

Dark Night
By
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'It had been a bad day', Nick thought to himself as his needle ship sped away from the Galacia Star System. He had been assigned to check out some intelligence received by the Empire Intelligence Service (EIS) regarding a plot to introduce an addictive drug into the commerce system of the Empire. The Galacia star system was under the economic and political control of House Chesterfield and they were definitely not friendly to Emperoro Leopaldo.

As Nick filled up his Danish style smooth bent Old Earth (O.E.) Larenzetti 18K pipe with a pseudo-tobacco, he thought back to his last two days and his recent interview with Dr. Joshua Nay while he was on 'Socrates II', the third planet of the Galacia Star System. Helmian University occupied about 20% of the land on the planet. Dr. Nay was an Instructor of Philosophy at the Helmian University and instrumental in the medical ethics field. He was also an informant for the Empire Intelligence Service (EIS).

They had been smoking pipes filled with McNay's Red Ribbon that Dr. Nay had produced while sitting on the veranda of Nickl's hotel. While at Helmian University, Nick had visited the 'University Pipe Shoppe' to gauge the local pipe smoking/collecting activity. The owner, Daniel Kovacs, had told him about a local pipe maker who carved pipes from the rare Krenellian B'iar. The pipe carver, Thomas James Rachards, was establishing a reputation for high quality pipes at a reasonable cost. A large Krenellian B'iar pipe in a hawkbill shape had jumped out of the group of Rachards pipes into Nick's hands. The pipe was rusticated, in a black finish with a smooth brown top made in the classical hawkbill shape. Nick's experience was that a pipe had to really stand out and 'call his name' before he would even consider it for purchase. This pipe had done so. Mr. Kovacs did not have to 'sell' it to Nick as the pipe itself spoke volumes. They negotiated an acceptable price and Nick left with the pipe firmly in hand as well as a pouch of a local neer-tobacco named 'Vicar's Choice' purported to be a remarkable mature virginia. Daniel Kovacs informed Nick that the blend was one of his own. He blended it in his shop but had also sold the off planet rights to produce and market the blend to the Morton Frog Tobacco Company.

"I am in the process of breaking in this new pipe" Nick had informed Dr. Nay.

“It looks like a Rachards pipe” he replied “I have found that Tom’s pipes keep getting better and better the longer he carves. They are in high demand here and those in-the-know here at the University seem to buy them up as soon as they become available. You are lucky to find one.”

“I was told that this is his first attempt at the hawkbill shape, and in my opinion, he quite nailed the shape”, Nick replied.

“He did at that” Joshua replied “As much as I would like to discuss pipes and tobacco with you, we need to get to business. As I mentioned in my report, I conduct research in the field of medical ethics. I have discovered a series of long lost research reports from an O.E. pipe personage named Dr. Fred Hanna. Besides being a noted pipe collector and pipe smoker, he also authored the book “The Perfect Smoke –Gourmet Pipe Smoking for Relaxation and Reflection”. He was also noted for delivering reports on his views on nicotine. Dr. Hanna opined that based on his review of the then research literature that nicotine had beneficial protective properties within the brain. The protective nature of the nicotine treatments had been successfully proven to not be a cure, but prevented, delayed or lessened the onset or severity of brain degenerative disease such as Alzheimer’s, short-term memory loss, and other aging factors due to memory related issues.”

“But isn’t that pretty much common knowledge” Nick asked “isn’t that one of the reasons our life spans are so extended? We can now live several hundred years and our brain function pretty much continues normally almost till our death?”

“Yes, that is true” he said as he puffed on a nice sandblasted billiard made of a neer-briar “the protective properties of nicotine are now well known, and that coupled with our highly technical medical knowledge and technology allows us to achieve the long life spans. However, what is not generally known is that Dr. Hanna’s work was suppressed near the end of his lifetime. His book was seized by the Anti-smoking governments that came to power in Old Earth. The work that he and other researchers performed was suppressed by the anti-smoking faction. It has only been within the last hundred years or so that the positive factors of nicotine or what he calls Vitamin N have been replicated by our scientists. As I noted in my report, it has come to my attention that House Chesterfield has been sponsoring research that is becoming successful in developing a derivative product that they hope they will be able to market that will provide all of the Vitamin N benefits in a pill form. In other words, they will do away with the need to smoke a quality cigar or pipe to receive these benefits, just pop a pill. Now, ethically, there is no problem with this, however, what they are not telling you is that there is one very significant side effect, their nicotine

derivative is that it is addictive. Once you start on the pill, its removal will cause a quick deterioration of the brain receptors, and a slow, but definite demise of brain function. You can only keep this from happening by staying on a maintenance dose of the nicotine derivative. House Chesterfield has the patent on the nicotine derivative, which is known as "brain-n". They plan to basically promote brain-n as a life extender and a mental capacity enhancer. They will not speak out about the side effects and the addictive properties of the nicotine derivative, except in micro-print in the advertisements. They expect to come out ahead because they can sell the product at a normal strength for short-term use, and then provide the product at a maintenance level, and finally, if these fail, then provide the nicotine patch again as at a maintenance level."

Nick was confused "By why go to all this trouble when, as you say the research indicates, you get the benefits of Vitamin N by just smoking a pipe, cigarette or cigar?"

"What you say is true" Joshua replied "But you are incorrect regarding the cigarettes where it has been shown that the paper and other chemicals produced in the cigarette making process does induce cancer. This has never been demonstrated with respect to pipes and cigars."

"The nut of the problem is that n-brain is a totally unnecessary product. It has no medical efficacy. It can be more harmful than helpful. There are other, more natural, ways to get the protective features of Vitamin N through smoking pipes." Dr. Nay responded.

"Can't Emperor Leopaldo just ban the brain-n product?" Nick asked.

"He can if the Empire Health and Safety Board's committee on medical product efficacy recommends its banning, and now they are evenly split. I sit on the committee and plan to cast the deciding vote for its banning." Dr. Nay responded "However, I believe that some of the members are being bribed by the Chesterfield representatives. I do not have any proof."

"I will contact Castle Pesaro for instructions and get back with you" Nick replied.

He watched while Dr. Nay left the table, passed through the gate and entered into the pedestrian stream of people. About a minute later, he heard a commotion coming from down the street. He left the table to investigate. In the midst of a gathering of people, he found Dr. Nay in the middle of the walkway dead on the ground.

The planetary police had arrived on the scene. Lieutenant Detective Durkt was the officer in charge. Nick identified himself as EIS to the detective. "Looks like the man had a medical emergency. Heart attack or something" the detective stated.

"We will want an autopsy and full toxicology report" Nick replied.

"Well, that is not quite how we do things here" the detective said "We don't normally do these things when people die of natural causes."

"I suspect it was not due to natural causes" Nick responded "Who do I need to contact to get this done?"

"Now don't go getting uppity. You may be EIS, but that does not carry much weight here. We don't particularly care for outsiders." He replied as he puffed on an old briar pipe, the aroma of its tobacco polluting the air "We will check the decedent's medical records. If we find anything suspicious, we will conduct an autopsy. If not, he will be immediately cremated, as is our custom. If you have any questions, you need to discuss them with my supervisor, Captain Argkis."

"I must object, this is an EIS matter and our request takes precedent over your policy, procedure, and custom" Nick objected.

"Only if we permit it" the detective replied "you may take it up with my captain, if you have a problem."

Nick left the 'accident' scene and returned to his hotel. Upon arrival at his hotel room, he first swept the room of any hidden electronic devices or transmitters. He only found two this time as he disabled them. He had found four bugs inside his hotel room upon his initial arrival. He used his EIS issued special communicator to communicate with Castle Pesaro. He requested to personally speak with Varten von Eckman, the EIS head and Emperor Leopaldo's weapons master.

He reported the story of Dr. Joshua Nay, the brain-n product, and the lack of assistance from the planetary police force.

'Don't expect much help from the police force" Varten explained to Nick 'They are all under the direction of House Chesterifeld. You will get little assistance. They killed him for a reason, maybe he could not be bribed and they could not

take another no vote. They probably used a poisoned dart or something similar. You must be very careful."

"I doubt they will do anything here to me. The death or disappearance of a key EIS agent would put them under a microscope, and they cannot afford it" Nick stated.

"True, but accidents do happen" Varten replied. "Due to the death of Dr. Nay, we will have to postpone the vote of the Empire Health and Safety subcommittee. We can arrange that. Keep poking around and see what turns up. I would start with the Captain."

Nick agreed and ended the communications. Varten had told him that they would research Dr. Fred Hanna's work and contact Ike McCane to find out if he was known to him when he was involved in the O.E. pipe scene. *(Author's note: Read "Hawkbills in Space" for more information on Ike McCane)*

Nick arrived at the Captain Argkiss' office. He walked in to see a big man smoking a big bent pipe. As they shook hands Nick spoke "Nice pipe, Captain, and If I am not mistaken you are smoking an English blend of tobacco."

"It is a near-tobacco called Frog Horton blended at the University Pipe Shoppe, which I understand you have already visited" the policeman replied.

"Looks like you have had your eye on me" Nick replied "Yes, I did see the blend there, but I prefer virginia tobacco and selected the Vicar's Choice. Do you mind if I smoke?" he asked as he lit his new Rachards pipe."

"Go ahead" he replied" and the pipe is an O.E. Peterson, Sherlock Holmes series, but then again, I also know that you know a lot about O.E. pipes."

"Ok, let's get down to business" Nick stated "Your lieutenant was not very helpful."

"He wasn't meant to be" Captain Argkis replied "He was just following instructions. Officially, there will be no autopsy or toxicology tests. Dr. Nay's death was consistent with and apparently due to his weak heart. Unofficially, he was murdered and you can guess why and by whom. By-the-way, there are no bugs in this office." He said as he passed a pad over to Nick with the letters "HC" scribbled on the pad. "It never hurts to be too cautious." He opened his desk drawer took out a small yellow bottle of pipe cleaning fluid, placed a bit on an old rag and rubbed it on the palm of his hand. A blue image of the bust of

Sherlock Holmes appeared, complete with deerstalker hat and calabash pipe – the universally recognized symbol of an EIS agent. It slowly faded away.

“Amazing what you can do with a bit of pipe cleaning fluid” the captain stated “I really do not have much additional information, what I find out will be transmitted to Castle Pesaro via the usual secure route. It was definitely murder. It was definitely House Chesterfield, but we have our orders not to investigate which we must follow.”

“I understand” Nick replied as he smoked the Vicar’s Choice “This is really a quite good tobacco. Daniel Kovacs store seems to be quite well stocked and he can make some good blends.”

“If I hear anything I will let you know. Approach everyone here with suspicion and do not trust anyone. You must be very careful. I cannot insure your safety.” The captain stated.

“I shall” Nick said as he rose to leave the room.

“We have a saying on this planet ‘foul things happen on dark nights’, on a brighter note, Tell Leo hello for me the next time you see him” Captain Argkis said as Nick left.

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When he got back from his meeting at the police department, he had a message waiting on his secure communicator. It was from Varten and instructed him to contact a Mrs. Goldberk at the Empire Research Station located near a town around the planet’s equator. He used his communicator and spoke with her secretary. A meeting was set for later near early evening.

He arrived at the research station via his rented aircar and was admitted to Dr. Joan Goldberk’s office in the administration building. He found her to be a tall, very stylish dressed woman in her early thirties. They made their introductions. “You may call me Joan” she said “I am the medical officer attached to the research station. I know that you are EIS. I have been asked to take you to the station hospital. We have two employees who are exhibiting symptoms of addiction. We are not sure to what.” She took out what appeared to be a Group 3 sized straight billiard pipe with a silver band “O.E. Dunhill Shell” she replied as she filled it up from a tobacco jar on her desk. “You may fill your pipe up if you wish. It is a bulk blend called ‘Vicar’s Choice’ from the University Pipe Shoppe.”

"I am familiar with it" Nick replied as he filled up his new hawkbill pipe with her tobacco and lit it. "It is quite good, and I like virginia tobacco. Your pipe is a great example of the ones created in the old days on Old Earth. I have an O.E. Dunhill, 2000 RTDA pipe and it is a great smoke."

They left her office and headed to the sickbay where they found two people in the 4 bed ward. Each was under the sheet sweating and shaking. "We are not sure what it is? Do they have a local disease? They appear to have symptoms of drug withdrawal."

He explained to her the story of Dr. Nay and the brain-n nicotine derivative drug. "Is there a chance they have been exposed to this drug" he asked.

"They had both just returned from a crop inspection at the Chesterfield plantation holdings. Their neer-tobacco crop looks pretty good this year. They were on-site over two weeks. I would not put it past the House Chesterfield to use our people to perform a little experimentation, however, could they be hooked on brain-n with so little exposure?" she asked.

"I don't know" Nick replied' but you should try providing them with a little nicotine, in a patch or pipe form and see if there is any difference. At their state, I doubt if you could harm them more. Without treatment, they will become more and more listless until their body no longer functions."

"I will immediately start them on a nicotine patch; I doubt they could smoke at this point." She went to the storage area and took out a box of nicotine patches. She placed on the forearm of each of the two patients. The effect was almost immediate. The sweating and shaking ceased. They both fell asleep in their beds.

"You realize if Dr. Nay is correct, you will have to place them on a nicotine maintenance regime the rest of their life. I wonder if this is the effect after one or multiple exposure to brain-n" He asked out loud.

"I don't know" Joan replied "but if it is after just one exposure to the drug, it is terrible indeed."

They returned to Joan's office. Nick relit his pipe as he contacted Varten and reported their findings "Yes, it is a very specific drug and the nicotine patch does seem to put the withdrawal symptoms into remission. I don't have the equipment or facilities to try to determine exactly what is happening and if just regularly smoking a pipe will countermand the effect of the drug. We don't know how much or how often the countermeasures must be taken. For that

matter, we do not even have a sample of brain-n for our researchers to use for evaluation purposes.”

Nick was instructed to return to his hotel and await further instructions. He said farewell to Joan and returned to his hotel at Helmian University.

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Meanwhile, back at Castle Pesaro, Varten was relaying Nick’s latest report to Emperor Leopaldo. They were both smoking some O.E. McClelland #5100, a mature virginia tobacco. Leo in his large Castello GG hawkbill, Varten in an O.E. JT Cooke nondescript billiard pipe.

“We have to get a sample of the brain-n drug for our laboratories to analyze and see if we can come up with countermeasures. Brain-n is clearly a harmful nicotine derivative. Once hooked, you will have to either stay alive using a low maintenance level of the drug or basically smoke to live. If I was back in the early O.E. 21st Century, brain-n would be the anti-smoking groups’ worst nightmare. If everyone were addicted with the drug, it would not be so bad. Smoking would be #1 in priority; the down side is that it would be forced, not chosen. So much for free choice. For House Chesterfield it is a win-win situation, they either make money from the drug itself or the tobacco sales if maintenance levels are needed” Leo said thinking out loud.

Varten replied “We do need to obtain samples of the brain-n drug. We also need to know if House Chesterfield can produce enough to enslave a city, country, planet or the Universe. I doubt if they have much of the drug at this time, but the longer we delay, the more they will obtain. We also need to find out how the research station workers were exposed to the drug. Did they ingest it? Was it added to their tobacco?”

“Yes, and we also need to devise a strategy to combat the Barron’s scheme.” Leo replied.

“I have heard from Ike McCane. He did know Fred Hanna, but it was before he published his work on the benefit of Vitamin N. He said that Fred was a researcher beyond reproach and he would trust any of his findings. He also had one heck of a straight grain pipe collection” Varten reported.

“Is Anthony Argkis our only EIS operative at Helmian University?” Leo asked.

“He is” Varten replied. We are sending other agents into the area. As you know, the Barron controls the planet. We will not get any help on the ground.”

"If we can't get to the Barron, then we need to get the Barron out of his hole" Leo responded "Now, how do we do that?"

Varten's communicator rang. He spoke with the EIS duty officer on the other end. He turned to Leo as he signed off "We have received some bad news. We have lost all contact with Nick Reardon. He never returned to his hotel after his trip to the Empire Research Station. Even Agent Argkiss' observers have lost him. We must assume that he is in the Barron's clutches.

Leo puffed on his Castello Hawkbill "Bad news indeed".

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The attack had come suddenly. One minute he was on his approach to Helmian University, the next minute he passed out.

He awoke in a dark room. He was securely bound to a chair. The best he could tell, the room was empty of all furniture except for the chair. However, he could detect the aroma of a strong English pipe tobacco. The light level slowly rose and he could see that he was in the center of what appeared to be a medical operating theater. As he looked up, he could see a number of people gazing down at him as one large man approached the microphone.

"Ah, Mr. Nick Reardon, Emperor Leopaldo's number one EIS agent. I see you are awake. I'm sorry about the headache, but it is a side effect of the knockout drops we used when we secured your aircar. I control everything of importance on this planet; from the spaceport to the police to the company your aircar was rented. Of course you got the 'special' model. I made sure you rented the one with the knockout drop atomizer and with the ability for us to take over the controls remotely. We have had our eyes on you since you arrived" the man said.

"Ahh, Barron, we meet again. I believe the last time we met was at Castel Pesaro after the little matter of the medals." Nick replied.

"Yes, you have been a thorn in my side for a long time. I believe it is time for payback." The Barron turned to the other visitors watching from above the viewing dome "As I was saying, brain-n is a drug with a most wonderful effect. When taken into the body, it attaches itself to the 8 nicotine receptors in the brain. Once it reaches sufficient strength, it perpetually numbs these receptors. The only way they will continue to function is by a continual dosing with either a

low level of brain-n, or the use of a nicotine replacement regime such as a nicotine patch, or by smoking. If the body is removed from the nicotine for fourteen hours, it goes through withdrawal with some pretty bad symptoms that will eventually lead to death. House Chesterfield has all ends covered. We manufacture the drug, we manufacture the nicotine patches, and we control a large part of the neer-tobacco production in most of the Empire. When he sees how thorough our plans are, we may even be able to entice him into our scheme.”

“So you are going to create an empire of addicts?” one of the men who was smoking a calabash pipe asked.

“I wouldn’t call them addicts” the Barron replied “I would call them dependents. They would be dependent on our products. It’s sort of like we are creating a new supply and demand situation for tobacco products.”

He continued “We all need water to live. In our economy, we control the source of water, the providing of water to the populace, and we set the price of the water. We do the same for electrical power. We all make great sums of money from these activities. So what is the difference?”

The same man responded “The difference is that we naturally need air, water, and power to maintain our state of living. We do not need brain-n. We are doing the ultimate creation of a market.”

“OK, how does the Brain-n work?” a man smoking a half-bent black pipe asked.

“Mr. Reardon will serve as our point of demonstration today, won’t you Nick?” the Barron asked while a female dressed as a nurse entered the room in which he was being held captive. She pushed a tray with four boxes on the tray.

“Now watch gentlemen” the Barron said “The nurse has four syringes containing 100 ppm of brain-n diluted in a saline solution. A syringe will be injected into Mr. Reardon’s blood stream an hour apart. A higher dose will be harmful; a lower dose will be ineffective. After the last dose is administered, he must have the equivalent of a 10 mg nicotine patch applied within 24 hours and every 24 hours thereafter or the equivalent of two pipes smoked within 12 hours. If not, he will go into withdrawal after 14 hours. The symptoms will be breaking into cold sweats as if you had been exposed to an overdose of nicotine, shakes, and eventually lethargy will set in. Once the withdrawal gets to the permanent lethargy, there is no known way to reverse the process. There are other means of exposure such as ingestion and inhalation, however direct injection is the most effective and controllable”

Nick felt the prick of the first injection.

The Barron had turned off the microphone. Nick felt nothing strange except for certain queasiness in his stomach sort of like when you first smoke a strong pipe tobacco. He could not hear his observers, but he could watch the animated discussion taking place above his head.

Each subsequent hour, another injection took place while under the careful observation of the observers. Finally, the fourth injection was made. As predicted, he fell into a deep, dreamless sleep.

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He awoke in a daze on his needleship heading out of the Galacia star system. He had one heck of a pounding headache. When the banging in his head settled down to a dull pounding, he saw a package on the bed with a note attached. He read the note.

Mr. Reardon,

I am sorry that you had to undergo the tribulation placed upon you by the Barron. All I can tell you is that I was one of the observers of your 'treatment' by the Barron. I won't tell you who I am, but you may remember the calabash pipe.

I do not agree with what he is doing or his plans. The package contains 2 Kilos of the pure brain-n drug. It is not diluted, so you cannot use it yourself. I would suggest that for now, you smoke at least one or two pipes every twelve hours until you get back to friendly forces. You must make it back to the Emperor as soon as possible as your tobacco supply will eventually run out.

Some of my people kidnapped you, got you back to your ship, and with the help of a certain captain of police, were able to get you launched into space and on course. The Barron knows by now that you are missing, so be careful.

When you meet Leo, tell him that not all of his adversaries agree with the Barron's plans. Also tell him to remember the military action at Gollopi. He may recall me at that time.

I sincerely hope you pull through on this one. It may be a test of all of your skills.

A friend and fellow BOTB.

Nick re-read the message and checked the ship's controls. He saw that the ship was on autopilot. From the ship's computer, he saw he could make a jump in about an hour. He also saw that a small fleet was quickly coming upon him. He activated his defensive screens. Instead of a few quick jumps, he planned a roundabout path which would take about two days to reach Castle Pesaro's landing field. He also found that he had about enough tobacco, that if he parsed it out, he would just be able to make it smoking two bowls every twelve hours for the two days.

He had time for one quick message to be automatically sent to EIS headquarters while he disconnected his hyperspace tracker before he punched the button to make his first jump. At least the Barron could not track him, but also neither could the EIS. If he miscalculated, he could end up anywhere but if he delayed, he would not be able to outrun his pursuers. He hit the button and the ship 'jumped' through hyperspace.

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"What is going on" Leo demanded as he puffed on his large hawkbill while pacing the room.

"Here is what we know Leo" Varten replied "Our agent in place sent us a short message that Nick was rescued from the Barron but that he had been 'treated' with the brain-n drug. His needle ship has departed from the Galacia star system and was being followed by the Barron. We got a short transmission from Nick saying to expect him within 2 days, if all went well."

"Well all better go well" Leo growled. "We will have to tell LuJo and Helen, a task that I will not enjoy. Put all of the Empire Navy on alert to find Nick's needleship. I will assume that Nick had enough sense to turn his hyperwave tracker off as I am sure that the Barron would be able to track him though hyperspace if it were left on."

"Nick is one of our best operatives" Varten replied "He will pull through."

"I hope so old friend. I would be most grieved if we lost him. We should not delay speaking to Helen and LuJo."

The ladies joined Leo and Varten in the conference room. Leo offered them a fill for their pipes from the tobacco jar on the table. The jar was from O.E. having an American Indian likeness on the jar and an old wooden top containing a tobacco humidifier.

Leo was still smoking his large deep red Castello GG Old Antiquari while Varten was smoking a small Charatan fossil lumberman shaped pipe. LuJo and Helen were both smoking small Dunhill Group 3 straight billiards.

“We have some bad news to tell you” he began as he unfolded the story of Nick’s mission and that he was currently missing in action.

With a look of concern LuJo asked “He will be found, won’t he and he will be ok”.

Leo answered “At this time, I am not sure of the answer to either of your questions. We have the entire Empire fleet out looking for him. Dr Witz and our Navy Medical Staff are awaiting his arrival to treat him. Our chief scientists are waiting to see if he has samples of brain-n so they can determine its effects, and develop a way to lessen its effects without keeping the individual addicted. We have every hope that our endeavor will be successful.”

Varten continued “The two workers from the research center are now on our Navy Hospital Ship ‘New Hope’ and are being examined. Although now addicted to brain-n, they are none the worse for the experience. They are on nicotine maintenance levels, one by smoking a pipe and the other via a nicotine patch or gum. Once again, our researchers are studying the effects of the drug.”

“Once you have a cure for the brain-n addiction, how will it be distributed? How will the exposed population be cured” Helen asked as she smoked her O.E.Dunhill pipe.

“I don’t have an answer to that question, Helen” Leo replied “I guess we would just have to stop the spread of the drug at its source, meaning the Barron, and I am not quite sure how we accomplish that task.”

Varten added between puffs “From what we know, the drug has no permanent negative effect other than one is addicted, and if is not maintained on a maintenance level, one goes into withdrawal. It appears that the situation is manageable. The problem is that exposing people to the drug opens up one heck of an ethical issue. It is definitely wrong to treat people in this manner, making them dependent on a drug to live. Control of the drug and its maintenance dosage can put too much power into one individual’s hands, almost godlike. The bottom line is this is just another attempt by the Barron and his supporters to usurp the Emperor’s power.”

They continued their discussion well into the night, knowing that it was just a matter of waiting to see what happens, and assuring each other that Nick would find his way home.

He had one last jump to make before arriving at Castle Pesaro. His ship had come out of hyperspace near the Alpha Centuri star system. He was smoking the Rachards pipe he had recently acquired. His tobacco supply was dwindling. He would have enough to reach his destination. His screens indicated that he was far enough away from the star to engage the jump drive. He was looking forward to arriving at his destination and ready to be the guinea pig in what would be some intense research on how the drug affected him.

He had noticed one important fact. The drug seemed to enhance his ability to focus on the problem at hand and it seemed his short-term memory was much better. He could remember the entire happenings since arriving at Helmian University.

Although debilitating diseases were few and far between in his age, there were occasional cases that medical science could not cure. Memory decline with old age and Alzheimer's disease had not disappeared; rather the new medical science had postponed their onset and appearance. It was not uncommon for people to live two to three hundred years with the decline starting shortly before their death. Perhaps the brain-n drug could be a beneficial treatment to people late in life. At that point in their long lives, the nicotine replacement therapy would be a small price to pay to prevent their mental decline.

He wondered if he should send a short transmission over the hyperwave communicator to Castle Pesaro. He did not feel he was being tracked and he only had one more jump to execute. However, he decided to follow the book and not potentially expose his position. He finished his bowl of McNay's Red Ribbon, emptied the ash into the disposal, placed the pipe in its pipe stand and hit the jump button. He headed home.

A short time thereafter, a message was sent to Castle Pesaro. 'Nick Reardon's needle ship had been detected by the Empire Navy Fleet. He was being picked up and transferred to the hospital ship "New Hope". Dr. Witzy is preparing for his examination. The researchers are awaiting their chance to get their hands on the brain-n drug to begin their analyses and experiments. Leo had convened a panel of top scientists and ethicists to study the problem of the drug and make recommendations on its use and suggest a manner to stop the Barron's plans.

He had arrived in homespace and had been escorted to dock near the New Hope, a fleet hospital ship. Once aboard, he was met by Dr. Witz and several Empire Navy and EIS officials for a debriefing. They were awaiting the arrival of Varten von Eckman from Castle Pesaro. Once he arrived, they met in one of the ship's conference rooms. Attending the meeting were the Emperor's personal representative, Varten von Eckman, Dr. Sohei Witz of the Empire Navy Medical Service, Captain McGill of the New Hope, Commodore Svenson of the Navy Fleet assigned to the Lynase star system, home of Planet Hayden and Castle Pesaro, Commodore Jim McClelland, friend of the Emperor who was on detail to Castel Pesaro, and Dr. Javone who was the director of the research program at the Hayden University, and other minor officers and advisors.

They had all pretty much filled their pipes with tobacco provided by the Captain of the New Hope and were sitting down at the table preparing the provide coffee. Most of the people were known to Nick. Prior to the meeting, they had met and greeted each other. They had been briefed, to the extent possible, about Nick's mission and the known information regarding the brain-n drug. The package Nick had brought was sitting on the table.

Nick began the discussion "So far I have not noticed any negative effects of the brain-n drug. I have noticed that I am more prone to focus on the matter at hand without distraction and that my short-term memory seems to have improved. I have, however, strictly smoked two pipe bowls of tobacco every twelve hours, which is not a very hard task for me" they chuckled.

He took out a small pocket knife and opened the package that he had transported. Inside were three small packages. Two of the packages were identical brick looking packages marked 'Brain-n, pure'. The third package was a much smaller box addressed to him. He opened the box and found a medium size gourd calabash pipe with a meerschaum bowl. "I believe I know who this is from" he told the assembled group "I believe it is from the man that rescued me from the clutches of the Barron."

Varten then addressed the group, telling them of the high importance the Emperor placed on their assignments. He also informed them of the confidence the Emperor had in their ability to complete their assignments, both quickly and thoroughly, and instructed them that this work was of the highest priority. The packages containing the bricks of pure brain-n were given to Dr. Javone with a portion to be returned to Dr. Witz. As the meeting adjourned, Dr. Witz spoke to Nick "You will be tested as you have never been tested before. From blood draws for analysis, to physical fitness tests, to CT and MRI scans, to some neurological tests. If, as you say, it enhances your mental focus and short-term memory, then we will test you to verify the effect. We have tested the two men

from the research center. Their results are awaiting verification from you. I won't tell you what we have learned at this time as I do not want to bias the tests or your responses. The problem with them is that we do not know the route of exposure or to how much of the brain-n they were exposed. With you, we know how you were exposed and the dosage of the exposure, if we can believe the information the Barron provided your visitors, and I see no reason why we cannot."

Varten left the others and joined Dr. Witz and Nick "Leo is most appreciative of the efforts you have undergone. He will not forget your treatment by the Barron. LuJo and Helen want you to return to them as soon as you are done. Leo feels very strongly that we cannot have an Empire of addicts to brain-n. There will be enough problems with the drug, even if it is only available from a physician. Let me be clear, the Barron's plan must be blunted."

"I understand" Nick replied "Let's get started"

Start they did. After eight hours of testing, Nick felt that he had been pinched everywhere, probed where people should not be probed, scanned to the point that he doubted anyone had a more defined map of his body than he did. He had been through many standard intelligence tests. He guessed he passed. He knew he had done better on the memory tests where in the past he could only recall the three words five minutes later, today he recalled a string of nine words. They finally let him eat at the end of the eight hours of testing.

Following dinner, Nick met again with Varten and Dr. Witz in a smoking lounge. Dr Witz said "We are going to start a series of tests that will last for the next 24 hours. You will be instrumented up for all of the essential measurements of your bodily functions. We will use telemetric methods to transfer the data to a central location on the ship. Shortly, you will have to smoke a pipe. You will repeat this process every 6 hours. This will enable us to see the changes over time that the brain-n causes in your body. Dr. Javone's team is studying the pharmokinetic properties of brain-n and is performing animal tests. We are testing and observing you."

Varten added "To make the experience a bit more exciting for you Nick, Leo has sent you a special little package." Varten handed him the package. Nick looked inside and found an unopened tin of O.E. Three Nuns pipe tobacco.

"Now this I shall enjoy" Nick replied with glee.

Dr. Witz handed him a special pipe "This pipe is also instrumented and connected to the ship's telemetry system. From the data obtained from the pipe,

we will be able to determine the dosage of nicotine that will be taken into your body. This is something that is necessary” he said as he took Nick’s new calabash away from him.

“Geeze, I always wanted to try a genuine calabash pipe, but I guess it will have to wait for a couple of more days.”

“That it will, Nick.” The medical technicians entered the room and connected several electrodes to various parts of his body. They attached special sensors to other parts. All were centrally connected to a small box worn on his belt. He had total freedom of movement. There was a micro-LED snugly in one of the crags of his sandblasted pipe so he knew that the pipe was transmitting data to the central depository.

“Let’s begin” Dr Witz said.

They filled and lit their pipes, talked and smoked away. Nick thought that the Three Nuns was an excellent virginia tobacco, but there was something else in the blend that he could not identify. At the end of roughly an hour, Dr. Witz left to go study the data. They performed the same procedure exactly four more times (6hrs., 12 hrs, 18 hrs, and 24 hours). Nick slept as the opportunity presented itself. His meals were rather bland, but he realized that the meals were also planned as part of the testing program.

At the end of the tests, Nick was again alone with Varten and Dr. Witz. “The two of you will be heading back to Castle Pesaro ”Dr Witz stated “ I will be joining you once we and Dr. Javone have completed the analysis of the data and have drawn some conclusions. You must not forget that you are currently addicted to brain-n and must keep a pipe smoking regime continuing, two pipes every twelve hours, preferably spaced evenly.”

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The trip back to Castle Pesaro was quite uneventful. Nick had a quick meeting with Leo and was informed that there would be a general meeting later in the evening after dinner. He left to find LuJo and their meeting was quite eventful, and truth to be told, some gymnastics were involved.

Leo always believed that a dinner was to be enjoyed and that business could take place after dinner. Enjoy their dinner, they did. It was probably one of the best dinners that Nick had ever eaten. Nick, LuJo, Varten, Leo, Helen, and Commander Jim McClelland enjoyed the culinary delights of the Castle Pesaro master chef.

After desert, they moved to the large smoking room, a room dedicated to the fine art of pipe smoking. There were over twenty large comfortable chairs, each holding pipe cleaners, tobacco, ashtray, and a slot for your favorite beverage. They were joined by Drs. Javone and Witz. The castle staff provided each individual with their favorite beverage, closed the doors, and left the room.

Leo was smoking a JimCooke straight black sandblasted billiard pipe. Helen had her Charatan Coronation pipe. Nick and LuJo were each smoking the Charlatan Executive straight grain pipe that they had been gifted by Helen. Commander McClelland was smoking his Cavicchi poker. Dr. Witz was smoking an O.E. Dunhill shell calabash. Dr. Javone had her small Dunhill Group 3 bent billiard pipe. Leo had provided them with some O.E. S. Galwith FullVirginia Flake or some O.E. Dunhill Early Morning Pipe depending on their taste for tobacco.

He began "First, I want to recognize the tremendous contribution that Nick has made, putting himself in harm's way, being exposed to the brain-n drug, returning to us safely, and participating in the medical testing program to determine the effects and possible countermeasures to brain-n. Second, I want to recognize the efforts of Dr. Witz and Dr. Javone's teams to assist us in understanding the brain-n drug. There will be a little extra in your pay checks next week." They all chuckled.

"This is a serious matter" he continued "Drs. Witz and Javone, you have the floor."

The two doctors basically confirmed all of the information they had on the brain-n drug, including the beneficial effects of increased focus and short-term memory improvement.

"It is our conclusion that brain-n could help some of the people experiencing loss of focus and/or memory loss as they get up in years and even those who have experienced brain trauma, but only under a physician's care."

"Dr. Witz informed the group that there had been physiological changes in Nick's body caused by the drug. They primarily affected the nicotine receptors in the brain. However, there is one piece of crucial information we do not have and that is what happens when an addicted person experiences withdrawal symptoms. That has to involve more than just the nicotine receptors in the brain."

"Well, couldn't you just stop me from having the nicotine after 12 hours and see what happens?" Nick asked.

“We could design such a testing and monitoring program” Dr. Witz replied “but there would be ethical implications that I honestly find hard to accept. First is the issue of withholding the nicotine or the brain-n maintenance dose. Second, if it were done, there is a chance that you could be permanently harmed or made into a vegetable, and I don’t believe anyone wants that responsibility. Lastly, such a commitment to undergo such testing should not be taken lightly. It is very serious indeed.”

“I understand the seriousness of the issues” Nick replied “but honestly, if such testing is not performed, will we ever know how to treat those addicted people and return them to a normal life? The Barron says that once the maintenance dose is removed, death is inevitable, but I believe we are smarter than the Barron. I believe you can come up with a countermeasure to brain-n.”

Leo stood up and said “Nick, this is a burden that neither I nor anyone else can impose on you. I know you would be willing to undergo the testing, however, I believe that you now have someone else who has a voice in your commitment” he said looking at LuJo.

“Damn right he does” she said “Not even married yet and I could lose him. Heck, I almost did! Thank goodness he is so intelligent and such a good EIS operative” she said with a chuckle. “This is something we need to discuss” she continued “Could we be excused for a while to have a little pow wow?”

They left the room for about ten minutes while the pipe smoking and discussion continued. The door opened and they returned.

Nick started “I could not in good conscience not participate in the testing since hopefully your findings will help me get the brain-n monkey off my back. However, there are several conditions that we would ask your concurrence.”

LuJo continued “One, if something goes wrong or gets out of hand, I am Nick’s representative and I get to stop the test program. Two, if it gets to the point that the outcome is Nick as a vegetable, then he will be euthanized. Finally, if we get through this all, I get to personally kick the Barron where it hurts.”

“Once again you two amaze me” Leo responded to the proposal “I can accept your three conditions. Regarding the last, you will be second in line because I will be first.”

Dr. Witz replied "I applaud your decision. I can assure you we will be as careful as possible. You must now have your last pipe and no more until after we are concluded with the testing. Fourteen hours from now we can start the test."

Leo contacted someone on the castle staff using his communicator. "If this is going to be his last pipe for a while, then it should be something special."

The door of the room opened and Helmsford, Leo's valet, entered the room with a tin box. He gave it to Leo and left the room.

The box was engraved "Admiral Richard E. Byrd".

Leo began "Admiral Richard E. Byrd was an O.E. American Hero. In 1934, he spent five winter months alone operating a meteorological station in the Antarctic portion of Old Earth. He almost died of carbon monoxide poisoning. Admiral Byrd was a pipe smoker. Inside the box Nick you will find a pipe owned by Admiral Byrd and an unopened tin of Dunhill Ready Rubbed Virginia. The pipe is a O.E. Dunhill 1936 Group 6 straight billiard. You will see his initials "R.E.B." engraved on the silver band. I want you to have this antiquity and enjoy it."

"Leo, I am speechless. However, I will accept the pipe, but the tobacco we all must share. I do have one additional question. The gentleman that rescued me obviously is a supporter of the Barron's, however, he is not totally evil. He asked me to remember him to you and mention the action at gollopi and signed the letter 'BOTB'. Do you know who he is? Nick asked"

"The 'BOTB' you should be able to decipher is stands for 'Brotherhood of the Briar'. The action at gollopi was a small skirmish on some minor planet in the Empire. The chief town on the planet was named 'Gollopí'. I was the Captain of a small assault group operating from an armed troop carrier. We landed on the planet and engaged the enemy, who I might mention were in a revolt from the Empire when my father was Emperor. This 'revolt' was instigated by House Chesterfield. In one of the ground actions, I was captured and was going to be ransomed or used as bait in a trap for the Empire forces. Under cover of night, I was allowed to escape by a stranger that smoked a calabash pipe. He obviously did not concur with the planned revolt. I never knew who he was until many years later when I met him during an affair of state. Both he and I appeared never to have met before and we continue this façade to this day. The person who rescued both you and I is Count Harold, the younger brother of the Barron of the House of Chesterfield."

"I'll be damned!" Nick exclaimed "a sympathizer within the Barron's inner circle."

"He is quite correct, Nick. Not everyone that opposes us politically is necessarily an enemy just as not all of our supporters are our friends."

They all shared and smoked the O.E. Dunhill Ready Rubbed Virginia Pipe Tobacco. Nick smoked his new Dunhill pipe for the first time.

They continued talking and smoking well into the night, well all except Nick and LuJo who left early after Nick's final smoke for the evening. As they entered their room a "Do Not Disturb" sign was placed on the handle of the door.

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Nick arrived at the Castle hospital early to meet Dr. Witz. "It has been eight hours since I have had any tobacco products" he told Dr. Witz.

They took him into an observation room which was actually two rooms with a communicating window and door. They placed him on a bed and instrumented him with a series of transducers and sensors.

"This room is wired for video and sound" Dr. Witz told Nick "I want you to tell us in your own words what you are feeling. You will be strapped onto the bed for your own protection. You will be under constant observation, both through electronic monitoring, and we will be observing through the window. LuJo will be with us."

"It reminds me of my last experience with a medical observation room, which was none too pleasant" Nick replied.

"This one may not be either" Dr. Witz answered "we will play some of your favorite music over the speaker system. LuJo tells me you are a fan of the group "Instead of Sleeping". I recall that they were at your bachelor party.

"Yes, they are one of my favorite groups. I enjoy their songs "Black Light" and "Mr. Wright Now" off of their album "The Reds, The Blacks, The Grays". I guess they like to smoke pipes, instead of sleeping." If they did, then they would have to consume a lot of tobacco if they did not sleep."

"I guess you could say that your bachelor party was quite a blast" Dr. Witz replied. "We have reached the twelve hour point and will begin the test."

They strapped Nick onto the bed. He was alone with his own thoughts, the sound of music being played over the loud speaker.

Nothing seemed to happen for a long time. He found himself tapping his fingers to the music. He remarked that the tapping to the rhythm of the music gave him something with which to focus his thoughts. He started to doze off when he came to his senses, he reported that he had a feeling of warmth like he had overdosed on a tobacco called 1792 and actually was feeling cold sweats. He reported that his stomach was upset and he felt like retching. He noted a patchwork of colors and sounds flowing through his mind and wondered how Dr. Witz could engineer the colors. The sounds seemed to be distortions of the music. He also had the feeling of smelling the aroma of burning tobacco, a very bad blend with burning rubber. Finally, everything went dark. His sensory inputs went totally dead. He was alone in the dark night.

Have you ever gone under total anesthesia; been totally out of it all? Then you may remember the groggy climb back to reality. That was how it was for Nick. He had no remembrance of reality. He heard a sound from here or there. He saw the impression of light through his closed eye lids. He felt the roughness of the cover over his body through his fingertips. He smelled the alcohol-like scent in the sterile room. He heard the voice of his love.

“Nick? Nick? Oh Dam it Nick, wake up” he heard in a tearful female voice.

“I think he is coming around” someone said.

“His vitals are coming up, Doctor”

He felt the blood pumping from his heart and the air coursing in his lungs. He realized that he was alive.

“He’s going to be fine, LuJo” he heard from one of the voices.

Slowly, it all came back to him; his assignment, the drug, the needles, the testing, the long trip home through hyperspace, and most prominently, his friends. He could see the bright light through his eye lids. His ears could better hear the voices and sounds around him. He opened his eyes. He tried to talk “LuJo?”

“I’m here Nick” she responded as she bent over and kissed his cheek.

“You are going to recover Nick. You gave us quite a scare, but we think you have got it licked. There is a way to mitigate the effects of the brain-n drug. We owe you a great debt of gratitude. Without this test, we most likely never would

have found it, and I'll bet the Barron's researchers never did" Dr. Witz responded "We are going to give you a light sedative. You will now sleep, but when you awake, you will be back to your full faculties."

"I'll stay with you Nick" he heard LuJo say before he fell asleep.

"Thanks, Hon" he replied.

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Once again they were in the Emperor's small smoking room, a group of three. Leo, Varten, and Dr. Sohei Wiz were smoking their pipes.

"So, in summary, the drug referred to as brain-n has both a good and a bad side. It is highly addictive and has strong side effects. It can kill if one becomes addicted and does not stay on a maintenance dose. It is beneficial in that it has certain neural properties that cause one to be able to enhance their focus, it improves delicate motor functions of the hands, and it improves short-term-memory functions. It is like everything else, it has its pluses and its minuses." Dr Witz expounded.

"So what happened to Nick in your test" Varten enquired.

Dr. Witz continued "At about 14 hours, the drug started to create lesions in the myelin, a coating on the nerves in the brain connected to the 8 neural receptors identified as nicotine receptor sites. This caused a greatly enhanced shock to the brain similar to a natural disease called multiple sclerosis. This disease had been wiped out many years ago through advanced medical treatments; however we had on staff a young resident who was specializing in arcane diseases. He recognized the symptoms and the disease. To his credit, he recommended a treatment which involved an injection of a beta-searon which is a genetically engineered material. Nick was starting to go down the tubes. LuJo agreed to the risky treatment as an attempt to save Nick. Dr. Weidrick was correct in assessment, diagnosis, and recommended treatment. We were most fortunate to have him here. Believe it or not Leo, he is here on one of your medical scholarships that you give in remembrance of your father. It was most fortunate."

"So Nick is no longer under the sway of brain-n?" Leo asked.

"We believe that the injection is a cure for the side effects of the drug. We will know better after we run some routine tests and keep Nick under observation for a while, but everything is promising."

“When this sorry episode is over, I will want to meet Dr. Weidrick. Both he and Nick deserve all the credit. It is funny in that brain-n will eventually have some beneficial uses for society once we spend more time researching it. Too bad the Barron did not realize this point, for once in his life; he could have done some good.” Leo said “Varten, what do you suggest we do with respect to the Barron?”

“We have flooded the Galacia star system with EIS people. We have implemented a blockage around the planet. No one goes in or out without our knowledge. We know that the Barron is now at his plantation estate. We have destroyed two of the Barron’s heavy jump ships attempting to leave the star system. Reports are turning up from our contacts that people are starting to appear with symptoms of exposure to brain-n ” Varten answered as he puffed on his pipe.

Leo took a long draw on his pipe “I think it is time we have a little talk with the Barron. I don’t think it will be a talk. I think the talking is over. There have been two assassination attempts on my person due to the Barron. It is time for the Barron to go, either quietly or forcefully. The only question is how do we do it?”

“Using Helmian University as our base, we could literally take over the planet and hunt the Barron down to ground. Capture him and put him on trial for ‘Crimes against the Empire’” Varten suggested.

“Too dirty” Leo responded “and it would drive a wedge within the Reichstagen, bigger and deeper than it is currently.” Leo responded.

Varten’s communicator began ringing obsessively. He answered it. Without closing off the communications, he turned to Leo and said “I think our problem has been solved. The Barron has been found dead in his bedroom at the Chesterfield Plantation.”

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They were in the officer’s smoking room on the Empire Cruiser Einstein. They had the conversation before. Leo, Varten, LuJo, Severins of the Empire Diplomatic Corps, and Captain Moriarty of the Einstein were engaged in the discussion while smoking their pipes. Leo had an O.E. small Mickles hawkbill, Varten had a no-name neer-briar billiard. Severins was smoking an O.E. Peterson Sherlock Holmes series pipe. Captain Moriarty was smoking a calabash. LuJo had a Dunhill Group 2 black tanshell briar which she was

smoking quite heavily. They were smoking an O.E. blend called 'Penzance' which was a crumble cake from Leo's stock.

"I just love the inconsistencies, Captain" Leo expounded "Moriarty was Sherlock Holmes arch enemy. He had the same name as you, and you are smoking a calabash pipe, Sherlock Holmes trademark in the early videos. You do know that Sherlock Holmes never smoked a calabash pipe in the books, just in the early movies. One of the greatest actors to portray Sherlock Holmes, William Gillette, found it easier to say his lines while smoking the calabash pipe."

"If it has been said or printed about Sherlock Holmes and Moriarty, I know about it. It is still debated in some circles whether or not Moriarty did die in the fall from Reichenbach Falls. Some say he ended up as an abbot Buddhist monk in Tibet" the Captain replied.

"Yes, and there are those that proffer that Sherlock Holmes married Irene Adler and that there was a progeny from the relationship" Leo responded "Who knows"?

"Yes, who knows" the Captain replied "the story in my family is that the incident you described did happen. I know that you know my given name is Sherlock"

"Yes, I am aware of it Captain. I also have been told that you have one of the best Sherlock Holmes collections in the Empire. I would be honored to see it sometime" Leo stated.

"And I would be honored to have you as my guest" Captain Moriarty replied.

"But back to business, gentlemen" Varten reminded them.

Severins began to speak "the death of a member of the royalty or of a royal House under suspicious circumstances is something that must be investigated and the perpetrator brought to justice. Even though you had wished him out of the way, you did not commit the crime. Whoever did the deed must be found and brought to justice."

"It would seem that someone did us a favor. However, for form sake, the guilty person must be identified and brought to justice, my justice" Leo replied.

LuJo spoke "Nick is still recuperating on the New Hope which has moved into orbit in the Galacia star system. He will join us once he is able. Although cured of the brain-n addiction, it seems that his memory enhancement has been

retained after the treatment. The New Hope's public health officers are now planet side treating and curing the endemic addiction the Barron had started with his brain-n drug. The cure rate is 99%. The Barron's plan seems to have failed."

"The EIS has taken control of the Chesterfield Plantation. The Barron and his personal effects have remained as found for our investigation" Varten reported "Dr Witz will perform the autopsy. Initial investigation has not disclosed an obvious cause of death. Regarding House Chesterfield, there are three members of the family at the plantation, Harold the Barron's younger brother, Herman the middle brother, and Rabin the Barron's nephew. The order of succession is Herman, Harold and finally Rabin."

"I don't know who is the better out of the group, I would favor Harold" Leo responded "I have issues with two of the Barron's potential successors. By law, Herman being the eldest brother would succeed to his title and possessions. Being the case of the death of a Household Head, by law, I must investigate, and so we shall. When will we reach the Chesterfield Plantation?"

"We expect to be in orbit in another hour, then it will take about an hour for us to reach the Chesterfield Plantation and start the investigation" Varten answered "The Einstein will be our nerve center in orbit around the planet. We will be in constant communications. I have setup an EIS operation center at Helmian University. We have militarized the Empire research station so it can also be used if needed."

Leo ended the meeting by saying "Be very careful. We are on the Chesterfield home turf and they do not particularly like us, but we must do our duty. I will be landing with our investigation team including Varten and LuJo. Captain Morarity will remain on the Einstein. Severins will be operating out of Helmian University and handle any diplomatic matters. Dr. Witz will be in charge of any medical issues. We work together on this one." He reminded them.

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He sat in his study in his suite of rooms at the Chesterfield Plantation. 'They finally killed him' he thought. 'They got the old Barron. The brain-n drug scheme was his last ploy to go down in flames.' He always knew it was doomed to failure. The Emperor would see to that. His eldest brother was always such a fool, such a brute, and such a pervert.' These were his thoughts as he sat and smoked his calabash pipe. 'Calabash pipes were so superior to briar pipes' he thought. The meerschaum bowl and the secondary chamber in the gourd always

provided him with a cool tasty smoke. He was enjoying a tin of neer-tobacco called 'London Dock', one he had obtained at the University Pipe Shoppe.

'But who had killed him? Had Herman or Rabin done the deed? Maybe both of them murdered the Barron since they seemed to be of the same demeanor. They would both want to succeed him; however, for Rabin to become the Barron, both Herman and he would need to die. Maybe neither murdered the Barron. Maybe it was someone holding an old grudge against the Barron. It was well known that the Barron had many enemies, including up to the Emperor. It was also well known that the Barron had subjugated many planets, imprisoned many innocent people, and probably had illegitimate children on a hundred worlds. The Barron had many enemies. He thought to himself 'foul deeds are done on dark nights'.

There would be an investigation. By law, the Emperor had to investigate when a Head of House died under suspicious circumstances and these were most suspicious. The Barron had been found dead, in bed with one of his trusted girls. There was no physical sign of death. The 'girl' part would be shared with the Emperor, but not with the media. The 'girl' had been judged clean by their security staff. There would not be any torture or forced confession from her and the Emperor would know if such tactics were used. House Chesterfield may have a bad reputation, but neither it, its employees, nor the family had ever been found to be stupid. The House doctor could not determine the cause of death.

The three of them had met in conference, Herman, Harold, and Rabin. They had decided to notify the EIS officials as required by law and await their arrival. None of them had shown any emotion. It was entirely business like. He doubted if anyone was surprised or regretted the Baron's demise. The Barron had truly been a hated bastard.

He had met Emperor Leopaldo on several official occasions of state. Both he and Leopaldo never let on that they had met many years before during a military action and that he had been responsible for Leopaldo's escape from House Chesterfield forces. 'Again, another stupid plan of the Barron's gone astray.'

He would wait for the arrival of their 'guests'. He would play the game as it came to him. 'Who knows how it will turn out' he thought as he put his calabash pipe out.

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They arrived at the Chesterfield Plantation near early evening. The plantation had been secured with Empire Marines. Guards and sentries had been posted. The House Chesterfield security personnel were confined to barracks, with the

exception of Dragul, the House Chesterfield's weapons master and head of security. He would assist the team in their investigation.

At 8:00 PM Local Time, all of the relevant parties met in the Chesterfield Plantation's main dining room around a great table. EIS guards were at each door. Emperor Leopaldo, Varten von Eckman, LuJo, and two other Empire Officials met with Herman, Harold, Rabin, and Dragul.

"Before we begin our meeting, you may smoke if you wish" Varten announced. Each person took out a pipe and filled it with tobacco from their own stock or pouch.

Emperor Leopaldo spoke first "We are here to investigate the death of the Barron of the House Chesterfield. I am required to do so when any Head of House dies under suspicious circumstances. Empire forces will maintain control of the plantation and the planet until the end of our investigation. Varten von Eckman is my head of security and weapons master. You may consider him to be my direct representative in any matter. He has my total confidence. LuJo is one of my trusted advisors. I know you have met her in the past. Mr Reardon will be joining us soon. He is also one of my trusted advisors and I know he had a run in with HC in the near past. Let me put our cards on the table. We do not like the House Chesterfield and we know you do not like us. However, we are here to do our legal duty and ask for your forbearance."

Herman took the O.E. Castello Billiard out of his mouth began to speak "I will let Rabin speak for House Chesterfield as he has been trained as a diplomat." Leopaldo enquired of Harold as to if he agreed to this arrangement and he indicated that he concurred.

Rabin took the floor "Emperor Leopaldo, We all know that there has been bad blood between our house and yours. We appreciate that you have come personally to perform the investigation. We realize the law requires the investigation, and am honored that you have chosen to personally lead it. We are as anxious as you to find the murderer of our beloved brother and uncle and will assist you in any way possible." He stopped and relit his O.E. Peterson pipe.

Emperor Leopaldo resumed "We have read your statements and reports; however, I would like to hear them directly from you. As I understand, Dragul is the HC head of security. I would like your report."

Dragul was a tall, thin man dressed entirely in black. The sigil of the HC was at the corner of the collar around his neck. He carefully put his large group 6 O.E. Dunhill Cumberland pipe in a stand at his seat and began in rote like manner

“Two nights ago, at 12:15 AM I received a communication from the plantation house staff that something was amiss in the Barron’s quarters. I arrived at 12:20 and found Ms. Theona Kovacs in great distress. She opened the Barron’s bedroom to me and I found the Barron in a state of disrobe, dead on the floor. There were no signs of violence in the room. I subsequently interviewed Ms. Kovacs who said that she and the Barron had dined. They had both smoked a pipe and had retired to the Barron’s bedroom where they enjoyed each other. Shortly thereafter she said the Barron collapsed and she communicated with the house staff and they contacted me. I conducted a superficial investigation and asked for statements of the whereabouts of Herman, Harold, and Rabin which have been turned over to you. Ms. Kovacs statement has also been turned over to you. Your representatives were immediately contacted as required by law. We were instructed not to disturb the scene of the crime and to place a stasis field on the Barron’s body. This we have done.” He sat down and relit his pipe. LuJo could tell that he was smoking an English type of mixture.

Herman was next “I was alone in my room all evening. I smoked a pipe while reading an O.E. book entitled “The Perfect Smoke - Gourmet Pipe Smoking for Relaxation and Reflection” by Fred J. Hanna. It is a very good book on pipe smoking. About 10:00 PM I called for my night time toddy and went to bed. I did not become aware of my brother’s death until I was awakend at 6:00 AM. I am a heavy sleeper and the ‘night toddy’ ensures a good night sleep.” He sat down and relit his billiard pipe. Heavy English tobacco LuJo thought to herself.

Harold placed his calabash in an ornate wooden stand “I spent the evening with my companion Ms. Niely Morton. She and I have been friends and companions for many years. After dinner, we smoked pipes in my quarters and watched an old Sherlock Holmes video. It is a rare edition of the “Hound of the Baskerville” in which an actor named William Shatner stars as the original Henry Baskerville. After it was over, we attended to some personal matters and went to bed. I was awakened at about 4:00 AM and informed of my brother’s murder. I believe you have both of our statements in the case file.” He sat down and picked up his pipe, emptied it out, filled it back up and lit it. Virginia tobacco LuJo thought to herself.

Rabin placed his old dark oily pipe in the ash tray and began “I and two of my friends, Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones took an aircar to Helmian University. We visited the local pipe shop for some tobacco, and spent the evening at a local entertainment venue called ‘The Blue Flame’. We arrived back at the plantation at about 2:00 AM and found the house in total disarray. Dragul informed me of my Uncle’s untimely demise.” He sat down and relit his most foul pipe. Light English tobacco LuJo thought to herself.

Leopaldo spoke "Your alibis will all be verified. I also have the statements of Messrs. Smith and Jones. We will examine the crime scene by ourselves. After we are done, the body will be transported to the Einstein where Dr. Sohei Witz will perform the autopsy. I want to thank you all for your assistance. We will talk again. Please stay here at the plantation. If you need to leave, you will be accompanied by one of my people."

With the exception of Dragul, the HC people left the room. He took them to the Barron's quarters. He entered the room after breaking a seal on the door. They entered the room with Dragul remaining outside.

The suite of rooms was modeled after 19th Century O.E. German country house. The outer room was setup as an office with a communicator and video screens. The walls were lined with books. A cabinet contained several of the Barron's pipes and several jars of pipe tobacco. There were several overstuffed chairs in the room with a pipe stand and ashtray between them facing one of the video screens. Several of the Barron's pipes were in the ashtray. The inner room was a large bed room with a huge ornate carved four post bed complete with a canopy and several overstuffed chairs. There was a smoking stand between the chairs. Leo opened the tobacco jar and smelled the aroma of a heavy English pipe tobacco. He guessed it was Ten Russians, one of the heaviest of all English blends, having over 60% Latakia tobacco in the blend. The ashtray held two pipes. The room contained several carved dressers, a mirror, and closets filled with clothes.

The Barron's body was on the right side of the bed facing it from the bottom. The stasis device was placed on the body to preserve it for later examination. The expression on the dead Barron's face was one of pure terror and pain. It was probably the worst death mask the any of them had ever seen. There had been no bleeding and was no sign of a wound. There was a slight discoloration around the lips.

"Remove the body and have it sent to Dr. Witz for autopsy." Leo instructed his accompanying staff. I want the glasses, any liquids, and all of the pipes sent to the EIS laboratory for analysis. Send his clothing also" Leo directed the people. "I want to interviews setup with Ms. Kovacs and Messrs. Smith and Jones, if they can be located. I understand the three of them have vanished into thin air. He directed Varten to complete the physical factor analysis of the crime scene. He and LuJo went out onto the terrace by themselves.

"Did you notice the discoloration of the lips LuJo?" Leo asked "I will bet you that he was poisoned, and not in a normal way."

"I saw the discoloration. I also noticed a slight redness around the nose" LuJo replied.

"I have a gut feeling that this was more than a simple murder." Leo replied.

After their visit to the crime scene, they returned to the Einstein.

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Leo, Varten and LuJo were starting to smoke their morning pipe when Nick joined them.

"We are glad you could join us Nick" he said as he loaded his O.E. Pre-transition Barling, stacked billiard, in a fossil finish with some of the Vicar's Choice tobacco that Nick had recommended. LuJo had a small O.E. Dunhill Group 2 Tanshell briar and Varten had just lit his trusty J.T. Cooke pipe.

"Do you mind if I join you?" Nick enquired.

"They let you out of jail, Nick" LuJo exclaimed.

"No Lu, I just gave Dr. Witz one of my get out of jail cards" he replied with a chuckle.

"We are glad to have you, Nick" Leo replied "We need you to help us sort through this mess. You have viewed the video of our meeting yesterday at the HC Plantaion. Could you give us your opinion?"

Nick filled up his Rachards pipe with the Vicar's Choice tobacco. "Yes, I saw the video of your meeting and of the Barron's rooms before they were disturbed." It's a bit funny that the Barron's brain-n drug has left me with a very good memory and the addiction has been removed. I am 100% sure that Herman, Harold, and Rabin were among the group that observed me when I was exposed to the drug. We also know who was responsible for my rescue. For some reason, I believe I saw Ms. Kovacs, but dressed in a nurse's outfit during the demonstration. It may have been her that performed the inoculations."

"I thought Ms. Kovacs may be involved a bit deeper than we suppose" Leo replied "I would like both you and LuJo to visit the University Pipe Shoppe and see if Ms. Theona Kovacs is connected to Mr. Daniel Kovacs, the owner of the pipe shop. Also, I want you to visit the Blue Flame and check out Rabin's alibi. While you are at the tobacco shop, pick up some more of the Vicar's Choice tobacco, it is quite good."

“We can do that” they both responded “provided the tobacco goes on our expense account”

“It will” Varten replied.

They continued discussing some of the test results that had been received. Dr. Witz had completed the autopsy and had established that the Barron had indeed been poisoned. Most likely a cyanide based compound. He believed that the Barron had somehow been fed cyanide over a long period of time and that a substance was used to trigger the final overdose. When it was activated, it hit him like a ton of bricks and he had no chance.

Laboratory analysis of the Barron’s pipes, their cake, and the dottle and ash at the bottom of the bowl indicated that at least two of the pipes contained a residue of a cyanide based residue.

The Empire Navy was following a small inter-stellar ship that had left the HC Plantation compound and slipped through the blockade. They were confident that Messrs. Smith and Jones were aboard. They expected the ship to be overtaken and captured within several hours.

Nick and LuJo departed and used one of the Einstein’s landing ships to travel planet side. Once there, they borrowed one of the military aircars. Nick remembered the last time he had rented an aircar while on the planet.

“Lu, did you notice Herman’s statement regarding his reading of the book by Fred Hanna, “The Perfect Smoke”? That is the same author that, according to Dr. Nay, posed all the theory on which all of this brain-n stuff was founded. I wonder if the death of the Barron is tied to the death of Dr. Nay?”

“I did not catch that point, Nick” LuJo responded “that damn drug must have increased your memory. Maybe I should try some.”

“Don’t even think it Lu. It is one experience I wish to forget. I was very lucky to have Dr. Witz monitoring the situation.” He responded.

Their first stop was the University Pipe Shoppe. It was typical of most pipe and tobacco shops that try to recreate a early 19th Century Old Earth pipe shop environment. The person who had designed the interior of the shop had done a fine job of researching his topic and the craftsmen executed the design down to the smallest detail. Their shop only carried the top lines of neer-tobacco and pseudo-tobacco found in the Empire. The proprietor, Daniel Kovacs was able to

blend his own formulations of which some were exported off planet and others licensed to one of the major tobacco conglomerates.

They entered the shop to find Daniel Kovacs behind the counter. He was smoking a large full bent billiard. LuJo asked him for two pounds of the Vicar's Choice in bulk form. While he was weighing it out, they chatted about the Barron's death and other happenings. "I understand that the Barron had a friend, a Ms. Theona Kovacs" LuJo said to Daniel "You wouldn't be related to her would you?" she asked. She saw that he had tensed up and almost choked on his pipe when she mentioned her name.

"Theona? Theona Kovacs? Why yes I know her, she is my daughter. I have not seen her in about 6 months. She is supposed to be off planet, studying. She, a friend of the Barron; I doubt it very much. You see, it is because of the Barron that she is in this world. Many years ago when the Barron was much younger, he sort of had an affair with my wife. No, not an affair, he raped her." Daniel said as he slammed the jar on the counter. "I'm sorry" he replied "I just get so emotional when this subject comes up. You can be sure that I not sorry to see the Barron's demise" he ended.

Nick spoke up, "I have one other question. Was Rabin, the Barron's nephew and two other gentlemen here the other night, the night of the Barron's death?" "Why yes they were" Daniel replied "Rabin usually stops here for tobacco for his family. It is usually the same. A light English blend for Rabin, Ten Russians in bulk for the Barron and his brother Herman, and a Virginia blend for Harold. It's the same order, every two weeks, usually picked up by Rabin.

They paid for the tobacco and left the shop. They asked Daniel several other questions which were of no account. The Blue Flame was on the other side of the city. They arrived about an hour later. It was a sleezy looking dive. "Do you think we will be safe going inside" LuJo asked.

"It shouldn't be a problem. Varten mentioned he would send a couple of plainclothes agents inside before we get there. Our backs should be covered." Nick answered.

They entered the establishment. It was one of the types that never close. There was a pole dancer off in one corner and other exhibitionists on the other stages. A long bar was opposite the stages. There were several patrons inside even at this early part of the morning. A couple of the patrons were smoking pipes, a couple cigars, and a few were smoking cigarettes. The bartender was smoking a large cigar.

Nick flashed the bartender a five solaris note. "For some information" he said after LuJo and he had ordered drinks. "You look like Empire Navy" Nick said to the bartender.

"Fifth fleet, gunners mate on the New Chicago. My name is John" he replied.

"Mine is Nick and this is my wife, LuJo. Was that when Jim McClelland was a junior officer" he asked.

"Why yes, Jim was just out of the Academy. I kind of scrubbed his ears, if you know what I mean."

"We do. Commander Jim McClelland is now attached to Castle Pesaro. He is a good friend of ours" LuJo replied as she filled up a pipe with the Vicar's Choice.

"How can I help you", he asked.

"The other night, the one when the Barron was killed, did Rabin and two other gentlemen visit the Blue Flame?"

"They sure did. They stop here every time they are in town. But this time was different; it was almost like they wanted to be seen. They caused some minor trouble and I had to call the police. Of course the police here are owned by House Chesterfield, so the incident was not even recorded. They finally left here about midnight, but then again, I already told that to the EIS" John answered.

"Interesting" Nick replied. They talked about some other items regarding the planet. John told him that he also got his cigars from the University Pipe Shoppe and knew Daniel Kovacs quite well. When asked about Theona, he said he had no information about his daughter. Nick gave him the five solaris note; they finished their pipes and drinks and left the blue flame.

As they once again returned to the Einstein, Nick commented "Did you hear him? The Barron was the father of his daughter."

"I heard Nick, I also heard that John had already told the 'EIS' agents that Rabin and his group had 'wanted to be seen'. I wonder why and I wonder who the EIS agents were."

They had been brought individually into a series of rooms aboard the Einstein. The three of them had really been no match against the Empire Navy, regardless of what Rabin had said. Mr. Smith, Mr. Jones, and Theona Kovacs had been caught trying to leave the Galacia star system. One of the Einstein's attendant vessels had captured them, actually quite easily. They had put up no resistance. When their vessel had been searched, several kilos of pure brain-n drug had been found.

They were not able to communicate with each other. Watching through the one-way mirror, Nick had recognized Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones as being in the group of visitors during his involuntary brain-n inoculations. He also confirmed that Ms. Kovacs had been the one performing the inoculation.

There were very skilled EIS interrogators with each person. Why were you at the University Pipe Shoppe? What was your business at the Blue Flame? Why did you kill the Barron? He did what to the tobacco? What is your relationship with Rabin? What is your relationship with Herman? What is your relationship with Harold? What was your relationship with the Barron? What kind of tobacco do you smoke? What kind of tobacco do the Chesterfields smoke? Where were you when the Barron was killed? Why did you want the Barron dead? Why did you participate or watch the inoculation of Mr. Reardon? What do you know about the drug brain-n?...and on.....and on.....until they passed out from exhaustion or cracked. Usually those under the EIS expert interrogation cracked.

By morning they had a pretty good idea of what was going on at the Chesterfield Plantation. All three, Herman, Harold, and Rabin wanted the old Barron dead, for various reasons. Harold was sick of the failed plots that Barron was constantly hatching and the toll it took on their House. Herman wanted to become Barron. Rabin believed he could influence the new Barron and, you know, accidents do happen. After all, he was number three in line to the title.

Mr. Smith and Mr. Jones were in the plot with Rabin to spread the brain-n drugs, hence the periodic trip to the tobacco shop and the Blue Flame.

Theona Kovacs was a different matter. Obviously, you don't get involved with your 'father' unless you have some ulterior motive, such as murder. She had the means, she spend the most time with the Barron and in the most intimate of settings. She had the motive, the rape of her mother by the Barron. It was obvious that the murder had been long in planning. The Barron was fed levels of cyanide over an extended period of time. Then came the trigger and the deed was done.

Or was it Daniel Kovacs. He had the same motives as Theona. Was it a conspiracy? Did the two work together? Were one or two or all three Chesterfields involved or sponsor it, or turned a blind eye to the plot?

Dr. Witz called Leo, Varten, Nick, and LuJo into one of Dr. Staker's chemical laboratories. "In this petri dish I have a layer of a liquid carbon-bond cyanide compound mixed in water. In this beaker, I have an electrolyte and water solution. Watch what happens when I put a few drops of the electrolyte-water mixture within the beaker into the petri dish." They watched and saw a shiny grey crystalline material settle to the bottom of the dish. "Gentlemen and lady, that is cyanide and how the Barron was killed. The level of the carbon-bond cyanide had built up in his blood stream. The water-electrolyte was introduced; the cyanide precipitated out in his blood stream and killed him. I would say that once the cyanide started precipitating in his blood stream, he died within five minutes."

"So how did each of the two substances get into the Barron's body" Varten asked.

"I believe the carbon-bond cyanide was introduced through the tobacco and we have found a residue from the jar in his bedroom and in at least two of his pipes. The electrolyte, I believe was administered quite easily, say through lipstick or a kiss."

"So, if I understand correctly, it implicated Rabin who picked up the tobacco, Theona who administered the 'kiss of death' so to speak" LuJo replied.

"Correct, but I believe that Herman may be implicated, as I will bet he put the tobacco in the Barron's jar. He and the Barron were the only ones that smoked the heavy English blend." Leo replied, "and we can confirm that by finding out how much carbon-bond cyanide is in Herman's blood stream. If it is significant, then we know it was the Ten Russians pipe tobacco was used to introduce it into the body. But it does not tell us who put it in the tobacco. It could either be Rabin or Daniel Kovacs, or both were in as part of a conspiracy."

"But, if Herman knew that the carbon-bond cyanide was in the tobacco, wouldn't he not smoke it? Therefore He would be innocent" LuJo asked.

"If Herman's blood stream is clean, then he knew of the adulterated tobacco. If it is high, then he took the risk knowing that the electrolyte would not be given to him that is not until his co-conspirator had a chance to use it. We will have a thorough search of Herman, Rabin, and Harold's quarters to see if we can find the electrolyte-water solution."

Varten spoke "So Theona is guilty. I also noted the Barron's lips and believe the discoloration was due to a lipstick containing the electrolyte, applied of course by Theona.

"I believe you are correct Varten" Leo said "I will ask Dragul about the Barron's tobacco jar. I think it is time to meet with the House Chesterfield, again and probably for the last time."

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The meeting in the Plantation Dining Room was more formal this time. EIS and Space Navy guards were all over the room. Each person was physically searched prior to entry. The same people were in the room as the first time with three exceptions, Nick Reardon was present with the EIS team and Daniel and Theona Kovacs were in the room, both were very nervous. All of the main participants were smoking a pipe.

"I am going to tell you a little story, actually several stories that are relevant to us being here tonight" Leo started "The first story started some 30 or so years ago. The Barron had just become the Barron on the death of his father or it was slightly before that time. He forced himself on a woman. Nine-months later she gave birth to a baby girl named Theona. Daniel Kovacs married her shortly thereafter. The second story started about a year ago. Ms. Theona Kovacs had become associated with the Barron. They were very close. No other woman had gotten as close to him. They were lovers. How does a young woman get entry into the Barron's world? The answer is through someone close to him such as his brother or nephew. The brother or nephew or both coveted the Barron's power and set out to become the new Barron. The way I see it is that Daniel and Theona Kovacs approached both Herman and Rabin with a plan. Daniel would supply them with a carbon-bond cyanide laced tobacco, Ten Russians. Both Herman and the Barron smoked it. Both would have the compound in their body. With their active participation, Theona wormed herself into the Barron's intimate world. At the right time, Theona used a lipstick form of the electrolyte solution, the trigger had been pulled, and the Old Barron died."

The objections came in a hurry...from all sides.

Herman said "That is crazy. You can't prove it."

"We can, and we have in that residues of the carbon-bond cyanide were found in the Barron's tobacco jar, and in yours, and in some of his pipes." Leo replied.

“But I just picked up the tobacco from Daniel Kovacs” Rabin retorted.

“True, you did that and more. You made sure you had an alibi at the Blue Flame. We also searched your rooms today and found a small vial of the electrolyte. I assume you planned to use it on Herman to result in his demise as our tests indicate that a high proportion of the carbon-bond cyanide is in his blood stream.”

“But I did not provide the doctored tobacco” Daniel said.

“You did” Leo added “The video of Rabin and crew did not show him adding anything to your tobacco and no one else had the time or training to do it. Besides, we raided your shop and found the carbon-bound cyanide, well hidden, but not well enough from our snoopers.”

Theona asked to be heard “It went pretty well as you said, Emperor Leopaldo. For my father, Daniel, it was done out of love for my mother and not with his head. We approached both Herman and Rabin, together. Harold was more interested in his lady friend, so he knew nothing. The cyanide was introduced into his body much as you thought a low level over a long period of time. So as not to implicate Herman, it is in his also. I had to act/do the most disgusting thing I have ever done in my life, become the Barron’s lover. I guess I did quite well. On that last night, after the poison started taking effect, and it is quite a scary thing, I asked the old bastard how it felt, I mean him screwing his daughter. He just laughed as the poison took effect. What you don’t know is that the cyanide is in my body” she said as she bit hard on a tooth. “I will be gone shortly, but remember father that I love you.”

The EIS agents quickly encircled her as they called for medical assistance and took her out of the room.

Emperor Leopaldo called the room back to order.

“What proof do you have now, smart ass” Rabin shouted.

“We have her statement. We have the physical evidence. We really don’t need anything else. You and Herman conspired with Daniel and Theona to commit capital murder. You carried out the murder. The Barron is dead.” Leo recounted the charges.

Herman stood up, raised his hand towards Rabin and a needle dart came through his skin and planted itself right between Rabin’s eyes. He fell dead in

his seat. "All the brothers had them" Herman said "Except Harold, he had his removed. He said it was dirty."

"Yes, we know" Emperor Leopald replied "We found the Barron's when we performed the autopsy."

"Then you also know about the cyanide tooth" he said as he bit down hard and sat down.

"Yes, we know from the autopsy" Emperor Leopaldo replied "In your case it saves us a trial and a lot of mess."

They watched Herman die, it was almost instantaneous. It was horrible.

Through all of the excitement, Harold sat motionless in his seat as in shock. "I don't know what to say. It was all a plot, to kill my brother. Even I did not agree with what he did, but I would never kill him."

Emperor Leopaldo replied "You are not like them, Harold. At one time the House Chesterfield was above approach. Somewhere, at sometime, things went amiss in the line. I hope the House Chesterfield is in for better times, Barron Harold, for after all, you are now the new Barron."

"It will take a bit for all of this to set in" he said, "You must give me time."

"We shall, for a while. I would like to meet with you after the funerals. Now we have three to bury. It will be a spectacle of state. The show must go on." Emperor Leopaldo replied "This investigation is now officially concluded."

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The funerals had gone off like clockwork. State funerals are actually easier to run than to watch. Especially the spin that is placed on their goodness and the fantastic things the ones being buried accomplished while alive. The truth rarely gets out.

They met once again in the officer's smoking room board the Einstein, Leo, Varten, Nick, LuJo, Dr. Witz and the New Barron Harold. On the table in front of them were six boxes, pipe boxes and a large tobacco jar.

Leo began "Gentlemen and lady, in front of you are six pipes made by Thomas James Rachards. There are several different shapes please take one and I get the one that is left." The each took one after checking them all out. Leo took the

remaining pipe. "They are made of the best Krenellian B'iar which is almost as good as O.E. briar. They are my way of saying thanks to each of you for your assistance in this case, actually two cases, the ending of the brain-n plot and the mysterious death of a Barron. The tobacco is Vicar's Choice and there will not be anymore, at least blended by Daniel Kovacs".

"What will happen to him" Nick asked.

Leo replied "He and his daughter will be relocated to a different planet. You know that Sherlock Holmes had a strange sense of justice, and maybe I do also. I believe that they have suffered enough. It is sort of like an "Eye for an Eye", if you get my meaning."

"I thought his daughter was dead" LuJo stammered.

"So did she. Unknown to her, we removed the cyanide from the tooth while she was here on the Einstein. We can't have any of that floating around." Dr. Witz replied "We could not do the same for Herman as he was slated to be the next Barron. Diplomatic niceties and all of that you know."

"But didn't you think he would use the needle dart on you?" Nick asked.

"It was a chance we had to take. We thought the likelihood to be small once Herman learned that Rabin had planned all along to murder him also." Leo replied.

Harold began to speak "I am not sure why I am among this group of obvious friends, nor why I am being presented with this excellent pipe."

Leo replied "I hope this is the beginning of the turnaround within the House Chesterfield. I also have two reasons to thank you; once to formally thank you for securing my release long ago and also the release of my friend Nick Reardon. I think that both Nick and LuJo will also give you their thanks."

"We do!" they said together "We mean thank you, not 'we do' as in getting married. That will come soon enough."

Varten observed "Good pipes, good tobacco, and good friends what more could anyone ask for?"

LuJo responded "A copy of Fred Hanna's book. Now that sounds like something I could get into. It beats reading those trashy Secret Agent Girl novels!"

They all laughed and talked the night away with their good pipes, tobacco and friendship.

-END-