

The Scheme of Doctor Fu Manchu

By

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-1- A Late Night Visit

Nick Reardon had been dispatched to the planet New Anglica by Varten von Eckman to investigate the death or disappearance of prominent scientists working on research projects for Emperor Leopaldo. He was living in a town house in a prosperous suburb of the capital city of New London for the past two months.

It was late at night; a damp dreary New London evening. He had been smoking his pipe and catching up on his reading after a long day at the governmental offices. He was reading messages from Emperor Leopaldo sent from Castle Pesaro. His investigation of the disappearance of a number of prominent scientists was going nowhere. He thought he heard a soft knock on the front door. He sat his pipe in the ashtray, walked into the hall, and slowly opened the front door.

With a push, he went back as a tall man came in, muffled in a hat and greatcoat.

“Shhhh, agent Reardon and put out that damned light.!” he said with a flourish as he removed his hat and coat after closing the door. “Let’s go into your study, and put out that lamp.”

We returned to the study when I turned out the lamp. He moved towards the window and opened the curtain slightly, peering outside.

“I was right, I have been followed. I don’t know if they know I am here, but your house is obviously being watched”, the mysterious man retorted.

“What is the meaning of this, I asked, “and who are you?”

“I will explain all, shortly” the man said “But first, contact your local police and have the two oriental/asian men watching this house picked up on some charge”

I called Detective Inspector Stanton of the New London police and transmitted my request. Within minutes, we heard several quick aircars light in front of the house and saw the uniformed police take two men into custody.

“Sit down; fill up your pipe, as I have quite an incredible story to tell you. Please pass the tobacco jar over to me.” He said. “As you light your pipe, Mr. Reardon, I will give you something to think about. My name is Sir Dennis Nayland Smith, I was born on Old Earth in the later part of the 19th century, and I am going to invite you to take part in one of the most exciting adventures in your short, young life”.

We both filled up our pipes. Smith’s pipe was a darkened, beat up old nondescript pipe. I filled up my Old Earth Dunhill Shell billard from the tobacco jar. We both lit our pipes.

“You are over 50,000 years old!” I said, “I don’t see how that is possible, and I don’t believe it.”

“Yes, it is very difficult to believe. I assume you have a secure hyperwave communications system here, please use it and contact Varten von Eckman, the Emperor’s weapons master. Let him know that I am here, and that you and I will be working together for a while. I am known to both him and Emperor Leopaldo. He will vouch for me.”

To say that I was stunned would be an understatement. I sent a message to Castle Pesaro. Within a short period of time, I received my reply:

Nick,

Sir Dennis is fully authorized to officially operate on the Emperor’s behalf. He has our full confidence and full authority on his mission, of which you are to fully cooperate. Consider yourself at his disposal. His story, which you will find interesting, is on the up and up. Provide any and all assistance.

Varten von Eckman

I looked at the reply to my message.

“Ok, you have been vouchsafed. I am informed that you will have quite a story to tell me and that I am to help you in any way I can.” I replied.

“The earliest way to start would be for me to ask you if you have ever heard of Dr. Fu Manchu.” He said while smoke from his pipe winded towards the ceiling.

“If I recall correctly, Fu Manchu was a character invented by an author named Sax Rohmer in the early 20th century. He appeared in 13 stories as the evil, yellow peril. His archenemy was your namesake, Sir Dennis Nayland Smith and Doctor Petrie. But, it was all fiction, a figment of the author’s imagination.”

“What you say is true, except for one thing, it was not fiction, it was fact. Dr. Fu Manchu is Satan incarnate; a ruthless indestructible intelligence armed with knowledge undreamed of by the science of his time. Imagine a person, tall, lean and feline, high-

shouldered, with a brow like Shakespeare and a face like Satan, a close-shaven skull, and long, magnetic eyes of the true cat-green. Invest him with all the cruel cunning of an entire Old Earth Eastern race, accumulated in one giant intellect, with all the resources of science past and present, with all the resources, if you will, of a wealthy government-- which, however, already has denied all knowledge of his existence. Imagine that awful being, and you have a mental picture of Dr. Fu-Manchu, the yellow peril incarnate in one man. This is the Doctor's description from Old Earth, imagine him the same, except that he controls groups within the empire. There are groups, secret societies, planets and populations that do not have the same goals as Emperor Leopaldo."

Dr. Fu Manchu has not been heard of or seen since the late 1930's First Age, because he has not wished to have been. Everyone has assumed that he has died, just as he wished. However, I assure you he lives, as do I."

Our pipes had gone out. We both refilled them, and lit them. He continued.

"Good tobacco, Reardon. I would guess that it is Dunhill My Mixture from the Emperor's private stock. One of the things that Fu Manchu was searching for was the elixir of life. I can tell you that he did find it. That is the reason that both he and I are still alive. Fu Manchu injected his serum into me as a test subject before fully believing it and using it himself. There was just enough for two doses and he wanted to be sure. Surely, just my presence and his existence must impress you as to the state of his knowledge and cunning. This single achievement has never been duplicated. Although here in the future, lifetimes have tripled compared to my time, unending life has never been achieved by today's science, except by Doctor Fu Manchu."

"I observe that your pipe is an Old Earth Dunhill, please take a look at mine. It is also a Dunhill from Old Earth, one that I have smoked over my entire, long life."

He handed me his pipe. I could barely make out the white spot and the nomenclature due to its ancient age and constant use, but it was an Old Earth Dunhill. I observed a patent number which meant it was much older than the one in my possession. I gave it back and Sir Dennis relit it.

"I have been a member of the Empire Intelligence Service, on and off, for many years. My age and history is only known to a group of a select few, of which you are now one. Behind the scenes, I have been Fu Manchu's enemy, constantly combating his every move over the centuries. However, he comes out of hiding very rarely. His last appearance was 500 years ago, however, now I believe he is about to hatch one of his nefarious plans. Recently, a number of important scientists have been suddenly dying or disappearing. They are predominantly in the farming and biological fields of science. The most recent death was Doctor John Winston Barks, Ph.D., from the University of New London. He died earlier this evening, I had just left his home and was heading back to New Scotland Yard when I detected that I was being followed. I had meant to contact you and thought this was the perfect time. So, that is how I got here, and some background. I need your assistance to find out Fu Manchu's aims and stop them."

“I will do whatever I can to assist you, Sir Dennis.” I replied “Where do we start?”

“In the morning, we will go to New London’s Chinatown where we will meet with Yi Ching, one of Fu Manchu’s lieutenants. Although totally loyal to Fu Manchu, Yi Ching has been useful to me as a source of information. I have done some small services for him in the past and he is beholden to me. I hope you do not mind putting me up for the night. We can get an early start tomorrow.”

“No problem” I replied.

We finished our pipes and went to bed for the night.

-2- Two Interviews

When I finally arose at 7:00 A.M., I found that Sir Dennis had been up for a while, was dressed, and smoking an early morning pipe.

“What are you smoking?” I asked.

“A cheap English blend pseudo tobacco” he replied “but it reminds me of Dunhill Early Morning Pipe”.

We finished breakfast and left for the Limehouse district of New London in our aircar. Limehouse is the Chinatown area of New London. It was a rather seedy area comprised of businesses, bars, and houses of ill repute, in all a good place for the criminal element to hide. It was located on the west bank, south of the Tower Bridge.

After parking our car, we walked down a road to the intersection of the main thoroughfare through Limehouse. We entered a small nondescript door located between two businesses, heading up a set of well-worn stairs. At the top of the stairs we entered a door marked Yi Ching Imports. An old Chinese man, wearing a padded silk jacket and a green mandarin hat, was sitting on top of a high stool behind a tall writing desk. A video display could be seen set into the desk. Along the walls were shelves holding all kinds of imported products, from small stuffed animals to fine works of art. Behind him was a rack of smoking products. He was smoking a small opium-type pipe, a small stream of smoke rising from the bowl. He looked up as we entered.

“Ah, Sir Dennis, how nice of you to visit my humble shop.” The old man said.

“Yi Ching, may I introduce you to my friend Nick.” He said to the old man.

“Ah, nice chow meet chu” he replied “What can I chow for chu Sir Dennis?”

“What have you heard of your master, the good Doctor?” he enquired.

“Ah, I not see him for long time” he said.

“I did not ask if you have seen him, Yi, just what kind of trouble he is brewing.” Sir Dennis asked.

“He is not brewing any mead, but I hear he is seeking knowledge about tobacco.”

“Tobacco? Why tobacco?” Sir Dennis thought out loud.

“I do not know, but one name I hear is Bruce Warren. Maybe you should talk with him.

“ I have heard of him, Sir Dennis” I said. He is the director of research for EDC Tobacco Products. They make a series of pseudo-tobaccos that are sold across the Empire.”

“We shall do that, Nick. Thanks for the tip, Yi, how is your daughter?” He asked.

“She is doing well. She studies nursing at the university.”

Sir Dennis and Nick said their good byes. As they left Yi Ching, he pressed a button on the display. He said two words “Smith, master”.

Smith and Nick strolled back to their aircar. “What was the bit about the china man’s daughter, Smith?”

“Oh, I saved her from being sold to a group of slavers several years ago. She is now enrolled at the University of New London’s School of Nursing, and is doing well. This is one of the reason’s that Yi provides some information, but never forget that he works for Fu Manchu. He has probably reported our visit already!” Sir Dennis replied.

They left Limehouse and headed back downtown. They parked their aircar outside a large new Plasplex skyscraper. Heading inside the main door, they saw that the EDC Tobacco Products Ltd. was located on the 132nd floor. They took the lift up to the 132nd floor where a pretty, young receptionist met them. Nick showed her his credentials and asked if they could meet with Bruce Warren. She rang his office. There was no response. They walked back to his office where they found it was locked. “I am sure he did not leave the office” told them. She took out a master key, and opened the door to a plush office, the back wall being a clear Plexiglas showing the skyline of the city. The aroma of pipe smoke was in the office. Suddenly, she screamed. They turned towards her and saw a man lying on the floor behind the desk.

“Bruce Warren, I presume” Sir Dennis said.

She nodded her head in the affirmative.

“Leave us alone, but call Inspector Weightmouth at New Scotland Yard” he instructed the secretary. She left the room to communicate with the Police. She also instructed the building security to look for any unusual persons.

“What do you see regarding the body?” Nick was asked.

“It looks to me like he died in great pain due to the contorted face. He was also smoking his pipe at the time. A fine old calabash.” He said as he picked the pipe off the floor. “Put it down!” Smith commanded.

Nick put the pipe back down on the floor.

“Look, there are no marks on the body. His face is flushed and contorted. The room is sealed. I suspect that he may have been poisoned. Let the police check out the pipe and its contents.” Sir Dennis responded.

The walked over to the desk and studied it. On one of the files was a note written in block letters:

Bruce Warren,

You have 6 hours to comply with the demands of the Si Fan. If you fail, then your reward will be death.

Fu Manchu

“You see, Yi Ching new something was going on. He could not tell us exactly what it was, however, he did point us in the right direction. We were too late. Always too late!” Smith said with a little dejection.

Inspector Weightmouth had arrived. His Crime Scene Investigators had taken over the investigation and taking of data.

“Mr. Reardon, Mr. Smith” Inspector Weighmouth acknowledged. “I have been instructed to cooperate with both of you and to follow any instructions that you may make.”

“We would like an autopsy performed on Bruce Warren, and a thorough analysis of his lunch on his desk, and the contents of his pipe.” Nick told the inspector.

“It will be done” I will communicate the results to your house, Mr. Reardon”, the inspector responded.

They left the skyscraper and returned to Nick's comfortable home. Once back in his quarters, they retired to the smoking room where they filled up their pipes and lit them up. Streams of aromatic smoke rose to the ceiling of the room.

"Did you note the slight odor of almonds above the aroma of the tobacco smoke?" Smith asked Nick.

"Slight, I thought he was smoking an almond aromatic" he responded "I also thought that anyone who smoked an almond aromatic deserved to be punished by death!"

"Well, the tobacco was an English blend, but there was a hint of almond. It leads me to suspect that Warren was poisoned through the use of a cyanide compound. I also noted that he was working on a paper entitled "EDC Tobacco – A new product for a New World Order" It was a proposal to establish a new tobacco trading system throughout the Empire using their own new brand of leaf that grows twice as fast as any other type of tobacco, and makes an excellent pipe tobacco. I wonder if Fu Manchu murdered him to prevent the publication of the article, or his refusal to turn the plant over to the Si Fan".

The communicator indicated reception of a message. It was from Inspector Weightmouth at New Scotland Yard. The autopsy had been completed and indicated death by cyanide poisoning. The contents of Bruce Warren's pipe indicated traces of cyanide and also some unknown compounds. He also reported that there had been a false fire alarm on the 132nd floor of the building earlier in the morning. There was a missing section of video recording on the building security cameras, and that the grills had been removed from the ventilation system in Warren's office and an empty office nearby. He also noted that people interviewed had noticed the presence of some strange foreigners of either Asiatic or Chinese descent.

"This provides us a lot to think about, Nick. We shall see what the morrow brings." He told Nick.

They spend the evening discussing Fu Manchu, and Sir Dennis Nayland Smith's old friends Dr. Petrie, Bart Kerrigan, Inspector Weymouth, all long dead, and his constant battle with Fu Manchu over the centuries.

-3- Terror in the Night

Nick awakened with a startle. He heard a strange noise. It sounded like a long-low wail coming from outside the house. He reached next to the bed for a needle blaster. He slipped it into the pocket of his robe. He walked into the hall and peered into the room that Smith was using. The room was in disarray and Smith was gone. He headed to the stairwell that went down to the first floor. As he started to descend, he felt something behind him. He turned around, saw a huge hulking figure, smelled the scent of lotus, then remembered no more.

Slowly, he began to awaken. He had a monstrous headache reminiscent of a bad night's drinking. He was in a large dark room with carpet on the floor and heavily curtained windows. He was all trussed up. He noted another tied up beside himself. He heard a whispered voice "Nick? Nick? I wondered how long it would take for you to awaken!"

"Sir Dennis?" He replied softly "What happened? Where are we?"

"I do not know where we are, but I suspect soon to be in the presence of Doctor Fu Manchu."

The light slowly increased as a lamp was turned up. A person was observing them from the far end of the room, sitting in a high fan-backed chair on a dais.

"Ah, Sir Dennis and Mr. Reardon, awake I see! My preparation of Lotus and odorless chloroform does wonders. It incapacitates one for a short period of time, yet recalls them back to full consciousness in complete control of their faculties." He said as he stood up. Doctor Fu Manchu was a tall, thin Chinese, wearing robes of green and gold silk which shimmered in the lamp's light. His face was unlined, but his eyes were old with ancient wisdom, green, and seemed oddly veiled, like those of a drowsing cat. Above an imposing brow, he wore a green skullcap with a single coral bead which indicated the rank of Mandarin. He leaned on an ivory staff, the top being that of a white peacock.

"We meet again Sir Dennis. I see the elixir of life had done wonders for you." He said.

"Yes it has, Doctor, as it has for you also." He replied.

"Yes, and once again, you are disturbing my plans. You and Mr. Reardon are becoming a factor that I must deal with. But soon, my plans will be at a point where you cannot stop them. There is one more brain that I need and some rare information that I must obtain." He said in a sinuous voice.

He motioned with his hands, and two large men came into the room and lifted Smith. They strapped him down to what appeared in the dim light to be an examination table. Above the table was a large apparatus, unknown to Nick.

"You have already heard and met my Dacoits. They did a fine job in introducing the cyanide into Bruce Warren's pipe tobacco. They gained entrance to his office through the building ventilation system. One of my small pygmies crawled through the ventilation ducts and completed the job during the fake fire alarm. Mr. Warren had been warned not to publish his findings and to turn his research over to the Si Fan. He refused and suffered the consequences. Now, for you" he said.

"Sir Dennis, you will soon be totally immobile. You have heard of what is referred to as the Chinese Water Torture. Well I have made an improvement on it. Mr. Reardon, Smith's head will not be able to move. Once fixed, his mouth is wide opened. You see the spout several feet above his head is aimed directly at his opened mouth. When I

signal, a slow, drop by drop strong mixture of tobacco juice will flow down into his mouth. After a period of time, his choke reflex will activate, but he will be unable to expel it. The high nicotinic content will heighten the experience for him. Eventually, he will die, one could say, drowned in tobacco!”

“What do you want Fu Manchu?” Smith asked.

“In Emperor Leopoldo’s private collection is a book from Old Earth. It a rare book dealing with the cultivation of tobacco. It is called ‘Jahn’s Tobacciana’. Jahn wrote a Tobacco Dictionary, but this is one of his books that was privately published in a limited edition. Jahn discovered a means to biologically stimulate the growth of the tobacco plant, but his methods have been hidden all these years. In return for you life, I want that rare book.”replied Fu Manchu.

“Don’t let him have it, Reardon!” Sir Dennis screamed as the Dacoits locked his head into position and put a device into his mouth to keep it opened.

“Look Mr. Reardon, you are an honorable man. If you will get me this book, Sir Dennis will avoid a very painful death.” Fu Manchu said without any emotion.

“How do you think I can get such a rare item from the Emperor? I do not even know him.” Nick replied.

“Do not consider me a fool!” Fu Manchu hissed.” I know the relationship between you, Varten von Eckman and Emperor Leopoldo! If you agree to obtain this small item for me, then I will accept your promise.”

“I cannot do as you wish” Nick replied.

“Then let it begin” Fu Manchu stated.

The dacoit pressed a button. Slowly, drop by slow drop, a small stream started to fall into Smith’s opened mouth.

All this time, Nick had not been idle. His EIS Academy training had paid off. He had found a knot in the rope of which he had been tied. He had started to work it free until his hands became unloosed. He found his needle blaster still in the pocket of his robe.

Nick could tell that the mixture dripping into Smith’s mouth was starting to affect him as a gurgling sound was coming from his throat. He knew that he did not have much time left. He took the needle blaster and fired quickly at the two dacoits. They fell down dead. He aimed and fired his last shot in the direction of the insidious Doctor. There was a flash in the direction of the chair. He quickly undid the rope at his feet and ran over to the examination table, pushed the spout away from above Smith’s mouth. He undid the band holding Smith’s head, tilted his head to the side and watched as the horrible mixture flowed out of Smith’s mouth.

Sir Dennis retched, and began breathing slowly. Nick began to remove the restraints holding Smith to the table. He got Smith up to a sitting position. "Thanks old man!" Smith said "I believe you saved my life,"

They looked around the room. No trace of Fu Manchu could be found!

"It looks like he has escaped again" Smith said.

They searched the room and found a hidden doorway behind the chair at the end of the room behind Fu Manchu's seat. They continued looking for an exit when they found another behind where they had sat. They pushed a button and the door slid away opening into another room. They went through it and found themselves in another room.

"This is my basement" Nick exhorted.

"I can only guess that the room we were in was the townhouse that butted yours. They must have had you under observation for a considerable amount of time. You underestimate Fu Manchu at your peril!" Smith stated.

They contacted Inspector Weightmouth at New Scotland Yard. A group of officers arrived and searched the townhouse next to Nick's. They found no one.

-4- War Council

Sir Denis, Nick, and Inspector Weightmouth convened a council over coffee. "Fu Manchu stated that he needed the rare edition Jahn book and one more brain. Nick, I think you should contact Varten and ask him to examine the book. We also need to ascertain who the final brain or person that he needs and warn him." Smith said.

Nick sent a coded communication to Castle Pesaro requesting the needed information.

They sat down in Nick's library, took out their pipes, filled them and lit them. Very soon, a dense aromatic smoke filled the room. The inspector smoked a pseudo-briar pipe, while Nick and Sir Dennis smoked their Old Earth pipes. They were lost in thought.

"Who is the most knowledgeable person here in New London that has information on the cultivation of both Old Earth tobacco, neer-tobacco and pseudo-tobacco?" Smith asked.

"I think that would be either Doctor von Herder at the University, or Samantha McDonald. Von Herder is a professor that has done much research, some for the Emperor, on tobacco cultivation. He has developed some special strains and blends for the Emperor. Samantha McDonald is a well known pipe collector. She collects all kinds of pipes and has an extensive knowledge and collection of Old Earth tobaccos." Inspector Weightmouth replied.

“Well, we better warn both of them” Smith stated.

“I will do that now” the inspector said. He sent word to New Scotland Yard via his communicator.

“It seems to me that Fu Manchu is searching for expertise to develop a new strain of tobacco that is quick growing. If he could destroy the current tobacco economy and replace it with his own, the result would be immense. It would have a huge impact on the economy of the Empire. It could have major political consequences.” Nick replied.

“I agree with you, Nick. Fu Manchu must be stopped in his devilish scheme!” Smith rejoined.

Nick’s communicator informed him that a message had been received from Castle Pesaro. Nick read the message. “They have the book. It appears that Fu Manchu’s description of its contents is accurate. It contains an ancient method to speed up the production of Old Earth tobacco. Varten and his staff believe that it could revolutionize the manner in which pseudo-tobacco is grown, halving the time, and doubling the production.”

The inspector’s communicator went off. He reported back “I have both good news and bad news. Von Herder has been warned. He is being guarded. Samantha McDonald does not answer. Aircars have been dispatched to her residence. An APB has been put out to locate her. We can only wait.”

“This tobacco is very good” Sir Dennis said “It reminds me of McClelland’s #5100, commonly referred to as Red Kake”

“That is exactly what it is” Nick replied “It came from Emperor Leopaldo’s private collection. He gifted me with a small quantity after our last case. Once it is gone, I have no more left.”

“I have never had the chance to smoke Old Earth tobacco” Inspector Weightmouth said “I thank you. This is truly excellent, a once in a lifetime event for me.”

“Yes, it is truly an excellent smoke. A real Old Earth mature Virginia tobacco” Sir Dennis said “Although I generally smoke an English blend, a straight Virginia is a treat indeed!”

Nick’s communicator again went off. A strange message came out in electronic text:

*The person you seek
Is housed near a big creek
The clock strikes loud
Near the crowd
Where the tobacco is sold.*

//////

“What do you think it means, Sir Dennis?” Nick asked.

Smith smiled “I think we have a message from a so-called friend. The six parallel lines at the bottom represent the hexagram ‘khien’. Khien is the first hexagram in the I Ching, or Chinese Book of Changes, also known as the Yi King. I think it is from Yi Ching. Fire up your computer system, Nick and find us a location in New London. I believe it is a tobacco shop located near a crowded location, a creek, and within hearing distance of a clock, such as Big Ben.”

“There is such a shop!” Nick exclaimed “It is the Tompkins Smoke Shop, between Old Ben and the Thames, around the corner from Trafalgar Square. I have been there several times. Jack Tompkins is the proprietor, a very knowledgeable tobbaconist.”

“Well, lets get a move on it. Inspector, send out your air cars. Instruct them to surround the area and wait for us to arrive.”

They immediately left the room and headed to the address in the inspector’s aircar in the dreary New London night.

-5- The White Room

The aircar landed within minutes near a large public square. They left the vehicle and headed from Trafalgar Square towards the Thames River. “The shop is just up ahead. We have it surrounded.”The inspector informed them.

“Nick and I will go around to the rear of the store and obtain entry. You and your officers remain outside. Make sure no one leave the shop. If we are not out in one hour, then storm the building.” Sir Dennis ordered.

Through the thick fog, Sir Dennis and Nick approached the darkened building. There appeared to be heavily shuttered windows in the front. The faint dim of a light could be seen creeping through cracks in the darkened shutters. They slowly crept through the alleyway between the two buildings. Once in the rear, they spotted the door. Nick took his lock picks out of his pocket. Within seconds, the door was unlocked. They cautiously went inside.

Inside they saw a dim lit back room to the tobacco shop. There was a scent of incense in the air, mixed with the aroma of fresh tobacco. Around them were boxes and packages of tobacco and other smokers’ implements. They could see the curtained entrance to the front of the shop.

“So you will not work with me voluntarily, Ms. McDonald” they heard “There are ways to make you talk, and many of them are not pleasant”.

Smith whispered to Nick “Fu Manchu! We need to be extremely cautious!”

“No, I will not assist you in your schemes” she said with a quaking voice.

The sibilant voice continued “You have perhaps heard of Dr. John Lawlor, the noted botanist. He too chose not to work for me voluntarily. However, he now works in my laboratory in Chung King, maybe not voluntarily, and maybe not in full control of his faculties, but his brain...his brain is what is needed. You have perhaps heard of zombies? I perfected that technique many centuries ago. It turns one into an exemplary worker with no will of their own. He is my slave, a thinking soul-less hulk. The work is good, but the individual will does not exist. They become a slave to Doctor Fu Manchu, doing my bidding. He has almost discovered the secret of accelerating the growth of pseudo-tobacco. I am sure that with your assistance, the goal can be reached. You can either help us on your own accord, or else you can be made to assist us.”

The quaking voice continued “I will not help you in your scheme. It would destroy the Empire.”

Then you must now depart New London with me. We shall travel this night using my Ring Drive Ship to Chung King. There, we shall work on the problem before us, of which, I am sure we will soon have a solution.”

Smith nudged Nick and whispered “On three, we rush the room. One, Two, Three”

They rushed into the front of the shop. They saw Samantha McDonald tied to a chair. But there was no one else in the white room!

“Ah, Sir Dennis and Mr. Reardon, I though you might show up at my meeting with Ms. McDonald. Do not go any further. I assure you that you will all die if you do.”

Nick pointed electrical wiring that ran along the floor towards the chair.

“The chair is a trap I see Fu Manchu” Smith exclaimed.

“So it is” he replied “My offer still stands, her life for the Jahn book. Your lives too, for that matter. If she gets off the chair, the explosives detonate. If you cut the wires, the explosives detonate.”

“I think we shall decline your offer. This is a problem we can solve.” Smith replied.

“Before you do, look on the table.” They saw a pipe being smoked with a pipe king device. They also saw wires connected to it. “When the pipe burns to the bottom, the wire is cut and the explosives detonate. You must decide now! You can see it is almost out.” said the voice of Fu Manchu.

Sir Dennis turned to Nick and said in a low voice “Look over at the wall. There is a junction box. All of the wires lead to it. When I give the signal, you must use your Lasgun to melt it. You only have one try. The wires in the box must fuse instantaneously; otherwise we are done for it.”

He slowly raised his hand and lowered it. Nick took aim at the junction box and fired. There was a bright flash of light, the sound of the discharge, then quiet. They breathed slowly.

“I guess you guessed correctly” Nick said. We are still here, and there was no detonation.”

“Guess nothing. The secret was that the device operated on an open circuit. If Ms. McDonald got up from the seat, a switch opened and boom. When the wire in the pipe opened, boom. If you blasted the wire, it would open and boom. The trick was to fuse the junction box so that there could be no open condition.”

They heard the now familiar voice “Very good Sir Dennis, but you are not yet out of the trap.” They heard the sound of a gas being released into the room.”

“Quick Nick, grab the girl and let’s get out of here!”

Smith took Nick’s gun and blasted the front door while Nick carried Samantha out the door. As they got outside, they could hear the sound of a launch heading away from the building down the Thames River.

“I guess Fu Manchu got away again” Nick mumbled.

“Looks that way, but he will be back. This was just a temporary setback to his plans.”

-6- The Two Sisters

For several weeks there had been no news of Fu Manchu. Things had reverted back to a relative quiet in New London. Sir Dennis Nayland Smith had been in and out of Nick’s home a number of times while he was trying to locate Fu Manchu. Nick was following the book lead to see if there were any other copies of Jahn’s book in existence.

Sir Dennis, Nick and Samantha McDonald were sitting in the study, Smith smoking his decrepit Dunhill pipe, while Nick was smoking his large Old Earth Dunhill Shell with the silver band inscribed ‘2000 RTDA, San Antonio’. Samantha was smoking an Old Earth Peterson Sherlock Holmes series pipe. Sir Dennis’ true identity had been shared with Samantha.

“I have always wondered what ‘RTDA’ stood for as stamped on this pipe” Nick commented.

“As I recall, it stands for ‘Retail Tobacco Dealers Association’ a trade group in the United States for proprietors of tobacco shops. They held meetings and exhibits once a year. ‘San Antonio’ is a city in Texas where the meeting was held. Pipes and tobacco products would be sold from the wholesaler to the dealer at these shows.” Samantha responded.

“This is one of my favorite pipes” Nick replied “It smokes well every time, regardless of the tobacco. It smokes straight down to the heel with no dottle.”

Sir Dennis replied “It is a fine looking pipe also, and in remarkable condition. Down through the centuries, no one has ever found an exact replacement for the briar found and crafted during the First Age of Man. The golden age of pipes was before 2010 First Age, prior to the Anti-smokers taking over the reigns of government in most nations and turning smoking into a criminal activity. At the end of the First Age, Earth was destroyed as was all of the genuine briar. Briar was one of the few natural Old Earth plants that did not grow well when it was relocated to other ecosystems. Although there are many substitutes and replacements, none are as good as genuine Old Earth briar. It must have been the environmental conditions of soil, sun, water, air, etc. Likewise, genuine tobacco also did not transfer well to other ecosystems. There besides the ones grown, pseudo-tobaccos that are chemically made are just not as good as Old Earth tobaccos. These days, only the true well-heeled pipe collector can afford both Old Earth pipes and tobaccos. And the discerning palate can discern the difference between today’s products and those from long ago. Fu Manchu’s plans ultimately will upset the economics of the Empire which is why he must be stopped. He would control the flow of tobacco through the Empire.”

“Yes, the Old Earth pipes and tobaccos cannot be duplicated in this day and age.” Nick said “I am most fortunate to have a friend that is interested in both and can afford such expensive tastes, and most importantly, he shares his interests with others. Speaking of the Emperor, how was it that you are known to him and Varten?”

“Back in my younger days, I had my battles with Fu Manchu. As I said, he had developed two doses of the elixir of life. Once when Petrie and I had fallen into his clutches, he forced Dr. Petrie to inject the substance in me to see if there were any dangerous side effects and if it worked. I was ill for a long period of time, but recovered. It seemed like time stopped. My friends grew older, but I remained the same as when I was injected, and thus you see me today.”

He continued “Over the centuries, I have worked for those who fought Fu Manchu. It seems to be a constant waiting, fighting, and regrouping. There were periods when good ascended and periods when Fu Manchu’s forces were in the ascendancy. It is sort of a constant struggle between right and wrong. I have been working in one capacity or another for the House Lineaus throughout its ascendancy to the throne of the Empire. Leopaldo’s father was a fine man and I was honored to serve him as I am in serving Leo. Oh yes, I am also permitted to address him as ‘Leo’ in private. Few know my true

identity and history. The elixir of life keeps me in good health, never aging one day. I am proof against any disease. I could be physically harmed, but unless it is a fatal blow, the elixir accelerates the re-growth of organs and cells. I have been examined by the best medical minds in the Empire and am a puzzle to them. Perpetual life is not perpetual boredom as I have my challenge in that some day there will be an ultimate defeating Fu Manchu.”

“I hope that you can do that” Samantha replied as she tamped her Peterson “but it looks to be a never ending story”.

“Like I said, he has been quiet for the last 500 years. For him to be active again, means that he has something very important in his scheming.”

“I think that I may know someone that can help us. My sister, Haley McDonald also is a pipe smoker. She is also involved in the tobacco trade. I believe she has contacts on Chung King. She told me as story a while back. There is a planet in the star system next to Chung King. The planet is almost entirely devoted to the raising of neer-tobacco. Note that neer-tobacco is grown while pseudo-tobacco is made from chemicals. It seems that there was a sudden defoliation of the planet resulting in the entire tobacco crop being destroyed. No one was ever brought to account for the disaster. Planetary exobiologists felt that it was an invasion by an unknown viral element. Based on recent events, I believe that it was some activity of Fu Manchu’s.”

“It seems possible that Fu Manchu was testing part of his plan. If he could destroy a good portion of the tobacco production in the empire and replace it with his quick growing variety, he would become extremely rich and powerful. Is there a way to talk to Haley?” Smith asked.

“If I call her, she can be here in a half hour” Samantha replied.

A half hour later, Haley McDonald was admitted to Nick’s townhouse. She was just as attractive as her sister, but several years older. She was taken to the study and introductions were made. “May I join you in a pipe” she asked.

“Sure” they all said. She took a Castello Natural Vergin #65 full bent pipe out of her purse. It appeared to be well smoked. She took out a pouch of tobacco filled her pipe and passed it around.

“I stole this tobacco from my sister” she said with a wink of her eye “It is Balkan Sobrannie, a very ancient Old Earth tobacco. It is very hard to find.”

They all agreed that it was excellent as long, thin tendrils of smoke arose from their pipes toward the ceiling of the room. She repeated her story to the assembled group.

“Do you know if there were any strange ships in the quadrant at the time of the incident?” Sir Dennis asked.

“The investigation turned up an extensive number of ring drive ships. There are two in which you may be interested. The ring drive ship “Eternal Peace” and the ring drive ship “Fah Lao Sue” were both in the area. However Empire Authorities cleared both ships and their personnel.” She said.

“The investigators may have cleared the ships, however, bribes go quite a way, and, of course, Fu Manchu has other means of persuasion at his disposal. The Fah Lao Sue is the one that interests me as I doubt if anyone, other than me, would know that it is named after the daughter of Fu Manchu.”

“That is quite interesting Sir Dennis” said Samantha “maybe it would be worthwhile for a higher level of empire officials to re-examine the investigation.”

“I believe it would. Nick, could you contact Castle Pesaro and request an inquest into this matter.” Smith asked.

Nick sent a message to Varten von Eckman at Castle Pesaro requesting the review of the inquest.

It was several hours later that the McDonald sisters had finished their last pipe and went home for the evening. While locking up for the night, Smith had commented that it was uncharacteristic for Fu Manchu to lie low. He said that he thought something would break very soon.

-7- En Route

The communicator rang very early in the morning. Nick rolled over in his bed. The clock indicated 5:30 AM. It was a hyperwave transmission from space directly to Nick. The message was from Varten von Eckman.

*Nick,
I and a taskforce are heading towards the Chung King system. We have been in space for the last week. Based on the evidence that you and Sir Dennis have uncovered, we feel that our nemesis has already returned to the Chung King star system. The Fah Lao Sue has been located in that star quadrant. I have dispatched a cruiser to retrieve you and Sir Dennis. Be at the New London spaceport at 10:00 A.M.*

Varten von Eckman

Prior to waking Sir Dennis, Nick made a few well placed calls. He woke Sir Dennis around 6:30 AM and informed him about the communications.

“I had a feeling that the action would move from New London to Chung King. Have you ever been there?” he asked.

“No, I have not. The Galactic Guide indicates that the star system has 10 planets of which three are earth-like and inhabited. The three planets are said to be established in line with ancient Chinese civilization models.”

“That is all true.” Smith replied “The three planets in the Chung King star system are known as Heaven, Sky, and Earth. Except for the Imperial Government, the local governmental system is patterned after the Chinese Imperial System where a magistrate or mandarin is the local chief. He is administrator, judge, prosecutor, jury, and executioner. Of course, any execution must be approved by the Emperor after review by the Imperial Courts. Although common English language is spoken, Chinese is the official second language and is used in all but Imperial business. I would suggest that you learn both High Chinese and Cantonese by hypnoED while we travel to meet Varten and the fleet.

They arrived promptly at the spaceport. The Ring Star Cruiser ‘Pittsburgh’ was waiting their arrival for immediate takeoff. They were ushered into the wardroom to meet the Captain as the ship lifted off. As they entered the room, they saw two individuals.

Nick held his hand out to one as he immediately recognized him. “Hi Commander, you look like you are doing well. Sir Dennis Nayland Smith, may I introduce to you Commander Jim McClelland. The Commander and I were involved in a little matter a while back at the Vesta V Space Station.”

“And I would like to introduce you to Captain James Petrie, Captain of the Pittsburgh” he said.

Hands were shook all around. “Gentlemen, please sit down. You may light up if you wish. It will take us two days to catch up with the fleet.”stated Captain Petrie.

They took out their pipes and filled them with a neer-tobacco blend provided by the Commander. Nick recognized the Commander’s trusty Cavicchi Poker pipe. He enquired as to Ike McCane, the infamous hawkbill pipe collector from the 20th Century. During the conversation he found that Sir Dennis and Ike had smoked many pipes together at PittPenn University discussing pipe lore.

“I think it is time we come to business” the Commander said “As you know, the Chung King system has three planets, Heaven, Sky, and Earth. Earth is primarily an agricultural planet. Eighty percent of the land mass is used to raise tobacco used in cigarette, cigar, and pipe tobacco blends. Two weeks ago, the entire crop of planted tobacco was wiped out within a 24-hour time period. As of two days ago, the crop had reappeared, but it was a new and different type of tobacco. Although still little more than seedlings, the tobacco is growing back at an immense speed. At the current rate, it will be full grown within a month.”

“This sounds like the work of Doctor Fu Manchu” said Sir Dennis.

“That is the conclusion we also came to” replied Captain Petrie.

“But nothing has been lost” said Nick

“On the contrary, our analysis of the new tobacco plants indicates that it is a mutation with one new side effect. The new tobacco is extremely addictive. Just one smoke and you are hooked to it. It is very powerful in that respect” explained the Commander.

“I now can see through Dr. Fu Manchu’s scheme. The addiction effect is most insidious. He must be stopped!” replied Sir Dennis.

“The entire star system has been placed under quarantine. We have found the Fah Lao Sue docked on the planet Heaven. We believe that Fu Manchu is in its capital city, Yangzee. He must be found and stopped” said the Captain.

“We have received a communication from the Doctor” said the Commander as he passed the message around:

To: Emperor Leopaldo

By now you have seen my little demonstration of my latest discovery. I intend to introduce my little plant into the ecosystem of every star system in the Empire. You cannot stop it. My demand is that you abdicate your throne and name me as Emperor of the Universe. This is my first warning. You will only receive two more.

Fu Manchu

“This message was received yesterday. Of course, we will not give in to his demands. We will stop him” stated the Commander “Varten is with the fleet in the Chung King system. Empire Intelligence Agents have infiltrated all of the planets. I believe Lu Jo is with the group on Sky. Our plan is to have you, Nick, and Sir Dennis land and operate in Yangzee. We believe we will only have a week to bring this affair to a successful conclusion. If we do not, we plan to destroy all three planets. We cannot let this abomination spread to any other star system.”

“It is quite a burden that has been placed on Nick and me. We hope that we can live up to the assignment” replied Sir Dennis.

“All I can say is that the Emperor believes that his team can find a solution to this problem. He hopes that the system does not need to be destroyed. I can say that he would feel the loss very deeply” said the Commander.

The Star Cruiser Pittsburgh strained its drive in traveling to the Chung King system. The four men spent hours discussing possibilities.

-8- Into the Tower

Nick and Sir Dennis eventually found themselves in the Empire Offices on the planet Heaven. After discussion with the locals, they scoured the town for possible hiding places for Doctor Fu Manchu. They had not any leads when Nick received a private message on his communicator:

It troubles me very much what is happening. Your friend saved my daughter years ago, and I am under obligation to him.

*The dragons no longer fly here
The swans do not sing here
The white peacock had come
Look near the white tower
The lidless green eyes are within
/////*

“Look, Sir Dennis at this message. I believe it is from your friend.”

“Nick, I believe you are on to something. I wonder what is meant by the ‘white tower’. The rest, I believe I understand” replied Sir Dennis.

They studied the maps of the city. In the old section of town, they found an old building that resembled a white tower. It was in an old Buddhist monastery.

“We have nothing to lose in going there. Have the local security surround the area and cordon it off to all traffic. Make sure no one goes in or out.” Sir Dennis said.

On their way to the monastery, they received a short communication from Varten von Eckman and the fleet. He indicated that a second message had been received from Doctor Fu Manchu. They had 24 hours to comply with his demands.

They arrived at the monastery in good order. It was a bad, stormy night. To all appearances, the monastery had been deserted for many years. The walls were in disrepair. Plants overgrew the crumbling walls. They decided that they would enter through one of the lower entrances. They gave instructions that if they did not return in twelve hours, the monastery should be destroyed.

After passing through a door in the lower level, they came to a courtyard. Ahead of them was a tower that rose about two hundred feet. They approached a side entrance very cautiously. Once inside, they came to the main room having vaulted ceilings.

They split up, Sir Dennis going around the circular room to the left, Nick to the right. Nick soon lost sight of Sir Dennis in the darkness. They did not want to risk a light. Nick thought that he had heard movement ahead of him. He cautiously moved forward. He heard a scream. Suddenly the floor under him gave way. He fell through it and all went black.

He awoke some time later and found himself securely tied to a chair. Another chair was next to him. He recognized its inhabitant as Sir Dennis. They were both stripped to the waist. A low light was ahead of him. Standing at the desk was a figure he recognized, Fu Manchu!

He heard a groan from the chair next to him.

“I see we meet again Mr. Reardon, Sir Dennis. This time, you will not interfere with my plans because I plan on doing away with both of you. Sir Dennis, you are very familiar with my poisonous snakes, spiders, and other assorted helpers. Above each of you is suspended a small hair-like filament. I have just released a drop of my strongest poison. It will travel down the hair, land on you and you will die in a most painful manner. My plans have been made. I will soon depart on the Fah Lao Sue to seed other new systems with my discovery. Soon all humankind will declare me Emperor! It has been a pleasure you being my foil all these years, Sir Dennis, but it must now come to an end. Mr. Reardon, I have enjoyed this little play with you.” He said in his sibilant voice.

Fu Manchu suddenly left the room!

They looked up. Slowly they saw the drops moving down the thread. Smith’s was traveling faster down the cord. Down and down the drops came. The one above Sir Dennis’ head jumped from the thread to his head. Nick heard a loud scream. The drop was about to breach the space to Nick’s head when there was a sudden blast of a Lasgun. It was a direct hit on the thread. The drop vaporized and was gone.

Lu Jo and several men dressed in the EIS uniform came running into the room.

“Good shot” Nick Shouted at Lu Jo. Quick, how is Smith?

Lu Jo released Nick from his restraints. They went over to Smith where he was laid on the floor by the other agents. His breathing was growing shallower and shallower. Suddenly, he took a deep breath and sat up.

“This elixir of life is quite good stuff. I believe that Fu Manchu is becoming a dotard in his old age. Obviously he forgot that it pretty much repairs any damage to the body. Quite quickly and quite effectively it works!” he said as he stood up.

“Where is Fu Manchu” Nick asked.

Lu Jo used her communicator to contact the fleet. She reported back “It seems that the Fah Lao Sue tried to lift off from the space port. It was destroyed on liftoff by one of the Empire Ships.”

“Let’s get out of this depressing place” Sir Dennis said.

They departed from the monastery.

-9- Reunions and a Message

They all met back on the Ring Cruiser Pittsburgh and assembled in the wardroom. In attendance were Varten von Eckman, Nick, Sir Dennis, Commander McClelland, Captain Petrie, and Lu Jo. They had all just sat down and lit their pipes, filled with genuine Old Earth McClelland #27 Virginia, an excellent all day, indoor smoke comprised of a beautiful orange-red, shag-cut cake tobacco.

“This tobacco is quite mellow” stated Commander McClelland “my forbearers of this name made an excellent tobacco with a mellow flavor and a light, subtle aroma.

“Yes it is” replied Nick “Lu Jo, I see academy training paid off. You are quite a shot with a Lasgun”

“First in my class I would have you know. I took the Commandant’s Trophy” she replied.

“I guess Doctor Fu Manchu perished in the Fah Lao Sue” Varten said.

“Don’t be so sure. Many times I have thought he perished, but he seems to be like a cat with many lives” he replied.

“How did you know how to find us? I thought you were on planet Sky, Lu Jo” Nick asked.

“Well, we don’t tell you everything. You were of course being traced and monitored. Varten would not send his best agent to a planet where nothing was happening, would he?”

“Best agent? I thought that was why I was on Heaven” Nick replied.

“You are both my best agents” Varten said “the Emperor needs both of you and both alive. We always keep our options open and never depend solely on just one course of action.”

“Well, it paid off in this case” Sir Dennis said.

A junior officer knocked on the door and came into the room. He passed a message to the Captain. Captain Petrie read it and passed it around.

To: Sir Dennis Nayland Smith

By now you realize that I did not perish on the Fah Lao Sue. I also have many escape routes as part of my plans, after all Sir Dennis, have we not jousted for many years?

I regret the loss of my ship, but there are others. I also believe one of my servants to be a spy and he will be dealt with severely. I will assure you that my plans to destroy the tobacco economy have been put on a shelf. You are all good adversaries. Who knows, maybe in another five hundred years I shall return.

Sir Dennis, I did not forget the wonderful powers of my elixir of life. It works quite well does it not? However, there was always the chance that it would not, and I wanted to test it.

You can rest assured that there will be no retribution on my part.

Fu Manchu

“Well, I guess we will not hear from him in my lifetime” Varten said.

“If I have learned anything about Doctor Fu Manchu, it is that in his own way, he is an honorable man. He will not trouble Emperor Leopaldo in his reign.”

“Well, I will end this discussion with a little doggerel from Old Earth that I found when researching the Doctor” Lu Jo said “It goes like this ‘Many man smoke, but Fu Manchu’”

They all laughed and kept on smoking their pipes as the Ring Cruiser Pittsburgh charted a course to Castle Pesaro.

-END-