted. Oh well, It could be worse. He headed to the bridge where he ‘enjoyed’ his dinner.

He had disposed of the dinnerware when he sat back and took out his pipe. He filled it with his tobacco and began to light it. All of a sudden he heard “Hawkbills? I abhor soggy pipes!”

“What did you say Phipps?” Nick asked.

“I, I didn’t say anything, Nick” Phipps responded.

“Oh, I thought you said something about my hawkbill pipe.”Nick replied.

“Hawkbills! I wouldn’t have any such soggy pipes in my collection!” Phipps raved.

“What’s the problem with you and hawkbills, Phipps?”

“Hawkbill, I quite imagine that if you were to crush some Viagra tablets and sprinkle the dust into your favorite blend, the soggy pipe of yours would look like a billiard!” Phipps rejoined.

“Phipps, do you have something mental about these pipes?” Nick asked “I thought you liked pipes, or so you said.”

“I, uh...”

Suddenly the jump alarm went off, and the ship entered hyperspace. Nick fell onto the floor. All went blank.

He slowly became conscious. He was Nick Reardon. He was on a needle ship heading to Xonie. He started to move.

“Nick, Nick are you OK?” he heard the voice.

“Yes Phipps, I am OK, except for one broken pipe. But are you?” Nick asked.

“I think so. I just ran a diagnostic and debug routine. I found one back door virus, which I cleaned. It seems that Dr. Swiftie meant to play a little practical joke on you. I was to harass you about your hawkbill pipe until 8-hours elapsed, and then tell you it was her playing a practical joke on you.”

“Nice joke! I think something else has happened. It also affected you during your jump calculations. Obviously we made a jump. Where are we?” Nick asked.

“Well, er, I don’t know. We are in a small, unknown star system, somewhere on the rim of the galaxy. There are eight planets in this system. From here, I can detect life on the third planet.” Phipps replied.

“Why don’t we just jump to Xonie or back to where we came from?” Nick asked.

“We have two problems. First, we overloaded an inductor in the ship’s ring drive power supply, and second, I don’t have any relevant coordinates from this system in my computer database. It is going to take me time to recalculate the relevant coordinates relative to this system. You are going to have to find the inductor in the power supply control circuit, and repair it. If you can’t, then we are marooned.”

“Ok Phipps, we can work as a team. You start determining the correct jump coordinates, scan the third planet with your sensors, and get us moving towards it using the local drive power. I will go look at the ring drive power supply.” Nick said.

Nick headed towards the rear of the ship. He entered the ring drive section. He opened the ring drive control panel and could smell the odor of smoked electronics. He quickly found the burned inductor.

“Not too bad. It could have been worse. Looks like a manufacturing defect. The large inductor must have had a flaw in the coil. It can’t be patched, but it could be remade if I had some high purity gold or silver wire. I’ll bet there is none on the ship in the spare parts kit.” He said to himself.

He checked the spare parts kit and there was none to be found. He went back to the bridge.

“I found the problem, Phipps. It was just as you indicated a fried inductor. Please check the inventory and see if there is any high purity gold or silver wire.”

“None Nick. I can’t help with that, and it is a crucial component. There is no way around it.” Phipps replied.

“Well, let’s just head to the third planet and see what we shall see. Use full optical and radiofrequency scan. I want to find out all I can about it before we go into orbit.”

They headed off towards the third planet.

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Eight hours later they were in orbit around the third planet. There had been no radiofrequency emissions from the planet. Optical scanning indicated one large city on the single continent. Environmental scanning indicated the planet was Old Earth-like. Temperature was 30 to 90-degrees Fahrenheit with a breathable atmosphere.

Telescopic scanning indicated that the inhabitants of the planet lived in a time period similar to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Old Earth, First Age. It was fossil fuel based, horse and buggy type economy. There were no signs of the development of internal combustion engines or gasoline fuels. With the exception of the one large city, the countryside was small villages and hamlets indicating a farming economy.

“It is going to be necessary for us to land in a secluded location, Phipps. I am going to have to find us some silver wire while you are going to continue to determine the new jump coordinates. I figure we will be here at least two standard days at a minimum.” Nick said

“That will be enough time.” Phipps said.

“When we land, I want you to activate your defensive screen so that no one can enter the ship but me. I also want you to use your invisi-shield so that you cannot be detected when we land and while we are on this planet. What have you found out about the inhabitants of this planet?

“Using my long-range scanners, I have found that the inhabitants speak Old Earth English, dated to the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with a strong English accent.” Phipps replied.

“Well, that is good. There will be no language problem. I am going to sleep before we land. I want you to give me the sleep-learning program for the language, and Old Earth history. I am going to theorize that this is one of the lost colonies from Old Earth. It looks like they are in a time mode of 19<sup>th</sup> Century England.” Nick said

Nick slept restlessly. He got little sleep during the eight hours.

When he awoke, Phipps indicated that he was ready to land the ship. “There is a secluded glade near a series of foot hills about 50 miles from the large city. What I take to be an estate is several miles from the landing site. We will land using the new magneto-power system which will permit us to land silently and with no visible

indication. This system is only good for takeoff and landings. We will be landing at night.”

“Good, I will have a little time to go and scout out the countryside.” Nick replied.

Nick strapped himself into the G-couch. The ship slowly left orbit and descended into the atmosphere, and headed towards the planetary surface. Nick almost fell asleep when Phipps announced they had landed.

“The invis-shield is on. We cannot be seen or detected by instruments. You can now leave, Nick.” Phipps informed him.

“Good Phipps. Do not let anyone in the ship.” Nick ordered I am fully armed and shielded. I doubt that any harm can come to me in this age. I also have my communications systems. As you can see, I have put on clothing I have adapted to fit this time period.”

He left the ship. In the moonlight he could see a pastoral countryside. He also saw a building off in a distance. He also noted a road running about a mile away. He had to travel down the hill passing through a wooded area to reach the road.

As he reached the country lane, he saw a man walking towards him. The man was well dressed, in his early 50s and was smoking a pipe.

He approached Nick he said “Hullo, I don’t recall seeing you in these parts. Are you lost?”

“Yes, you might say I am lost. I have just arrived in this area. That is a mighty fine pipe you are smoking.” Nick said.

“Well thank you young man. The pipe is a Dinhill. I picked it up in Londonium about two months ago. It smokes quite decent. Do you need some tobacco?”

“Ah thanks, I have broken my only pipe. By the way, my name is Nick Reardon. I am from the south and seem to have lost my way. I was heading towards the city when I became lost. I take it that I am trespassing on your land and that the estate house in the distance is yours.”

“Yes, and Yes. I am Sir Arthur Doyle and that is my country home “Euston House”. But you are not trespassing. I always enjoy company. I do have a second pipe here in my pocket that I will loan you and here, have some tobacco.” He said as he took an old briar out of his pocket and gave it and his pouch to Nick.

Nick took the straight bulldog shaped pipe and thanked him for it. He filled the pipe and lit it, returning the pouch to Sir Arthur. “This is a fine tobacco” Nick said.

“It’s the best tobacco on Arth! I just got this Pembroke Blend at my tobacconist shop, Newgate Tobacconist, in Londonium. It is rather expensive, but well worth it.”

“I agree” Nick said “One of the best I have ever tried.”

They sat on a stone wall adjacent to the lane and talked while they smoked. Nick learned that Londonium was the capital city of the Blessed Isle, which they called the continent. He also learned that the people could only trace their history back several thousand years on Arth.

After their pipes go out, Nick goes to give his back to Sir Arthur, but he tells him to keep it. “I have really enjoyed talking to you this evening. If you are here tomorrow, come back early in the evening to this place and we can have another pipe. If not, I hope you have a safe trip to Londonium.” Sir Arthur said.

“I will meet you here tomorrow night during the early evening. I would like to continue this conversation. It has been most enjoyable. I will supply the tobacco tomorrow evening.”

Nick returned to the needle ship. Phipps was making good progress recalculating the jump coordinates. Nick told Phipps about Londonium, and Arth.

The next night Nick left the ship in the early evening. He went down the hill towards the road. A man sat on the wall. He rose when Nick approached. He said “Sir Arthur had pressing business in Londonium. He asked me to meet you tonight. I will tell you that I am armed, but I do not expect to be required to use it. My name is Sherlock Holmes!” he said.

“Sherlock Holmes? I seem to recall that name.” Nick said.

“ Hmm. I don’t know how you could. I deduce that you are not from this area, nor Londonium, nor of Arth. I would say that you are a visitor from another world.” Holmes said.

“That is ridiculous. I am from the south.”

“I think not. I can tell from the mud on your boots that you are staying around here. Speaking of your boots, although they appear to be leather, I can see they are not. Your clothes, although made to look like mine, are of a close material but just not the same. Although your language is good, it is not native and you do not have a southern accent. When you eliminate all the possible theories, you must settle on the impossible.” Holmes said. “Sir Arthur was quite right to be suspicious of you.”

“Let’s try a pipe. I have this one from Sir Arthur, and I have brought some of my tobacco.” Nick said. He filled and lit his pipe. He passed the tobacco to Mr. Holmes who did the same having a large wooden calabash pipe.

“Your powers of deduction and reasoning are very strong. You are, of course, correct. I am not of this world. I am from a society in a different part of the galaxy. You also could say of a different time. My ship is damaged. I need to find some high grade silver or gold wire to make the necessary repair. Can you help me? I can be most generous with you.” Nick stated.

“I will make you a bargain. If you help me solve a little mystery, I will obtain the wire for you and will keep your secret safe with me. What do you think?”

“I will assist you to whatever extent I am able, provided I don’t have to use any advanced technology”, Nick said.

“Let’s head back to Sir Arthur’s house and take a late train back to Londonium. Early in the morning we should be able to reach my rooms in Baker Street. I will introduce you to my fellow lodger and adventurer, Dr. John H. Watson. As far as he is concerned, you are my distant cousin, Nicholas Reardon from the Vernet side of the family.” Holmes explained.

“Ok, let’s go. You may find this hard to believe, but I have read, I think, some stories of your exploits. I have to contact my ship and my Watson, Phipps.” Nick replied.

Nick used his communicator to contact the ship and inform Phipps of his impending departure. He renewed his orders regarding security. He also told Phipps his locating system would be on as well as his autocommunicating system. Phipps was told to monitor at all times for distress and to come in aid at the first sign of a potentially life threatening situation or problem.

They lit their pipes again as they headed down the lane towards Euston House.

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Once they got back to Euston House, they were driven by trap to the local train station. They took the old coal burning steam train to Londonium, arriving at the station well after midnight. A handsome transported them from the train station to 221b Baker Street. Nick studied the locale and local landmarks on the way to Baker Street. He found the lit gas lamps quite interesting. He could see bright, round multi-colored halos around the lights in the evening fog.

Holmes mentioned that his landlady was Mrs. Hudson. “She is a rare woman. I discovered a long time ago that she is a good housekeeper, and an excellent cook. You will probably meet her in the morning. Dr. Watson may be asleep, so I don’t know if you will meet him tonight or tomorrow.”

221b Baker Street was a typical English sandstone building. Homes and Nick finally got into the rooms very early in the morning. They went through the main door, up the stairs,

and into a sitting room. The sitting room had several overstuffed chairs in front of and to the side of the fireplace. On the right, in front of the large windows was a dining table. In the corner was a desk with a ton of reading material on the desktop and piled to the side. There were numerous bookcases placed around the room so that there was no clear wall space. A door off to the left side opened and a man appeared holding a revolver. He looked at Holmes and the stranger.

“John Watson, may I present my cousin Nicholas Reardon. Nicholas is going to be spending a couple of days with us.” Holmes said.

“A pleasure sir” Nick said as he reached out to shake his hand, “I have heard so much about you.”

“I hope that all you have heard was all good. It is a pleasure to meet any friend of Holmes; however, I must say that he has not mentioned you before. But then again, he does not talk much about his immediate or extended family.” Watson replied.

“Come, come gentlemen. Sit down. There is tobacco in the slipper and cigars in the coal scuttle.”

They sat down in front of the fire place. Holmes lit up his briar calabash. Watson filled and lit his full bent blast. Nick filled up and lit the small billiard that Sir Arthur had given him.

“Watson, Nicholas is going to help us solve the little matter of the bank theft.

Holmes began “There is an archeological site north of the city. Many experts believe that this is the spot where the first people on Arth originated. There are several interesting theories about the origins of life on Arth. One theory is of mankind being developed from lower life forms. One is that a universal God put us here. Another is that our ancestors had come from the stars. I am a believer in the third theory because of the scientific evidence. Over the years, several relics have been taken from the site. These are items that are way ahead of our technology.”

“Several weeks ago, the Tollie expedition had dug up a mysterious cylindrical device. The device seemed to do nothing. They had, by chance, left it in the sunlight. After being in the light several hours, they noticed that it provided a beam of illumination when a button was operated.” Holmes continued.

Nick had recognizes the device as a sun powered flash light having a power system that is recharged by photo cells. He told them about the flash light and the manner in which it worked. Holmes quite agreed with him.

“What is this?” Watson asked “How does he know what the device is and how it functions. Our best minds were not able to figure it out.”

“You have to remember; Watson that Nicholas and I are related. We both come from the same gene lines. My abilities are detection, his are in figuring out how things work.”

“Amazing” Watson observed.

Sherlock exclaimed “It seems that the device was stolen from the expedition’s tent. Two nights ago, there had been a robbery of the Londonium state bank. 50,000 Uroes were stolen. Towards the end of the theft, an alarm was sounded, but the robbers escaped with the loot. On the bank floor, near the door in which they fled, the light device was found. I have been retained by the bank manager to locate the missing money.”

“This is a very strange story, Holmes” Watson said.

“Yes it is.” Nick replied “but I have every faith in you to that it can be solved.”

“Tomorrow morning we can visit the bank.” Sherlock said “I also have to visit my tobacconist. It has been a long day, and I think we should get some sleep. Nicholas, you can have the guest room. Good night, gentlemen.”

The small group broke up, going to their rooms and some well earned sleep. Before turning in, Nick contacted Phipps via his communicator. There had been nothing to report.

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The next morning was dull and overcast. Nick, John Watson, and Sherlock Holmes met for breakfast. “You are right Holmes; Mrs. Hudson is an excellent cook. These eggs, kippers, and muffins are excellent!” Nick exclaimed

“Yes she is. Watson and I fell into these rooms. And Mrs. Hudson comes with them. She is an added bonus! Anyway, we need to get moving if anything is to be accomplished today.”

They left the Baker Street rooms and headed towards the center of Londonium. On the way, they stopped at the Newgate Tobacconist Shop. “Nicholas” Sherlock said “You need a new pipe. Please select one.”

Nick looked at the many nice pipes in the display case. He selected a full bent with a deep blasted finish. “Put it on my tab” Sherlock told the tobacconist. He added some bulk tobacco to his order. “Nicholas, you have selected a very nice pipe. It was made by Larry Rouch, one of Londonium’s best pipe makers.”

“Thanks Holmes. The pipe Sir Arthur gave me is nice, but just not my cup of tea.” Nick said.

They continued to the bank. When they arrived at the bank, the bank manager met them. Sherlock introduced Nick as his cousin who was assisting him in this matter. “When we arrived, there was the distinct aroma of pipe smoke in the air. We found the safe open. There were some shards of pipe tobacco and ash in an ashtray and the end of a rather small, dark cigar was found on the floor. The ash and cigar butt had to belong to the thieves since the bank had been cleaned before the robbery. Scratch marks indicated that the door in the back of the bank had been picked.

“I have an idea” Nick told Holmes and Watson. “We need to go back to the tobacconist. You did tell me that he was the largest one in Londonium did you not?”

“Yes, he is the largest tobacco establishment in Londonium” Watson said.

They returned to the Newgate Tobacconist Shop. The proprietor, upon seeing them, asked if something was wrong with Nick’s new pipe.

“No, nothing is wrong, it is an excellent piece.” Nick said “But I do have a question for you. Would you say that you stock all of the tin tobacco that would be available in Londonium?”

“Yes, I believe my stock of tinned tobacco is the most complete in Londonium. I stock over thirty different brands of tinned tobaccos, and have twenty bulks.” He said.

“Ok, we want to purchase one tin of each tinned blend, and two ounces of each of your bulks. Do you think your tab can take it Holmes?” Nick asked.

“Yes it can. I just wonder what you have in mind.”

Nick replied “The cigar butt is from a type known to me as a parodie. It was probably smoked by one of the thieves. I would hypothesize that one of the thieves was the ring leader, the pipe smoker, and the other an accomplice, the cheap cigar smoker. I am not familiar with the pipe tobacco. We are going to go back to Baker Street and smoke each of these tobacco samples. There are over fifty. When each sample is done, you are going to examine and catalog each of the ashes and dottles by studying them under the microscope. You will then compare the ash and dottle from the bank to those in your catalog of results. Hopefully there is a match. Knowing which tobacco the thief smokes may help in catching him or her.”

“That is a great idea Nicholas” Holmes said “You know it would make a great topic for a monograph that I may write when this is all over. Knowing what a criminal smokes can be a very important piece of information when performing detection work.”

They finished their business at the tobacco shop, and headed back to Baker Street. When they got back to the rooms, they started smoking their pipes. They each smoked a bowl, emptied the ash and Holmes examined it under a microscope, carefully recording his findings. They each had over fifteen bowls to smoke, with Holmes examining each one.

“You will notice the difference in the ash and dottle between those tobaccos that are ribbon cut, flake, or shag. There is also a difference between the blends based on the types of tobaccos that go into the blend’s composition.” As Holmes was talking, the door to the room opened and in rushed Mrs. Hudson with a bucket of water which she promptly dumped on Holmes table.

“Oh my gosh!” She exclaimed “I thought we had a fire going in here! I am sorry Mr. Holmes for the mess I have made.”

“Not to worry, Mrs. Hudson. We will take care of cleaning up. Don’t worry, there is no fire, just a little experiment.”

Holmes took out the sample of dottle and ash retrieved from the bank. He put it under the microscope. “Fine ribbon cut, light tobacco with about ten percent dark.” He looked at his notebook and the samples that were laid out on the desk. “Come here Watson. Take a look at this slide.” Watson did so. “Now look at this one” Watson did look after he changed the slide. “They seem to be the same.” Watson said.

“They are the same” Holmes said. “The blend is Summersville Blend, one made by Newgate Tobacconist and sold only in their establishment. Your idea Nicholas worked out very well.”

“Yes it did” Nick said “and my new pipe is now quite broken-in.”

Holmes left to go back to Newgate Tobacconists and find out who purchased the Summersville Blend. While he was gone, Nick and Watson sat down in the overstuffed chairs and were smoking the blend that each seemed to enjoy from the tasting.

“I take it John that you have been with Holmes on quite a few adventures.”

“Yes I have. Some of them have been quite interesting and unique.”

“Did you ever think about writing them up and presenting them to the public? You may make some money from it to supplement your income.”

“That is an excellent idea.” Watson said “I could probably get Sir Arthur Doyle to be my agent and have them published.”

“Yes you could, and I have faith that you would do very well at it and the public would just eat up the stories.”

“Holmes may not like the idea” Watson said.

“I don’t think you will have much of a problem on Holmes account. In case you did not notice, deep down, in his heart of hearts, he is a vain man. He would never admit it, but he is.”

They sat back, enjoyed their pipes and were off in their own little dreams.

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About two hours later, Sherlock Holmes returned to Baker Street. “This has been a good afternoon Watson, Nicholas. The Summersville tobacco blend is quite exclusive and expensive. It is only sold to five customers: Robert Richen, a man in the financial business; John Siler, a noted experimentalist and engineer; Stanley Stormer, an actor; Bruce Logger, a civil servant; and Sir James Stoltzman, a member of the House of Lords.” Holmes reported.

“I then went to visit my friends on the Metropolitan Detective Force who told me that of the five, Richen and Stoltzman had been in some financial difficulties of late and that there were rumors that Stoltzman had contacts with the Londonium underworld. Stoltzman has been a legislative and financial supporter of the archeological work trying to determine our origins. I think we should arrange a meeting with both Richen and Stoltzman and see how things progress.” Holmes said.

“I think that would be a good idea.” Nick said.

Holmes took out his Eastern Union pad and wrote a message. “Watson, would you be so good as to take this to the postal office and have this message dispatched to Richen and Stoltzman. It invites them to a meeting tonight here at Baker Street. It also says that it is very important to them to attend. I think they will accept.”

“Sure Holmes. I will take it. Do you mind if I stop at the bookstore and check for the latest Lancet magazine?”

“No Watson we don’t mind. Take your time coming back.”

Watson left on his mission.

“Nick, you know Watson will be gone for at least two hours. He will probably stop at a pub. It is the sherry, you know.”

“Yes, that is not a problem.”

“Light up your pipe. Since I have you to myself for a period of time, I want you to tell me of your world.”

They sat and smoked their pipes while Nick answered all the questions that Holmes put to him. He told him about his great friends, Emperor Leopaldo, Varten von Eckman, and Lu Jo, and some of the mysteries he had solved.

“Your stories are most interesting” Holmes said “Most common people of this time on Arth would think you were a madman. I am glad I have had this chance to meet you. Now, Emperor Leopaldo, there is a man after my own heart.”

“He is one very accomplished person. He is quick of mind, loyal to his friends, and quite the consummate pipe smoker and collector.”

They discussed the finer points of the case and how they would proceed with the evening meeting. Watson finally returned with the replies that Richen and Stoltzman would be attending the evening meeting.

They had dinner and discussed the finer points of pipes and tobacco.

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Promptly at 7:00 PM, Mrs. Hudson admitted two men to the study. Although both men were well dress, the two men were a study in contrast. Richen was tall, thin, and gaunt while Stoltzman was short, dumpy, and ruddy in complexion. The visitors entered the room. Holmes indicated that they should sit near the fireplace.

“As you know, I am Sherlock Holmes. These are my two associates, Dr. John Watson, and Mr. Nicholas Reardon. I have asked you to come here to discuss a matter that I am investigating. Please, let’s enjoy our pipes while we talk. Nicholas, do pass around some of that most excellent tobacco.”

Nick passed around the tobacco jar. They all filled up their pipes and lit them.

After a minute, Stoltzman exclaimed “Summerset Blend!”

“Yes it is. Which is one of the reasons you are here. You are all familiar with the theft that occurred at the Londonium state bank.50,000 Uroes were stolen. The thieves were inside the bank for several hours. Towards the end of the theft, an alarm was sounded, but the robbers escaped with the loot.” Holmes said.

He continued “We know there were at least two thieves. One of the thieves smoked small parodie cigars. The other thief smoked a pipe. We have identified the pipe tobacco as being Summerset Blend.”

“There must be many people that smoke that blend” Reichen stated.

“No, not so” Homes replied “Summerset blend is only produced and found at the Newgate Tobacconist Shop. It is more exclusive than you may think. There are only five

people that smoke it in Londonium. That gets us down to a group of five suspects. The two of you are known to have been having financial difficulty. The others have been thoroughly investigated and cleared. That is another reason why the two of you are here.”

“Further investigation indicates that Sir James has had some contacts with the underworld, and is a supporter of the archeological expedition, both important connections to the case.”

Both Richen and Stoltzman had finished their pipes. Nick, carefully looking over their shoulders, examined the ashtrays at the side of each man wherein they had dumped the ash from their pipe. Richen had smoked the Summerset blend down totally to ash. Stoltzman had smoked his pipe to the point of ash with an appreciable amount of dottle. Nick made a sign to Holmes pointing out Stoltzman.

“I think we can now conclude, Sir James that you were the ringleader of the bank theft.” Holmes stated.

“You can conclude what you wish, but it will never stand up in court.” Stoltzman said.

“Oh, I think it will. If you examine your ashtray you will find that yours contains a mixture of shards of tobacco and ash, whereas Richen’s contains only straight ash with virtually no shards of tobacco. Robert Richen is a true pipe smoker, while you are just an amateur.”

Holmes went on “That coupled with the fact that you had the opportunity to steal the relic flashlight which was left at the scene of the crime, and I believe we can quickly come up with your accomplice. You needed your helper to pick the lock on the back door of the bank and open the safe. It won’t be long until we have a confession from him. Finally, now that we know where to look, we can follow the trail of the money. I think you are quite finished.”

At that time, there was a knock on the door. A large man entered with a uniformed policeman at his side.

“Ah, Inspector Lestrade, here is the man responsible for the bank robbery.”

The Inspector took Stoltzman into custody, placing handcuffs around his wrists.

“Watson! Why don’t you accompany the Inspector to the police station and fill him in on the details? You can stop and pick up that issue of Lancet on your way home that you forgot to get earlier today.” Holmes said.

“Good idea, Holmes” Watson said “Don’t stay up waiting for me.”

Lestrade, Watson, the uniformed policeman, and Stoltzman left. As Robert Richen was leaving, he thanked Holmes for a most enjoyable evening and a unique experience.

All that was left at 221b Baker Street were Sherlock Holmes and Nick Reardon. Nick used his communicator to contact Phipps. Phipps informed him that the new jump coordinates had been computed and they could leave once the new inductor had been wound and the repair made to the ring power supply.

“Watson will be out late. It’s the sherry, you know.” Holmes said “Mine is the 7% solution when I get bored. I don’t know which one is worse.”

Holmes had Nick sit down and light up his pipe.

“First, I want to thank you for helping me solve the bank theft case. I have enjoyed working with you. You know, you could stay and work with me.” Sherlock offered.

“Yes, I could, and we would make a good team. But you have Watson, and I would not want to impose. Beside, there are others that depend on me.” Nick replied.

“I quite understand. Here is a spool of 100% silver wire. I believe it is the diameter you specified. It should be enough.” Sherlock gave Nick the wire. He reached for his pipe rack and took down two wooden calabash pipes. “This is a matched set of calabash pipes made locally by David Wobler. Dave is considered one of Londonium’s best pipemakers. Note the “SH” stamping on the side of the pipe. I want you to keep one and I want you to give the other one to Emperor Leopaldo when next you see him.”

“I thank you and I am sure that I can say the same for Emperor Leopaldo. You know Holmes, you really need to have Watson start compiling your cases for publication. I am sure they will be a best seller.” Nick said.

“I will consider your thought. We shall see if there is any interest in the matter.” Holmes said “I suggest we get some sleep. I propose we leave early in the morning to take the steam train to the station near Euston House. We can be there by 9:00 A.M.”

“Sounds like a plan. We can leave before Watson gets up.”

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As Holmes had suspected, Watson had not gotten back to the rooms until 2:00 A.M. He was still asleep when they arose at 6:00 A.M. They caught the early steam train and arrive at the station early in the morning. Holmes rented a trap to take them to Euston House.

Nick communicated with Phipps regarding their impending arrival. He and Holmes were smoking pipes as they approached the needle ship. Nick communicated with Phipps that

he could put down the invisibility shield, which he did. The ship became visible in the glen.

“To paraphrase Watson, astounding. Absolutely astounding, Nick” Holmes said.

“Come on aboard and I will give you a tour. Phipps, this is Mr. Sherlock Holmes” Nick said.

“It is a pleasure to meet you Mr. Holme, one second. Hmmm, do you know a Dr. John Watson and a Sir Arthur Conan Doyle?” Phipps asked.

“Why yes I do. How did you know?” Holmes asked.

“Let me just say, it is those stories by Watson” Nick said “You will find out soon enough.”

They toured the ship. When they got to the power room, nick re-wound the inductor and tested it out. He put it back into the ring drive circuitry.

“You know Holmes, this ship can hold two people. You could come with me.” Nick said.

“Well, it is a tempting offer, Nick, but we both have our own place and time. Yours is to me the future, mine is to you the past. I think I will stay here on Arth with Watson.”

Holmes left the ship. Through the visiscreen, Nick could see him move some distance away from the ship.

“Let’s get out of here, Phipps”

The ship slowly began to ascend to the heavens. Holmes got smaller and smaller until he could no longer be seen. Nick’s last image of Sherlock Holmes was the great man, decked out in his overcoat and deerstalker hat smoking a wooden calabash pipe waving.

It took four hours until they were far enough away for the ring drive to be engaged.

“Well Phipps, do you think the drive will work and the coordinates are correct?” Nick asked.

“Both look good to me” Nick.

“Ok, let’s go”

Phipps engaged the hyperspace drive and they made the jump. When they came out of the jump, Phipps used his scanners to determine their location.

“Nick, we are coming into the Xonie solar system. There are a number of Empire vessels off in a distance. Actually, it’s quite a fleet.”

“Establish hyperwave communications with the command vessel.”

“Communications established Nick” Phipps replied.

The visicreen came on and Varten von Eckman was on the screen. Hi Nick, you are a little bit late. We are just mopping up this operation. I hope you have a good explanation.” He said a little impatiently.

“Oh I do” Nick replied “It all started as a practical joke by Dr. Swiftie Vann, and just got blown out of proportion to the point that I met Sherlock Holmes. I will tell you about it when I board. Bring me along side for boarding.”

Nick directed Phipps to bring the ship along side the much larger Empire Cruiser. The needle ship was pulled up inside the ship. As Nick left the ship, he said “Phipps, you were a pain in the rear to me this trip. You totally screwed up my assignment. However, you gave me the opportunity to work with Sherlock Holmes and Watson. For that I am grateful. I am also thankful that you got my skin back here. Once you are fully operational, and not experimental, I hope to get the chance to fly with you again.”

“It has been a pleasure Nick. I hope we meet again.”

Nick grabbed his kit bag and then left the needle ship and headed to the Cruiser’s main conference room.

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Nick found the conference room to be quite full. Inside the room were the cruiser’s officers, Varten von Eckman, Emperor Leopaldo, Lu Jo, and Dr. Paschak. They welcomed Nick but all kidded him about being late for the operation. The aroma of pipe smoke pervaded the room as almost everyone was smoking.

“Better late than never” Lu Jo said kidding Nick “It’s good that the Empire Intelligence Service has at least one operative on which they can depend, and it isn’t you! You can always send a woman to do a man’s job, and be sure the job gets done!”

“Welcome back Nick” Leo said “Sherlock Holmes eh? This has to be a good story.”

“We are glad you got back to us. We thought you and the ship were lost.” Varten commented.

“Guess we need some further work on the robotic driven needle ship.” Dr. Paschak stammered.

Lu Jo said that when they had not heard from Nick, and they could not trace him, she had been sent in to Xonie undercover to infiltrate the pirates. Through various contacts the EIS had made, this was quickly accomplished. Once they had learned the location of the pirate stronghold, the fleet was brought in to recover the merchant ship, wipe out the pirate stronghold, and capture the ragtag fleet. This operation had just been completed. Captain Mondure had escaped capture.

Nick then told his story. When he got to the part about Phipps malfunction, Dr Paschak asked for a pause, got on his communicator, and gave instructions for some tests to be run on Phipps and the needle ship.

Nick then continued his story. As evidence, he produced several pipes; the small billiard that he had been given by Sir Arthur Doyle, the full bent that Sherlock Holmes had purchased for him at the Newgate Tobacconists Shop, and the two briar calabashes that Holmes had given him. He also told the group that the video/audio monitors that he had carried and the ship's records could also be checked. They could also check the wonderful job he did in repairing the ring drive power controls.

“Emperor Leopoldo. Sherlock Holmes asked me to give you one of these pipes. He said that my pipe was in remembrance of our meeting, and yours was because he felt that you were one person he very much would want to meet.” Nick said.

“Well Nick, He is one person I hope to meet. I will treasure this pipe in my collection. Based on your jump coordinates, I hope to meet with him in the future. Your story is very interesting. Did you bring home any of the Summerville or Pembroke Blend?” Leo asked.

“Yes I do have some in my kit bag for us to try later.”

Dr. Paschak's communicator went off. He answered. When the conversation was over he reported to the assembled group “I have some good news and some bad news. We have gone over Phipps programming. It seems that he had the Pierce Virus. It was introduced into his computer programming, I expect, by Dr. Swiftie Vann. I don't know what you did to her, Nick, but you must have pissed her off. It was triggered by your presence, and mention of hawkbill pipes. For a short period of time, Phipps became Pierce, who had an innate dislike of hawkbill pipes. Pierce was to harass you unceasingly for a fixed amount of time. When the time limit expired, Pierce would disappear and Phipps would become himself again. However, when Phipps was Pierce, you had a scheduled jump. Pierce did not know what to do, so he performed a random jump, hence you ending up where you did. Phipps is now back to himself, and Pierce is gone forever. We have improved Phipps so that he actually adores hawkbill pipes. That is the good news.”

He continued “The bad news is that although your story is confirmed in the ship's databank, there is no record of the jump coordinates. This means there is no way for us to ever find Arth again. I am not sure, but I have a theory that I will explore. I believe

your jump was not just a normal, everyday, jump in space and location, but may have included a component that was a jump in time.”

“Well, I guess there goes my chance of meeting Sherlock Holmes” Emperor Leopaldo said “I guess this pipe is now beyond value. Nick, look closely at those pipes. They are not neer-briar, or pseudo-briar, but are genuine Old Earth briar.”

“I am confused” Nick said “You are right. All these pipes are genuine briar. The philosophers and mathematicians are going to have to sort out this story.”

The meeting was adjourned.

As they were leaving, Lu Jo turned to Nick and showed him a book she was carrying. She had it opened to a story.

“Look at this Nick. The story is entitled “The Curious Case of the Amazing Light and the Bank Heist” by John H. Watson. In this story, Sherlock Holmes and John Watson are assisted by Sherlock’s cousin Nicholas. The book was written by Sir Arthur Doyle. I wonder if it is genuine or a knock off”

“I guess it is like reading a copy of ‘Secret Agent Girl’ and finding the main character’s name is Lu Jo” Nick commented.

She gently punched him in the ribs as they left the room.

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