

The Farside Chronicles

Book IV

Farside Legacy

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1 – Academia

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Dana Morton scoffed at Penelope, “there has to be massive development in Farside in order to support civilization. You can’t keep it as pristine as a national park forever. We’d never be free of dependence on Nearside technology!”

“Some technology is necessary, certainly,” Penelope retorted, trying hard to keep her voice level, “but not on a scale such as Eugene and his *clique* are proposing. The whole of Farside would become a radioactive waste dumping ground.”

Dana swooshed her hand as if to swat away the annoying fly Penelope had become. “Even Nearside hasn’t gotten that bad and they’ve been at it for how long? Nearly a century? You’re a Luddite, Penny, admit it. You just don’t want to see us progress past water wheels and spinning wheels.” A few of the onlookers chuckled. “If you get your way, we’ll still be begging for scraps from Nearside tables a hundred years from now.” She turned and walked away.

“We may not have everything we want,” Penelope fired at Dana’s retreating figure, “but we do have everything we need, and we have lots of things the Nearsiders wish they had.”

Geraldine Miller rested her hand on Penelope’s shoulder in a gesture of comfort. “You’ll never convince them, you know,” Geri cooed. “Their minds are made up and they are going to push, push, push until you collapse from resisting them.

“And they have a valid point,” she continued. “Nuclear power can be made safe and it can solve a whole universe of problems, some of which we haven’t yet discovered we have.”

“Like what?” Penny glowered.

“What haven’t we discovered yet?” Geri asked. “I don’t know. I’ll tell you when we discover them. One thing I do know, though, is that wind and solar power are nearing the limits of their usefulness. The blow-out on the Boulder-Pecos monorail last week ought to be proof of that.”

Geri was referencing the shutdown of the Boulder-Pecos rail line the previous week when insufficient wind caused the batteries in one segment near Tucumcari NM to drain, stranding a car on the single track and putting the entire route on hold until nature restored sufficient power to allow continued operation. The fact that local residents alongside the track also used the watts generated by the windmills contributed to the battery arrays not getting their full charge. The Interior Ministry had to remind the locals of their

obligation to supply their own power and not rely on the rail line's power supply except in unusual circumstances.

Penelope paused a long time, thinking. "Am I being stupid?" she asked.

Geri chuckled. "Whenever you stake out an extreme position, it's an almost-sure sign you're being stupid. Were you paying attention in the Economic Development lecture" — she quickly flipped through her class notes — "two weeks ago Thursday? It was a case study on uranium mining by AMAX, if you recall. Mr. Harrington said we have tons — that's the word he used and I believe it — of refined uranium in storage just waiting for the reactors to be finished so it can start generating power for us.

"Okay, I understand you don't want a reactor on every street corner. Neither do I. Right now, if we had two reactors, one in the southwest and another along the Atlantic seaboard, we could abandon all the windmills we've put up so far. Abandon! Two reactors would supply as much juice as all the windmills and all the solar panels we've installed since before I was born... since before you were born. Yeah, you're being stupid."

Penny grimaced at Geri. "Grrrrr," she said. Geri laughed and pointed in the direction of their next class. Penny turned in that direction and the two moved off.

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"I don't think that's what Eugene is saying at all," Peter Moss asserted.

"If that's not what he means, he needs to adjust his words so that he actually does say what he means. The words he's using invite speculation he wants coast-to-coast concrete. If it weren't for the fact that his sister is proposing something equally ludicrous, no one would be on his side."

"If you ever talked to Eugene directly, you would know he doesn't intend coast-to-coast concrete. That's plain silly."

"Thanks, but 'no, thanks'. The last time I talked to that little snot I nearly punched him out. The only thing that kept me from doing it was some little voice inside me that kept whispering: '*Golden rule... golden rule...*'"

"Come on, we'll be late for class." The group of seven stepped inside the classroom.

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"They're planning to bring Stafford One online a week from this coming Tuesday, ma'am," Linda Rossi informed her sovereign.

"The Nuclear Oversight Committee would like you to do a ribbon-cutting ceremony the Saturday prior. It's awfully short notice, I know..."

"No, that's alright," Barbara sighed. "I'll do it."

"I was going to suggest you send Eugene. He can actually speak with some authority on the matter — it's a topic quite dear to his heart."

"He'd miss school," Barbara objected.

"One class. He can review the recording later. I think he'd really like the opportunity..."

"He's only fifteen."

"Alice was doing such things long before she was his age," Linda parried.

"Girls mature earlier," Barbara reminded her.

"Indeed," Linda agreed. "I was your vice chancellor at twenty and making decisions on your behalf for all of Farside. We're not asking him to design the reactor. He's only going to be giving a short speech congratulating everyone on a momentous achievement."

"Alright, then, send Eugene. Give him the assignment today and have him rough out his speech. I'll want to review the highlights with Chancellor Burke and the rest of the Privy Council."

"Think of it as 'done'," Linda assured her. "Is there anything else?"

"No, nothing I can think of right now."

"Then if I may be excused..."

"Oh, Linda, must you be so formal? Yes, you're excused." Linda smiled and departed.

She headed for the monorail station and as she did she dialed the yardmaster's office. "Good morning, Madame Chancellor," the yardmaster started the conversation, "what can I do for you today?"

"I'll need Barbara's car for a round trip to Aurora. Can you have it brought onto the mainline and scheduled? I'll be there in fifteen minutes."

"The car will be waiting for you when you get here," he assured her.

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The trip from Boulder to Aurora, 39 miles by rail, took less than half an hour including extra time to switch onto the Aurora spur for the second leg of the journey. The Aurora monorail station was within walking distance of every important site at the Aurora complex: the hotel, the post office, the conference center, the immigration

transit station and FIPS, the Farside Institute for Political Science. She made a bee line for FIPS.

The office staff at FIPS all rose when they saw Vice Chancellor Rossi enter the area. Linda waved them all back into their seats. "I'll need to meet with Prince Eugene as soon as his next class breaks," she told the administrator. "I'll need a guide to take me to him as well." Someone pressed a cup of coffee into her waiting hands.

Four minutes before the next bell, an aide approached Linda Rossi. "Follow me, please, Madame Chancellor."

As class broke and the students filed out of the room scattering for their next classes, Eugene spotted Linda leaning against the opposite wall. He elbowed his way through the crowd to her.

"Good news, I hope," he offered.

"Depends," Linda answered. "You're doing the ribbon-cutting at the Stafford nuclear power plant on Saturday next." Eugene smiled. "You'll give a little congratulatory speech, of course. Your mother asks that you rough out the text so she and the council can preview it."

"That's it?"

"Just wanted to give you a 'heads-up'. I know you'll want to start working on the speech right away."

"Yes," Eugene confirmed. "I may cut the rest of the day."

"Your mother will kill you, and then she'll kill me. Don't you dare — but you can think about what you'll say."

Eugene waved and departed. Linda and her escort returned to the front office where Linda spoke with the Superintendent.

"I want to be informed if His Highness misses any classes over the next week except for" — she scanned his class schedule on the computer screen — "Managerial Economics on Saturday next; he'll be out of town for the day. Please see that the lecture is recorded and made available for his review."

"Will do," the Superintendent agreed.

She shook everyone's hand and called the Aurora yard before she left the building. "Linda Rossi. Please schedule Barbara's car for a return to Boulder as soon as possible. I'm on my way and will be there in ten minutes."

At the Aurora station, she found Barbara's rail car on a siding waiting for a break in traffic. She closed the doors, took her seat, and powered her tablet computer on knowing that when traffic eased on the mainline, the routing software that ran the entire system would release the car and guide it to the Boulder station. She began to compose a note to Eugene:

Further to our conversation today:

Naturally, you need to thank everyone involved in the project. Don't forget the engineers from GE and Siemens. Also, the software teams from IBM and HP.

Many of the operations crew have asked to remain in Farside to operate the reactor and become citizens. They should be singled out for special congratulations and a welcome to the community of Farside.

This is Farside's first reactor. As such, it represents a huge step forward in our quest to become a fully-self-sufficient society. Emphasize that the Stafford community now has a permanent place in Farside's history.

Everything should be UP! If there are any 'downs', let one of the other speakers handle those.

Smile.

She sent the note and switched her mind over to other Vice-Chancellor-ish duties.

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Ivan Deruschka stood when his name was called. "Farside provides a unique problem in 'governance'," he began his answer to his instructor's question. "We have virtually nothing as far as statute law is concerned and thus have little need for 'law enforcement'. Because of this, the people of Farside think of themselves as perfectly free. They are, however, strictly controlled by our prime directive, so much so that, especially for newcomers, a great deal of time and effort goes into each person constantly self-determining whether their actions are permissible or not.

"An unfortunately intriguing side effect of this was demonstrated by the Oneida Colony, much to everyone's chagrin." The instructor nodded in acknowledgement. "During the first two years the Oneida Colony spent in Farside, one out of five of their people sought treatment for nervous disorders of one sort or another. They went from one state — reservation life, where there were few social norms

that carried penalties and many federal laws which did — to Farside where the exact opposite was true: a multitude of social norms all carrying severe penalties and a virtual vacuum where law (in the traditional sense of the word) was, for all practical purposes, absent.

“It was culture shock and it caught them all by surprise.

“They seem to have bounced back pretty well, but Farside’s Immigration Directorate now watches out for exactly that sort of potential problem. Immigrants from law-rich locales get special classes designed to, without actually saying so in so many words, introduce them to a legal framework they may never have considered.” He sat down.

“Why do you think it’s a problem going from a — as you call it, ‘law-rich environment’ — to the relatively-anarchic Farside?” the instructor asked.

“I think the most likely explanation is that Nearsiders are used to having others make their decisions for them,” Ivan answered from his seat. “In Farside only one decision has been made for you: ‘*do unto others...*’. You and you alone are responsible for the consequences of everything you do, everything you say, even everything you think. That’s a very great load of responsibility, one most Nearsiders never have to cope with.”

“So, you’re suggesting Farside tends to attract a certain class of people and not others?”

Ivan paused before answering. “Are you suggesting it does not?” he asked.

“I’m suggesting nothing,” the instructor parried, smiling. “I want to hear your thoughts.”

“Then, yes, absolutely,” Ivan answered. “Farside definitely appeals to a certain mind-set and repels others.”

“All of you agree?” he asked the rest of the class and received a murmur of agreement.

“What does that signify for Farside’s future?” he asked. “How many Nearsiders can we expect will want to emigrate? What are we going to do with 35 billion acres if there aren’t enough people to work them?”

“I think you may have asked the wrong question, Doctor Klein.”

Harold Klein turned to face his challenger, Kathleen McCormick. “Bless you, Katy,” he winked at her. “What is the right question?”

“Who says we have to work all 35 billion acres? We only need to ‘work’ Farside to the extent necessary to maintain ourselves and our lifestyle. If we choose a simpler lifestyle than some, that is a choice

we are permitted to make, and as Ivan pointed out, it is we who are responsible for the consequences of such a choice.

"We have farms to the east and ranches to the north that produce enough food to feed everyone in Eastamerica and Westamerica. We sell most of it — and in some cases give it away — because it's surplus to us. It's surplus because every community must still produce enough to feed itself. We no longer need that policy. We could drop it as a requirement and still survive on what those farms and ranches produce. To some extent, we are overexploiting Farside. If we were to exploit the whole planetary surface, we'd be up to our eyeballs in stuff we don't need, can't sell, can't store, and can't use. We're so far from needing to exploit more of Farside, I think we'd do fine if we simply stopped letting newcomers in."

Klein turned to the class. "A valid position?" he asked.

"Understandable," Miguel Antojos interjected, "but, no, not valid."

"Stand up," Klein instructed. "Tell us what Katy isn't seeing that you do."

"If we are content to live a rural life, there's nothing wrong with what Katy said. Not all of us are necessarily farmers, and that's what Katy is overlooking. This is the 21st century and Farside is, except for a few places, still living in the 20th or the 19th. We're about to fire up our first nuclear reactor to supply electricity to communities in Eastamerica. Katy's right about our ability to produce food. Soon, that will also be true of power. When that happens, the door is open for us to begin branching out, trying new things.

"Yes, correct that we don't have to exploit Farside's acreage for farms or ranches, but we will have to exploit it for other things. We have to provide an environment where entrepreneurs can begin new ventures. We have to provide places for people to live and work..."

"We have to provide...?" Katy interrupted, rising from her seat. "Why do we have to provide? Hasn't it always been official policy that all new immigrants provide their own place to live? Why is there suddenly an exemption for newcomers from that policy?"

"As I said," Miguel answered her, a tone of exasperation clearly audible, "not all of us are farmers. If we intend to attract nuclear physicists, we can't recruit them with a policy that requires their first actions to be building a house and digging a well. We're going to have to make it possible for them to buy a house rather than build it, and they're going to have to be able to buy it using Nearside currencies.

"No, I didn't mean that we would actually provide housing, but we have to make it possible for somebody to provide housing for a fee. We have already surrendered on the issue of 'producing your own food'. It has been over a decade since we relaxed that policy for

individuals; it now applies only community-wide. Can you not see that the energy mandate will be next?

"Consider the case of an engineer who contributes one one-hundredth of a percent to the creation of a power plant that provides power to ten thousand people. Has that person not provided as much energy as he uses? Insisting that every new Farsider must be a self-sufficient pioneer will keep us in the Dark Ages. Why would any thinking person support such a policy?

"Further, there have already been exceptions made to that policy. The first Master of the Gatekeepers' Guild, Robert Larreau, was a retired academic who moved into Farside and was given his first house by the Queen. Why? Because he provided talents Farside needed, talents that couldn't easily be measured in ounces of gold or kilowatts of electricity.

"It was a good policy to initially recruit only those who could pull their own weight in a primitive setting... because we actually had a primitive setting. The work those first settlers performed didn't erase that primitive environment — although we should expect it will, given time — but it made it possible for Farside to take a technological giant step by bringing on specialists in fields that aren't 'primitive'.

"It was good policy then, but this isn't 'then'; it's 'now'. You always have to have a plan, Katy, but it doesn't always have to be the same plan."

Katy McCormick cocked her head to one side as if in thought and paused for a moment. "Do you support the original mandate for those immigrants who intend to be farmers and ranchers?"

Now it was Miguel's turn to pause and think. Harold Klein smiled. This was exactly the kind of back-and-forth they needed to hone their minds for making extraordinarily difficult policy decisions.

"If the policy were retained for farmers and ranchers, I wouldn't have a problem with it," Miguel finally answered, "but I still believe it isn't absolutely necessary."

"Miguel and I are in agreement," Katy announced.

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"I'm certain everyone here appreciates the importance of the Stafford community and its new reactor — Farside's very first — to the future well-being of all of Farside. This plant behind me" — he gestured without looking — "will produce enough energy for one hundred seventy thousand homes, more than double what Eastamerica now has.

"Your new steamer paves the way for an explosion of population growth in professions Farside has never yet attracted,

especially in energy-hungry fields. We have already attracted — you have already attracted a team of technicians more than adequate to run this technological marvel, and I'd like to ask those engineers, technicians, and operators who have applied for permanent admission as citizens of Farside to stand and be recognized." 109 men and women along with their families stood among the audience and were given loud applause before again taking their seats.

"None of this would have been possible, of course, without the skills and expertise of the principal contractors, General Electric and Siemens" — those men and women rose and received their applause — "or the systems engineers and software magicians from IBM and Hewlett-Packard" — a new group rose for recognition — "whose efforts make it possible to run Stafford One in complete safety with just a handful of operators.

"As an historic event, this ranks with the discovery of Farside itself. My mother sends all of you her best wishes for success on this most historic day which, I'm sure we all hope, will be merely the first of many more to come.

"Floreat Farside."

The gathering exploded in applause as Eugene stepped away from the microphone.

2 – Changing Of The Guard

When Paul Gillman developed cancer, he resigned as Barbara's Foreign Minister and he and his wife moved back to Nearside for access to specialists, leaving all their grown children behind in Farside. He would return once more to be buried where he had found contentment, on a low hill overlooking the two consecutive bends in a stream where Paul, Elaine, Paul Jr., Eleanor, Glenn, and Jack had spent the last (nearly) two decades washing gold out of the silt.

In his absence, Ted Chubb acted as Prime Minister/Foreign Minister and was finally appointed to the position permanently when it became clear Paul would never resume those duties.

Davy Harmon turned over his responsibilities to the new Minister for Farside Security, Tony Dinardo, a scant five weeks before a stroke took his life. Adele followed him four months later.

In the space of seven months, Farside's flag spent almost all of it at half-staff commemorating the loss of Harry Tumulty, Emile Valcour, Robert Larreau, Mark Hamm, Steve Okambo Sr., Walt Clancy, Larry Hopkins, Ted Chubb, Peg Clancy, Bert Hamm, both Burkes when their light airplane broke apart in flight, and in a final crushing blow, Nell Gruder, who had been standing too close to a wellhead at the moment it blew out.

Linda Rossi-Larson stepped up into her boss' now vacant position, then less than three months after Ted Chubb took over as Prime Minister, Barbara was once more looking for someone to fill the again-vacant spot, finally settling on Ivan Deruschka, a graduating senior at FIPS and — acknowledged by all his teachers and classmates — probably its next headmaster.

"All of the people who made Farside possible are gone," Barbara quietly told Ernie at they watched Nell's coffin being lowered into her grave.

"Not all of them," Ernie replied. "You're still here and there are more from a new generation stepping up to take their place. Are you worried?"

"Not 'worried' so much as wondering if it's time for me to step down — let someone else wear the crown."

"I don't believe they'll allow that," Ernie whispered.

"They?"

"They," Ernie confirmed. "The people of Farside. You reign at their pleasure, a real oddity as monarchs go. And I seem to recall you mentioning more than once that you would wear the crown only so

long as the people demanded it. It hasn't been a really tough job, has it?"

"No, I suppose not. Still, shouldn't I have an understudy?"

"Not a bad idea," Ernie agreed, "but don't you already have six dozen?"

"The regents?" she asked.

Ernie nodded. "The regents," he confirmed.

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"Ivan, I promised I would not unnecessarily interfere with your coursework, but I do need a few moments of your time."

"That's not a problem, ma'am. Would this evening be too late?"

"No, this evening would be fine. Why don't you plan to have dinner with us?"

Ivan hesitated. "May I bring a date? I was already planning to have dinner with someone."

"Six thirty?" Barbara asked.

"Six thirty," Ivan confirmed.

At six twenty-seven, headlights briefly illuminated the front steps of the Walsh residence before swinging away as Ivan parked his Jeep on the apron next to the driveway. He escorted his date to the front door, checked his watch, paused, and rang the doorbell. Eugene answered it.

"Dana!" he greeted the young woman next to Ivan, then leaned in for a hug. "Good evening, Ivan. My mother is waiting for you in the lounge." He stepped aside to let them both enter.

Ernie rose from his seat as Ivan led Dana Morton into the lounge area. Although Dana, like everyone in Farside, knew Barbara eschewed formality when she wasn't wearing the crown, Dana simply couldn't help herself. She curtsied toward Barbara before Ivan could stop her. Ivan rolled his eyes. Penelope, standing off to one side, giggled with delight at Dana's *faux pas*.

"Tsk," Barbara clucked her tongue. "Well, now that we've gotten that over with..." Dana turned red as the blood rushed to her face.

"Penny, show Dana the garden. Try not to argue," her mother ordered.

Penny wagged her finger in Dana's direction and Dana obediently followed Penny outside. Eugene left as well.

"To get right to the point, Ivan, I think I need to start preparing to step down," Barbara began, "not because I think I'm no

longer capable, mind you, but more because the future is so unpredictable.”

“Your Majesty is not ill...?”

“No, Ivan, I am in perfect health — for now. It just seems an opportune time to start thinking about the future. If I were to consider appointing a successor, who ought I consider?”

Ivan wore a puzzled expression. “Would you not appoint one of your children? Penelope or Eugene?”

“I’m still unconvinced that would be a very good idea, Ivan. Both Penelope and Eugene are — what’s the right word? — wedded to exclusionary world-views. Penelope would be happy if Nearside thought of us as ‘The Farside National Wildlife Preserve’. Eugene would strip-mine the entire planet. Oh, yes, I know I’m exaggerating wildly, but really, how far off the mark am I? Even though they are my own offspring, I cannot bring myself to believe either would be a good choice.”

“I understand Her Majesty’s predicament. I must admit I never considered the matter in quite those terms. Perhaps you would give me some time to develop a list of prospects?”

“Of course, but I hope you won’t take a very long time on this assignment.”

“May I consult with the occasional regent? Would it be permissible to share this concern with them?”

“Yes, you may, but I hope you will impress upon them that this is not an issue that should ‘go public.’” Ivan nodded his understanding of his instructions.

Barbara turned and pressed the intercom button for ‘Rec Room’. Eugene answered. “Yes, ma’am?”

“Call the girls in from the garden. Dinner will be ready in a few moments.”

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“What’s happening in there?” Dana asked Penny, pointing over her shoulder at the house.

“If I knew I wouldn’t tell you,” Penny informed her. “When a monarch speaks in private with her Prime Minister, what’s said should be up to them to disclose, not anyone else.”

“Yes, I suppose so.

“Look, I want to apologize if I said anything insulting the other day. They get us into ‘debate mode’ in nearly every class. It’s hard to switch to ‘friendly discussion’ mode...”

Penny waved her hand as if shooing away an annoying fly. “One, my skin is much thicker than most people realize; you have to

strike pretty hard to get me riled. Two, my mother has ordered me — you were there, you heard it — to avoid arguments. Tonight, you are a guest in the house of Mr. and Mrs. Walsh, and thus my guest as well. Were we to argue over anything, I would be honor-bound to let you win,” and she winked at Dana. Dana smirked.

“So,” Penny continued, “you’re dating gospodin Deruschka. That’s a surprise. I would be less surprised had he shown up with Kathleen McCormick. Her political views are much more closely aligned with Ivan’s than are yours. What do you talk about?”

“Politics, believe it or not,” Dana admitted, “and he does date Katy occasionally. Ivan likes to keep his finger on everyone’s pulse. He’ll make an excellent PM. Actually, he’d make an excellent damn-near-anything. He’s very talented.”

Penny turned and smiled at Dana.

“Oh, get your mind out of the gutter!” Dana snapped back, unable to keep herself from smiling as well. “Are you seeing anyone?”

“I’m Princess Alice,” Penny explained. “If I were seeing anyone on a regular basis, it would be known far and wide and my mother would certainly weigh in on my choice. As it is, I haven’t been approached by anyone with an offer I couldn’t refuse.

“...although Olaf Tonnessen has been staying pretty close lately, now that I think about it. And if that gets around, I’ll know who to blame.”

Dana made a motion as if pulling a zipper across her lips.

Eugene approached the two. “Dinner,” he notified them curtly.

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Ivan settled Dana in the Jeep’s passenger seat and took his place behind the wheel. He steered the Jeep back to the FIPS dormitories where both he and Dana were housed. As students, they had no choice in matters such as ‘where to live’ even though Ivan was now officially employed by the government of Farside in a position that would normally rate a real house of his own. Dana closed her eyes as if napping but still kept up a running dialog with Ivan as he drove.

“So, what was so important that we rated dinner at the palace?” Dana asked casually.

“Nothing I can discuss,” Ivan told her dismissively.

“Oh, nonsense,” Dana scoffed. “Give me a hint.”

“A hint?” Ivan asked playfully. “Alright... it has something to do with my job,” and he turned and winked at Dana.

“That’s not much of a hint,” she informed him.

“Even so, it’s probably more than I should tell you — which is ‘nothing’.”

"You're really taking this 'Prime Minister' thing seriously, aren't you?"

It took Ivan a few seconds to comprehend what Dana had just asked. "Do you think I am something other than a real, a serious, Prime Minister?"

"Ivan, be realistic! You're a student! You haven't even graduated from FIPS. You're a place-holder."

"For whom?" he asked her.

"I don't know 'for whom', but you're still a teenager. Nobody appoints a teenager their Prime Minister. The only reason you — any of us, for that matter — can handle the assignment is that Farside doesn't have any enemies and is largely self-sufficient. Tell me honestly: if we had to go to war, would you be up to the task? If we had to struggle to keep our economy afloat, would you be the right choice for PM?"

Ivan paused. "Some are born great," he began, quoting Shakespeare, "some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them. In the end, what does it matter? The judgement as to whether or not I would make a good wartime PM or a good leader for tough economic times has already been made by people for whom that judgement is a matter of great importance. It would be ungracious to suggest they have made an error. It would also, quite probably, be wrong.

"Do you think I have done a poor job so far?"

"I think you have not yet been tested. I think you will do well in a general sense, especially considering that 'Prime Minister of Farside' is an easy task, but all your experience is purely academic, none of it practical. Don't you worry sometimes?"

"I do," he admitted, "but I think that's a good thing. It makes me more cautious. It makes me double-check decisions with talented people, and doing so moves that academic experience more toward the practical.

"Is there something I've done that you would have done differently?"

"I can't say," Dana admitted with a chuckle. "What is it that you have done?"

"Meow," Ivan imitated a cat. "Getting a little 'catty', aren't we?"

Dana laughed. "Perhaps a little... So, c'mon, tell me: what's going on?"

"It's a personnel issue," Ivan told her. "Really, I can't discuss it."

Dana huffed. She knew Ivan was not going to reveal any secrets. Not even a challenge to his self-perception was going to

budge him from what he saw as his duty. The matter was settled. She gave up and kept to herself for the rest of the trip back to Aurora-in-Farside.

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Nadya Simonova plucked the phone from its cradle after a quick glance at the caller-ID panel. "Gospodin Deruschka, I'm honored..."

"I'm pleased to find you in a good mood, Madame Viceroy, because I'm about to put you to work. I met with Her Majesty last night on a personnel matter of some importance and she — probably because of my lack of experience — gave me permission to call upon her Regents for assistance.

"Her Majesty is contemplating retirement," — Ivan heard Nadya Simonova's quick intake of breath — "and wants me to suggest a few plausible candidates to replace her."

"Not Alice?" the regent inquired. "Not Eugene?"

"They are, I have no doubt, eligible, although Her Majesty worries about their somewhat intransigent political positions. She is concerned that Alice is too anti-industrialization and Eugene is too pro- and feels strongly that neither of those attitudes would serve Farside well. She's looking for, as I said, plausible alternatives outside her immediate family. I was hoping you might supply me with some material I can lay before her for her consideration."

Nadya Simonova exhaled at last. "Minister, you have no idea how relieved I am to hear you say that. In private conversations with some of the other regents, I have heard them express the same concerns. I have for quite some time harbored doubts that Farside would long survive as we know it and love it with either Alice or Eugene at the helm, and for exactly the reasons that concern the Crown.

"As it turns out, I do have what I consider a plausible candidate. May I offer the name?"

"Madame Viceroy, I command you to offer the name."

"Leif Thorvaldsson, Regent for Scandinavia, is one of the most level-headed persons I have ever encountered. I have heard him debate with other Regents and all those debates end in only two ways: Leif convinces everyone in earshot of the essential worth of his thesis — the typical outcome — or he readily adopts his opponent's thesis, admitting his own error. What never happens is that Leif 'agrees to disagree'. Either his position prevails because it is the stronger, more obviously correct position, or he discards a position that has shown itself to be indefensible. There's no middle ground for him. A position

that cannot withstand brutal examination is a position he will not allow himself to be any longer associated with.

"He does his own thinking in most cases, but when he is presented with better thoughts than his own, he adopts them and grows stronger..."

Ivan laughed and interjected: "That which does not kill him makes him stronger."

"Exactly," Nadya agreed. "He's not afraid to admit error. I think that is an excellent quality for any leader."

"I quite agree, Regent Simonova, and I thank you for your assistance. When I present Leif Thorvaldsson's name, I will make sure Her Majesty hears, as well, that Regent Simonova was its source."

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"Leif Thorvaldsson. I would follow him into Hell."

"That's quite a recommendation, Regent Dempsey. I doubt that will be necessary..."

"So do I. I have no doubt he would convince any opposition that they should go there first because it would be such an enjoyable trip."

Ivan laughed. "I'm reminded of the lyrics of a song: `...to be willing to march into Hell for a heavenly cause...'"

"That's our job, isn't it?" the regent asked. "We're supposed to be ready to sacrifice everything for the survival of Farside. What good would we be if we weren't?"

"So, you have no hesitation recommending Thorvaldsson as your new boss... and mine?"

"None. None whatsoever. Barbara simply couldn't make a better choice."

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"Thorvaldsson? He is a good candidate, no doubt about it, but you should be asking a different question: who has caused him to re-evaluate his prejudices? Yup, Thorvaldsson is flexible when someone shows him the error of his ways. How many regents have done that?"

"I don't know," Ivan admitted. "Do you?"

"To the best of my knowledge, there have been three: Marcel d'Hourtin changed Thorvaldsson's mind about foreign currency speculation, an admittedly esoteric subject; Livia Potenza taught him all he knows about research and development funding; every other time — every other time Thorvaldsson has scratched his chin and said, 'You know... you're right!', the person he said that to was Linda Rios.

"Yes, Thorvaldsson is brilliant. Shouldn't we also be looking at the people who taught him how to be brilliant? If Linda Rios is not on your list, your list is incomplete. I would be ashamed to present such a list to Her Majesty, and so should you."

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"I would certainly have Marcel d'Hourtin on my list..."

"Too old," Ivan explained. "Barbara wants someone younger, someone who can put in twenty years under the crown. That's why, for instance, she appointed Dan Murphy right behind Robert Larreau when the Gatekeepers' Guild was formed. Although she needed Larreau's expertise immediately, she understood that he would have a necessarily short career due to his age. She's going to insist on a thirty-something or *in extremis* a forty-something as her replacement."

"Well, then, Mike Foster."

"Really?" Ivan expressed his surprise. "He doesn't seem much like 'leader' material to me. Does he really strike you as a leader?"

"I think he could be. He's very likeable. He's the most likeable regent I can think of. As far as I can tell he doesn't have an enemy in the world."

"That's because he doesn't have an opinion he can call his own," Ivan retorted. "He bends with whatever wind is blowing today."

"...If you want to put a negative spin on it, yes, or you can say he believes in consensus-building if you're inclined to spin it positively. I wouldn't have a problem with King Michael. Besides, it's Barbara's choice, not yours or mine."

"I'll add his name to the list."

3 – Candidates

Eugene gave the door a sharp rap, then entered without waiting for an acknowledgement from his mother.

"*Buenos dias, Linda,*" Barbara greeted her visitor. "Please make yourself comfortable. I'll be with you in a moment."

Linda Rios took a seat and gazed out the window while she waited for Barbara to finish composing a note on her computer. At last, Barbara tapped "send" and turned away from the machine.

"How was your trip?" Barbara asked.

"Uneventful," Linda replied, "but long. I can hardly wait until there are Farside-based airlines. One might think that with a population of eight million people there would be enough demand right here in Farside that we would no longer need rely on Nearside carriers."

"...except that Farside's economy is still very heavily agricultural and industries based here find telecommuting a very economical way to run a business. Face-to-face meetings such as this will always be quite rare, I think. Plus, almost a majority of Farsiders can fly their own airplanes. We may never have need for commercial air carriers."

Linda shrugged. "That makes this meeting even more mysterious. In a world where face-to-face meetings rarely happen, what might be the necessity that brings me all the way from Lima that cannot be handled by phone? I can hardly wait to find out how much trouble I'm in — and why."

Barbara laughed at this. "I must have an absolutely terrible reputation among the regents! 'Barbara the Terrible!' 'Off with his head!'. No, you're not in trouble. I just have never had the chance to meet you in person and to share views with you over coffee and I thought that ought to be remedied, don't you agree?" Linda smiled. "And Sudamerica is hardly in such turmoil that you can't be spared for a few days, although I would like to hear how you're dealing with the influx of the less-than-savory."

"It is something of a problem," Linda admitted. "It's time-consuming and labor-intensive to screen every applicant in a region where many people do not interact with traditional financial institutions in traditional ways and court records are not easily available to the general public. We must rely much more heavily than we might prefer on personal recommendations and hear-say evidence. As a result, we often admit those who might otherwise be excluded as a danger to the community and we wind up having to deport them. It provides an

extra workload on our Immigration office that means we have to staff much more heavily than you might have to do here.

"Within the past month, we have had to remove nearly three dozen people for failure to internalize the Prime Directive."

"Why not require prospective immigrants to provide more extensive documentation?" Barbara asked. "Push it back out toward the applicants themselves?"

"We could," Linda agreed, "but you have to keep in mind that many of our new acquisitions start out very economically poor as compared to, say, Colorado-in-Farside. Many of them can't afford the extra expense this would generate. Those who can often can't afford the time it takes to gather documents that, in some cases, either don't exist or are not available to them as a matter of public policy. In either of those, only we of Farside have the economic wherewithal and the necessary governmental contacts to actually get the job done."

Barbara nodded her understanding and Linda continued:

"It gets worse. Many of the newcomers start out as or become over the course of their life 'subsistence farmers'. What they know is 'slash and burn'. One of them started a fire that took out twelve thousand acres before it was controlled. We've had to start an educational program to teach them modern farming methods for tropical climates, and we now make everyone go through it before they're allowed to begin operations. Each of the co-ops is responsible for getting all their new members up to speed on what's expected of them. I think we're lucky we were able to stop the practice before it got out of hand.

"But I don't think you brought me all the way here to hear me talk about farming."

"Actually," Barbara answered, "I did. I brought you all the way here so you could talk about whatever is closest to your heart and I could hear it directly from your lips without anyone else standing by to inhibit you from saying whatever you think I need to hear, and with no one acting as a filter to clean up words or opinions they consider — inappropriate."

"In that case, I guess I can now go back home," Linda smiled as she said it, "because I've just given you my number-one hot button issue — actually, probably numbers one, two, and three: immigration, investigation, and inculcation."

"And are you happy with how things are going?" Barbara pressed.

"I think, in that regard, I'm probably a lot like you: I won't be happy until things run so smoothly I'm no longer needed. I have the feeling that won't be for a very long time. The question uppermost in

my mind today is: are you happy with what you're seeing in Sudamerica?"

"Oddly," Barbara smiled, "that turns out to be not simply a good question, but a rather good answer."

"To what?" Linda asked.

"To a personal question of my own. You're here not just for coffee with Barbara, but so that I can interview you for an upcoming position with potentially far-reaching consequences for Farside."

"Is Rossi-Larson retiring?" Linda Rios asked.

"No, but you're close."

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The corporate bizjet with a crowned red griffin on its tail settled onto runway 22L at Detroit's airport and Gunnar Ekberg, SAAB's European Operations Manager, reached across the aisle to shake Leif Thorvaldsson's hand.

"I enjoyed the trip, Leif, and I won't need the plane until Thursday at the earliest. Just bring it back with the tank full," and he smiled and winked.

Thorvaldsson laughed. "I certainly will. It's the least I can do for such a gracious host. I expect Her Majesty is not going to keep me very long. She said it's just a casual get-together, so I expect I'll have your plane back here in plenty of time. I can't thank you enough for the offer of round-trip transportation to Denver not to mention the services of your pilot. I'll find a way to repay you; count on it."

"I have not the slightest doubt," Ekberg acknowledged as he made ready to deplane on his way to a meeting at GM headquarters.

Within the hour, the plane departed for Denver now bearing only Thorvaldsson. It was late in the day when Leif released the pilot, crossed into Farside at the Aurora immigration point, and settled himself into his hotel room to get ready for the next day's meeting with his Queen. At around the same time, a fuel truck in Farside began refueling the SAAB bizjet through a small portal.

The following morning, Thorvaldsson followed his escort to the Aurora monorail station, onto the next departing train, and arrived in Okambo twenty-two minutes later. From there, Thorvaldsson was driven to the Walsh residence for breakfast and the beginning of a two-hour chat with the Queen.

"I hear you have some very upscale transportation, Leif," Barbara teased him over breakfast.

"Thanks to some very upscale friends," Leif explained. "Gunnar Ekberg's schedule fortuitously happened to overlap with my travel plans, and since he almost always travels by private jet..."

"...you get to cross the Atlantic in luxury befitting your position," Barbara finished the thought. "Does he expect anything in return?"

"I think he expects to get treated fairly," Leif mused. "The first time I flew with him was to the Regents' Colloquium in Lisbon two years ago. When he made the offer to provide transportation, I initially refused because of exactly that: the appearance that something improper was happening. We had a very frank chat about it, and he assured me he did not expect anything in return. We always joke about that. He always says: 'bring it back with the tank full'. I'd do that anyway, so he's not asking for anything he wouldn't get even without asking.

"Even so, he is very generous with a very luxurious asset. I try my best to see that he has a case or two of CRB around Jul — I mean 'Christmastime'."

"That doesn't sound like much of a 'present'," Barbara winced. "You can get a case for less than five crowns, can't you?"

"Well, actually, I get it for less than that. A pallet of the stuff, twenty cases maybe, shows up on my doorstep — anonymously (ha!) — every year right around *Lucia*. I must have done Cousteau a favor somewhere in the past, but I can't recall what it might have been."

Barbara and Leif moved into her study and she closed the door to give them a little privacy.

"How are things in Scandinavia?" Barbara offered as an opening gambit.

"No one is complaining except Guido, but he'd complain if everything were going strictly according to his plan," Leif started. "It's a good thing Farside has Alps. It makes for a nice, natural border and we can all simply ignore everything happening south of them. If not for those Alps, we might already have had our first border war."

"Surely Guido's not that much of a troublemaker!" Barbara objected.

"You don't hear of it because the rest of the Regents handle any conflicts before they rise to that level, but, yes, Guido is a royal pain in the ass... no offense."

"None taken," Barbara chuckled. "Should I consider replacing him?"

Thorvaldsson went silent for a moment. "When I called Guido a pain in the ass, that was an opinion. If I were in your position, I would replace him. I'm not in your position, and it's none of my business whom you select to represent you. I have faith that you made your choice for good and valid reasons. Unless you have changed your mind since, it would be wrong to replace Guido simply because I don't get along with him."

"Fair enough. Tell me about any problems you see in West Europe that I may not have heard about via normal channels."

"Royal Dutch Shell," Thorvaldsson said without elaboration. Barbara knew what he meant.

"They will operate under strict no-spill rules," she assured him.

"It's ocean drilling. They can promise whatever they want. When the North Sea gets unhappy, drill rigs go to the bottom and oil gets spilled. That's just the way the Earth is constructed. Wishing won't make it spill-proof."

"They don't have 'limited liability' to protect their Farside operations. Don't you think that will make them adequately careful?"

Thorvaldsson shook his head. "No, the deal you give oil companies — ninety-three percent free-and-clear — means they will make a fortune while everything is going well, and it will pay off their investment in no time at all. After that, if there's an accident, they can abandon their entire Farside operation and just call it 'sunk cost'. It will already have been completely amortized. They lose nothing."

"...except their future profits, an extraordinary pile of loot," Barbara finished. "Is there a solution, or have I made — by your calculation — a catastrophic error?"

"Nadya said something I think has merit," he offered. "She thought if you escrowed something like sixty-five or seventy percent and gave it back after, say, fifteen years of spill-free operation, it might spur them to new heights of technological expertise. They would be on the hook for an extraordinary pile of loot, as you put it, that they only get their hands on if their operations are squeaky clean. It could then be worth their while to develop innovative ways to prevent spills, or (to put it another way) guarantee the capture of every last drop."

"A perfect solution? No, but damn close. If you insist on 'no spills, no way, not ever', you will be disappointed... eventually."

"I'll take that under advisement. Thank you for the input, and thank Nadya for me if you get to talk with her first." Leif nodded in acknowledgement. "Anything else?"

"Sámi," he said. "We have a growing population of Finnish herdsmen who have captured Farside reindeer and mated them — successfully, if you can believe it — with Nearside stock, and the hybrids are not only fertile but massively robust. It's a miracle, but they have an urgent problem with wolves. The wolf populations are growing out of hand—"

"Dire wolves?" Barbara interrupted.

"No, grays. The European Dire wolf doesn't range that far north. In response, the locals are hunting wolves. There's a prohibition against organized wolf hunts — what we call 'pack killer packs' — but we feel the prohibition is widely flouted. Because the

activity happens in stark wilderness, there's little disincentive beyond an individual's respect for the Rule, and I, personally, feel we're losing that battle."

"That's a battle I don't want to lose. Is there anything I can do?"

"You might make a personal appeal to the clan leader, Matti Suokinnen. If you can get him on your side, most of the others will fall into line — I think."

"Set something up. I'll be happy to talk to him."

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Mike Foster yawned wide enough that there was no way to hide it. "I'm so sorry," he told Barbara, "I'm having an awful time with this jet lag."

Barbara smiled and waved his apology away. "No, Mike, it's I who should apologize for dragging you all this way when we could have had the same conversation via telephone. We've never had the chance to sit in the same room and have a one-on-one and I thought it was time to remedy that. Perhaps I should have just bitten the bullet on having you where I could look you in the eye."

"I'd have to forgive you in any case," Mike replied. "My experience is that nothing substitutes for being able to see a person's face in real life. I would have been disappointed had I not gotten to do this."

"Well, then, tell me how things are going in Australia-in-Farside? Are you coping?"

"No worries. AMAX and three other producers are complaining about not being able to dig in certain areas, but the paleontologists are going wild, making discoveries that they say shed new light on Earth's formation on both sides of the gate. The story of the origin of life here in Farside seems to be analogous-to but far-from-identical-with the same in Nearside, and Australia with its Grand Canyon is proving to be a near-perfect laboratory for such studies, especially when one considers that whole trees of species never managed to get a foothold here.

"Meanwhile, where they can dig for uranium and other metals, the mining companies are too busy making money hand-over-fist to have any time left for much of anything else.

"Like Nearside, Farside Australia seems to be great sheep country and the only snag is the Fat Viper which each can consume a sheep every other day. We may have to consider a control program for our own safety."

"I'm uncomfortable with any program aimed at upsetting the balance of nature," Barbara told him with a note of concern.

"We've already done that by introducing herds of flock animals. The vipers' food supply has expanded astronomically from their viewpoint and they seem to find sheep quite tasty — to the point of abandoning their historical food sources in favor of hunting the flocks. They're going to be a problem.

"However, recognizing our obligation to the land, if we can protect the flocks from predation, that will force the vipers to resume predating their traditional food sources. We'll try that first — we are trying that, but the vipers may not cooperate. What then?"

"I see your point," Barbara agreed. "The Crown will not object as long as the killing doesn't get out of hand."

"I can promise that, Your Majesty. The 'control' will be exercised only in a sort of No Snakes Land well away from the Fat Vipers' normal hunting range in a border around the pasture lands. No one will be hunting Fat Vipers except zoologists looking to garner specimens, speaking of which — there is one such who's becoming something of a problem, Dr. Gregory Urbaniek of New York State... The farmers and ranchers have started calling him 'Father Noah'. He collects two of everything and when he thinks no one is looking he bags four of everything."

Barbara sighed. "I have assurances from very many quarters that Gregory Urbaniek is trustworthy as regards the Crown's concern for animal welfare, and he will soon no longer be 'from New York State'. Dr. Urbaniek will take a post as Dean of the new School of Exobiology at Colorado State this Fall. He has my permission to take very many more than 'four of everything' as long as, in his professional judgement, it will not stress the existing populations. Please try to cooperate with him."

"My apologies, Majesty. I did not realize he was on a Crown mission."

"It's not that formal, Mike, not by any means. Gregory manages the Capitol District's Institute for the Study of the Dire Wolf in his spare time — which I fear is about to become much more spare — and his wife, Susannah, is the Chief Ornithologist who looks after our seven Great Ernes."

"They're Farsiders, then?"

Barbara made a face. "Not yet. I think he's waiting to see what kind of signing bonus we'll give him." She chuckled and Mike Foster joined in.

"Tell me about mining," Barbara prompted.

"There's plenty of it," Mike began. "Oh, crikey, I almost forgot!" He fetched a small fabric pouch from his coat pocket and handed it over.

Barbara unfolded the fabric to reveal a polished opal the size of a rat. "Mine?" she asked.

"Yours," Mike confirmed. "It doesn't break any records, but it's damn big anyway. It's taken us since August to get it polished, but it's ready to join the Crown Jewels."

"Mining," Barbara forced the conversation back on track.

"Each of the mining companies digging in Farside produce pills of refined uranium, small enough that, alone, they pose no danger. Naturally, get enough of them together and it will become a problem. We don't let that happen.

"They keep 45% and ship it back into Nearside where (presumably) they sell it. Raw uranium as in those pills is a mixture of U-235, the reactive kind, and U-238, the non-reactive kind. It takes further processing..."

"You can skip all that stuff, Mike. I'm familiar with the whole process."

"Okay. We have a separator running and are building up a very large store of reaction mass. Siemens is building a steamer for us on the north coast.

"Along with uranium, some mines also produce lead which we use for isolating and storing the U-235. Naturally, there are opals as well as other types of ore... We're rolling in wealth. Everybody we talk to on the other side wants to take a bite. Immigration is humming. The population is booming. There have been a few deportations back to Nearside, but nothing we can't handle. Life is good."

"All good?" she asked.

"It's never 'all good', but it hasn't yet gotten to the point where we have to bother you with the part that's not."

"Bother me."

"Well, an economy is like a water-filled balloon. Squeeze it here, it bulges somewhere else. Where? Hard to say.

"The sweet deal you're giving those mining companies is bulging where Australia doesn't like it. Mining concerns are shipping headcount into Farside to work our fields and they're using miners who would otherwise be working Australian claims, producing ore in Australia, and paying income taxes and excise taxes into the Aussie treasury. Last week a shipment of refined metal was stopped at Customs and turned back because of 'safety concerns'. Nonsense, of course, but the shipper can't get his product to the waterfront."

"What does the trade agreement say?"

"We guaranteed no unsafe objects would be brought through the gates, but we never defined what constitutes 'safe'. They wave a Geiger counter over the shipment, and if it ticks they turn it back. Well, this stuff isn't produced in an antiseptic lab. The lead containers should keep stray radiation escaping to the outside, but a smudge of contaminated dirt on the outside can give off enough radiation to cause a rejection.

"When that happens, the shipment comes back, the containers have to be sent through a scrubbing process to make sure the outsides are clean of all debris. It's not a big deal, just an inconvenience. It means we add another step to the clearance processing."

"Okay, so we add another step," Barbara acknowledged. "It's still a good deal for us, isn't it?"

"A very good deal," Mike confirmed. "The situation would have to become nearly intolerable before we would conclude otherwise. Aussie Customs could make it intolerable overnight if they want to."

"Do you have a solution if they do?" Barbara asked.

"We do not have much leverage," Mike offered, "but you already know that. We do not levy import duty on inbound shipments as a matter of policy. Hell, we barely inspect incoming shipments. It's a free-for-all. Somebody could import botulinum toxin and we wouldn't know it until it was too late. Imposing costs or delays on imports would only impact Farsiders, and they don't need any more problems.

"All we have is 'appealing to their better natures' and that's not much. It has been suggested we find another port of entry more amenable to such shipments and divert the product elsewhere in Farside."

"You mean 'another port of entry in Australia'?"

"No, actually. I mean somewhere other than Australia. Singapore? Brunei?"

"That could divert quite a lot of duty revenue," Barbara muttered.

"It's the only lever we've got."

"I wonder if any Nearside ocean freight lines would be interested in beginning operations in Farside?" Barbara offered.

"With the right blend of low import duties and a forward-looking attitude," Mike continued her thought, "we could really make our customers love us."

"They already love us," Barbara countered.

"Well, love us more, then," Mike finished with a grin.

"Let's open negotiations with some ocean freight carriers, find out if they sail to anyplace where we already operate gates, and start making plans to use somebody else's port-of-entry."

"Just remember that Australia is an island both in Nearside and in Farside. We'll need someone to sail it from place A to place B and Farside doesn't yet have any ocean shipping industry."

"Hmm..." she said.

4 – Commerce

Jorge Sepulveda winched the net up out of the water and watched as its silvery bounty glistened in the ship's floodlights. Now came the task of sorting the fish and icing it down to make it ready for market.

Every day the ship brought ashore seafood enough to feed the growing Ensenada colony, but there were always a few creatures in the mix that no one was brave enough to try eating. For these, the San Diego Zoo always kept a staffer standing by to examine, classify, and preserve the sometimes bizarre fauna fetched from the waters of Farside's Continental shelf.

Denise Henik stood on the dock as *Stella Maris* slid alongside. "What have you for me this morning, Jorge," she called to the captain.

"*Muy interesante, señorita,*" he answered, "and this time we keep it alive!"

Denise shrieked, grabbed a line, and swung herself aboard. "Show me!" she demanded. Jorge flipped a hatch cover back and shined a spotlight into the makeshift aquarium. The beast lunged upward toward the light, its jaws agape showing Denise two rows of jagged teeth. She lurched backward instinctively.

"Ju know what is?" Jorge asked.

"It looks like a monkfish," Denise muttered. "What the heck is it doing in the Eastern Pacific?"

"Eating half my catch before I can get it on the deck," Jorge explained with a frown. "Can eat?" he asked.

"If it is a monkfish, you can eat it, but let's make sure of what it is first, okay?"

"I'll go ashore and get a transport tank. I'll be back in an hour."

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Getting Jorge's schooner into Farside had been a major operation. First it was floated into a dry dock and the masts desteped. Then the dry dock itself was raised until the water level inside was the same as the Pacific in Farside. Last, the *Stella Maris* was winched through the biggest gate ever built.

Floating on Farside's Pacific Ocean off the beach at Ensenada and with no dock yard facilities to assist them, the Sepulveda family took another month to restep all the masts manually.

The ship's huge sails meant that Jorge and his family were not dependent on fuel supplies from Nearside for the operation of their business beyond the needs of the diesel auxiliary engine used only when there was no wind or when they needed to generate electricity.

The ship's capacity was such that Jorge only had to take it to sea twice a week to supply Ensenada with all the seafood it could consume, and there was always plenty left over for sale in Nearside — what didn't spoil waiting to clear Customs. The Sepulvedas bristled at the mention of Customs, but they were obedient to the Queen's rule not to violate Nearside laws. The spoilage only deprived the Nearsiders of the healthiest seafood available anywhere on the planet; Farsiders already had their fill.

Periodically, an order would be packaged for delivery to Ensenada's new airstrip, and a business jet reconfigured for cargo would be waiting there for Jorge's ship to tie up at the wharf. It made for an expensive delicacy for the dinner tables of Okambo, but all that would change when the new monorail line finally arrived in their colony. After that, they would have a low-cost land shipping route from Ensenada and Los Angeles through Phoenix and Albuquerque to its connection with the Boulder-Pecos line. Much of the track was already in place, created in many cases by towns that wanted easier access to neighboring towns. There were gaps totaling less than 120 miles to be plugged. Power supply stations were already activated and supplying electricity to communities accreting along the route. Fourteen more windmills and the line would have sufficient coverage to more-or-less guarantee sufficient power to run regular schedules until steady supplies of nuclear power became available.

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Whitey Smith learned his trade in the saddle working for Otto Crenshaw's cattle ranch. Four years of rounding up cattle and herding them hither and yon had given him enough of a grub-stake that he thought he could afford to start his own operation. Not a cattle ranch, but a dude ranch. He wouldn't need thousands of acres and dozens of employees, and the recently relaxed rules on productivity now only required that he support himself and his family — which he didn't have — and be a supportive member of his community.

When Charlene Monti mentioned her plans for almost the exact same thing at dinner that Thursday, Whitey pulled her aside and suggested they partner with each other rather than compete.

"I was thinking I'd concentrate more on the fairer sex, Whitey," she told him. "I suspect you'll be looking for customers among men, no?"

"And couples looking for a week or a weekend to get away from it all," he corrected her.

"Well, then, maybe we should think about combining our stakes," Charlene agreed.

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Originally, immigrants to Farside had been granted large tracts of empty space but with the *proviso* that they had to make one-fifth of it productive — as a way of getting a food-producing economy started. Some operations, however, were granted exemptions from the requirement to be self-sustaining but were also graced with much smaller parcels. The first of these was Tester-Cameron Builders, a firm partly owned by Dennis Cameron. Tester-Cameron was granted its exemption on condition that it took over from Leroy Starkweather the tasks of surveying and platting town centers and outlying land grants. They also designed and built houses, farm buildings, and commercial storefronts. They, along with two other similar companies, were now 'by appointment of the Crown, surveyors, land agents, and builders'.

When the Burkes opened the first general store in Farside, it was housed in a Tester-Cameron building. The New Moot Hall had been erected by DOMEciles Farside, a wholly-owned subsidiary of a Nebraska builder specializing in pre-fab dome structures, and that contract had generated enough business among Farsiders to pay off DOMEciles' initial investment. It was now common for businesses in widely disparate fields to ask for — and get — 'appointments by the Crown' for operating small-footprint operations.

Whitey's and Charlene's dude ranch was one such. They kept cattle, but never more than three dozen head so they didn't need a large area for penning them. The cattle were driven to open range to graze. Other than that, there was the 'ranch house' where the business operation was headquartered and where guests ate and congregated, the dormitory where the guests slept, and the barn used mainly for milking the cows.

At first, running a dude ranch was typical of any small-ranch operation. There were a few experienced cowboys to teach the newbies the arts of riding and roping, two trained dairymen to run that side of the business, a cheese maker to produce items suitable for use as souvenirs for the folks 'back home', and (eventually) two staff to handle reservations, room assignments, and guest relations.

It was that last that caused the greatest challenge to Whitey's and Charlene's business model.

Tuesday night's and Saturday night's entertainment was always square dancing, and the only problems arose when the guests

didn't match up by gender and there would be too many of one and not enough of the other. The first time this happened, Charlene placed an ad in the local St-Louis-in-Farside penny saver seeking experienced dancers to fill in any gaps (of which there were always a few). What Charlene got was not exactly what she had envisioned.

True, they knew how to square-dance, but they had other talents, and when the evening's activities wound down, some of those experienced square dancers wandered over to the bunkhouse with their partners and stayed the night — for an additional fee. Prostitution was not illegal in Farside — very little was — and an enterprising young woman could easily supplement her income with all sorts of work.

Before long, word of this began circulating in Nearside. *Have a real western dude ranch experience, the word-on-the-street said, and find an enjoyable partner for late-at-night activities as well.* Gradually, the S-Bar-M ranch's clientele began to morph into 'male, party of one'. In turn, as the lopsided gender-mix became public knowledge, single women began to see the S-Bar-M as a good place to meet unattached men, and the clientele added 'female, party of one' to the mix. As might be expected, there then were odd weeks or weekends where the extra dancers needed were men. It turned out that an enterprising young man could easily supplement his income with all sorts of work. In less than two years, it was no longer a good bet that this person or that one on the S-Bar-M dance floor was just here for the dude ranch experience.

Whitey and Charlene chuckled at the jokes about them having 'the best little whorehouse in Farside', but not everyone was laughing. Before too very long, their names were mentioned at a Moot, and questions began to be asked.

Another exception was for medical personnel. Very early in Farside's development, settlers recognized the value of having qualified doctors, nurses, and others close at hand to see to the needs of the people. Naturally, one doesn't want the doctor to have to drop everything at the farm or the ranch or the river to rush to the hospital for an emergency.

To entice their targets to consider moving to Farside, a committee of prominent citizens, initially headed by Dennis Cameron but later joined by the Burkes, the Gruders, the Clancys, and Larry and Susan Hopkins along with Dante Robinetti, pledged sufficient gold up front to begin making payments on the candidates' student loans. In return, the newly-minted doctors, dentists, and nurses inked contracts obligating them to work Farside Free Clinics for terms ranging from four years to seven for room and board plus a small

stipend for incidentals. The terms were always highly favorable to the medical staff so no one ever complained about being mistreated. At the end of their indentured servitude, a significant percentage of those medical personnel stayed on and became permanent Farsiders.

For the docs in St-Louis-in-Farside, the procedure they did most regularly was examining 'intimate workers' for their periodic demanded-by-the-Moot health checks.

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"And, finally, a short report from the Secretary of the Moot at St-Louis-in-Farside," Ivan intoned solemnly, "probably subtitled 'A Vignette From A Developing Situation.'" Everybody including Barbara looked up at him to hear what might have happened in St-Louis that would warrant the Privy Council's attention.

"The S-Bar-M Ranch operating a few dozen miles west of the community is developing a reputation among many Nearsiders as a great place to have a real fun weekend getaway. The S-Bar-M and two or three similar dude ranches."

"Nothing wrong with that," Linda Rossi-Larson opined. "Is State having trouble processing tourist visas?"

"No," Ivan continued, "but the doctors at the clinic are hopping doing STD tests on tourists and the Farsiders they've come to do business with. It's wearing them down, I hear."

"STD tests?" Barbara interjected. "Prostitution?"

"Briefly, yes," Ivan explained. "Not professionals, if I understand the details correctly, but rather 'gifted amateurs', mostly women but a few men as well. The Moot has ordered everyone involved in the business — everyone either paying or receiving money for intimate encounters — to both certify that they are not knowingly endangering the health of the community by exposing it to potential STDs and to back up that certification with a clean bill of health monthly from one of the clinic physicians. It is the one service the clinics charge for, and they're apparently making money hand over fist."

Some of the council were chuckling and others wore startled expressions. You can probably guess who was in each category.

"Do we need to take action?" Linda asked.

"I don't believe we do," Ivan assured her. "I think the Moot has the situation under control for the time being. I just wanted you all to have the facts so that no one can blind-side you."

"*Spasibo, Gospodin Deruschka,*" Barbara nodded toward her Prime Minister, "I would appreciate any updates should you hear of any."

"Da."

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When the time for renegotiating the trade agreements between Farside and the United States finally rolled around, Tom Plummer made sure he had Linda Rossi-Larson, Farside's Chancellor, right there at his side. She had insisted that there had to be a complete exemption for goods in transit from Farside-to-Farside via Nearside carriers while those cargo containers were kept under seal. In this way, she hoped to be able to use Nearside airlines and freight trains to ship material expeditiously from one Farside colony to another before it spoiled. Only by being able to totally bypass Customs inspection could perishable foodstuffs be shipped with any expectation they would still be edible on arrival. Dick Schoonover had willingly yielded on that point, so happy was he that he had survived in office long enough to participate in the renegotiation of the trade agreement.

They had already come to an agreement requiring U. S. Customs to clear shipments marked 'Perishable' by the 'time required' on the Customs Bill for the shipment, and required that other shipments would clear within 12 hours.

"But I'm going to need something in return," he warned them.

"You can have anything you want within reason," Tom Plummer assured him, "but after article one I can't imagine what else you might want." Tom referred to the first article of the agreement in which the U. S. government asserted authority to tariff any and all goods and services offered trans-portal. The first trade agreement, negotiated directly by a Congressional committee, had spelled out in detail the items to be tariffed on entry and the ensuing rush of Nearside companies into Farside had produced a tidal wave of products which had not been specified and which were thus not dutiable by Customs. Whole industries had found themselves competing with Farside producers whose costs were a fraction of the Nearside companies'. Schoonover was drooling at the prospect of leveling the playing field via customs duties.

"I'm talking about 'retail sales trans-portal'," Schoonover tossed off.

"What about retail sales?" Plummer asked.

"They'll be prohibited," Schoonover announced matter-of-factly.

"Prohibited... how?"

"Well, actually, we want you to prohibit sellers shipping to retail buyers. I'm not sure we have the kind of muscle you have in that regard."

"How would our people know whether a sale was retail or wholesale? I presume you're planning to allow wholesale transactions."

"Yes, of course. It would remain perfectly legal to sell to Nearside wholesalers," Schoonover explained. "Nearside wholesalers will be licensed to deal into Farside. Farside wholesalers would be required to verify the destination of their shipments are to firms licensed to deal with Farside. If an unlicensed buyer orders material from Farside, we expect that order to be refused."

"Stop me if I get this wrong," Linda began. "You, the U. S. government, will license companies to do business trans-portal and our producers and suppliers will be restricted to dealing only with properly-licensed Nearside companies. As such, shipping to a Nearside residential address via the U. S. Postal Service or a common carrier, would become a violation of this treaty. I think I see where this is going. You can't forbid us the use of USPS for person-to-person mail because that would contravene other international agreements, so you want us to voluntarily give up that access — at least for commercial transactions."

"Okay, but the law in Farside is The Golden Rule. Are you willing to subject your own citizens to the same *regime*?"

Schoonover had a dazed look on his face. "I... I hadn't thought about that," he admitted.

"Because, to be perfectly frank, Secretary Schoonover, we will not subject our people to such onerous regulations unless you are willing to reciprocate equally. And this... this 'scheme' is going to cost you a heck of a lot more to implement on your side than it will cost us on our side."

"And it would be so easily circumvented: Becky Jones of Topeka orders a mammoth wool quilt from a Farside quilt maker. What happens? The package gets shipped from Dorothy Smith to Becky Jones. How do you determine this is not an early Christmas gift from Aunt Dorothy to her favorite niece? Even keeping extraordinarily detailed records on an extraordinarily expensive database won't tell you anything."

"There's an old maxim you teach your Political Science students: Never pass a law you can't enforce. We don't teach that at FIPS because we almost never pass laws, but if we did, this would be 'example #1' of laws you don't want to pass."

Schoonover laughed. "It won't cost us much, if anything at all. Farsiders buy very little from Nearside producers, they buy at

Nearside prices and they pay in gold, and their government doesn't care because their government doesn't charge customs duties on anything! We don't care whether our merchants are dealing at retail or at wholesale. We're just happy they're dealing! Alright, we'll make it illegal to deal other than wholesale-to-wholesale trans-portal and we'll enforce that prohibition the same way you'll enforce it — on the honor system. Deal!"

Linda Rossi-Larson smirked at being checkmated by Schoonover. She really hadn't expected him to use her own culture against her, but she was satisfied nonetheless. He was adapting to the Golden Rule, and that was a good sign.

"It's the best we're going to get," Schoonover told the Senate committee. "As with anything like this — any trade agreement, for example — there will be an admixture of stuff you love with stuff you'd rather not have to deal with. We will be able to protect industries you think need protecting as long as you don't mind sticking it to the consumer, and you've done those same consumers a big favor by making Farside produce — especially Farside *pesca roja* which, I assure you, is out of this world — available to them at reasonable prices."

The instant the Senate voted to approve the new treaty it went into full force and effect.

In Farside, there was a small bit of grumbling over the treaty's anti-dumping provisions, and almost everyone understood that the prohibition of trans-portal retail transactions was likely to be widely flouted by Nearside companies even as Farsiders would find themselves disadvantaged for refusing to violate a Crown edict.

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Barbara's phone rang and she pulled it from her pocket to answer the call. It was Melinda Logan who served as Barbara's part-time personal secretary as well as the Secretary of the Moot. "Good morning, Melinda," Barbara addressed her, "what's up?"

"I was just opening your mail and came across something that I think requires your personal attention. It's of such a nature that I'm sure you will want to see this at the earliest possible moment so you'll have every available second to mull it. I'm not even sure how I might give you an 'executive summary' over the phone, so I'm suggesting you come home and read it for yourself."

"Wow," Barbara muttered quietly. "I'll be home in fifteen minutes."

She put down her shovel, and gave Ernie a peck on the cheek. "Gotta go," she told him. "Business." Ernie stared as she jumped on her ATV.

A quarter hour later, Barbara braked her wheels to a stop at her front door where waited Melinda Logan. Together they entered the Walsh home. Barbara held out her hand and Melinda plopped an envelope into it. Barbara sat and pulled a page from the envelope and began reading.

A Petition To The Crown

May it please Her Majesty: I, Jane Emerson, have resolved to begin doing business within the St-Louis-in-Farside community providing 'sex tourism' services primarily if not exclusively for properly documented visitors from Nearside. The Officers of the Moot have forbidden me to engage in such practice.

I have for some time been similarly employed part-time at the Town and Country Dude Ranch, also within the St-Louis-in-Farside community. It is my intention to become self-employed and to provide similar or ancillary work for other residents of St-Louis-in-Farside as my employees. An appropriate site presently exists and is owned by me. I am aware of the restrictions placed on such businesses by the Moot in the name of community safety, and I fully intend to implement both the letter and the spirit of their law.

I beg the Crown to overrule the Officers of the Moot and to instruct them to allow me to proceed.

and a handwritten signature finished the page.

"Why me?" Barbara asked rhetorically.

"It gets worse," Melinda informed her, handing her a second envelope. Barbara rolled her eyes, took the envelope, glanced briefly at the return address, and extracted the letter from it.

May it please the Crown,

Within the week, one Jane Emerson, resident of St-Louis-in-Farside approached the Moot with a proposal for a new sex tourism business. As the Crown may be aware, St-Louis-in-Farside has several such businesses currently operating and attracting visitors from Nearside along with considerable revenue in Nearside currencies. All these businesses operate under strict supervision of the local medical services and appear not to have caused any harm to the community as regards communicable diseases or to the workers themselves through occupational illnesses.

The Moot has denied Miss Emerson permission to press on in her endeavors and Miss Emerson has expressed her intention to ask the Crown for relief. What follows is information we believe the Crown ought to consider should such a petition for relief present.

Three years ago, the parents of Eloise and Jane Emerson were killed in a tragic accident while helping to raise a barn for one of their neighbors. The community naturally stepped in to provide for the Emerson children, Eloise, then sixteen, and Jane, then 14, and they were briefly housed among neighbors until they could find their economic and emotional feet. The terms of the Emersons' wills left their farm, for which permanent title was granted the following year, to their children. Shortly thereafter both Eloise and Jane became emancipated minors and continued operating the farm, having notable success at doing so. Last year Eloise returned to Nearside to live permanently with relatives there, apparently abandoning her share of the farm to her sister, Jane.

Jane Emerson runs the Emerson farm with the help of a series of farmhands who do the bulk of the labor. Each year, Miss Emerson recruits one or two new hands to replace those who, having saved enough for a stake, bid for their own land. She appears to be quite a shrewd businesswoman.

What concerns the Moot is that Jane Emerson sought part-time employment as an 'escort' at the age of fifteen, and now, at seventeen, seeks to become Farside's youngest 'madam'. The community retains a strong sense that it ought not encourage children to take up such pursuits. We hope that the Crown will agree with the Moot that such employment is inappropriate and uphold its prohibition.

and it was signed by the Secretary of the Moot.

Barbara switched on her phone and began dialing. When it was answered, she said: "Ivan, please summon the Privy Council."

"Problems?" Ivan asked.

"Just for me," Barbara told him with a sigh.

Barbara gave her councilors the executive summary: 17-year-old Jane Emerson, a prosperous farm-owner and in addition already a well-paid escort, wishes to open her own bunny ranch catering to Nearsiders and the Moot is objecting.

"She owns and runs a farm and she's a hooker?" Linda Rossi-Larson asked incredulously.

"I don't know that 'hooker' and 'escort' are necessarily the same thing," Barbara responded. "It may be. I just don't know. The Moot's secretary used 'escort' and Miss Emerson herself was vague on the nature of her employment. I suspect that Miss Emerson — possibly — may not herself be sexually active, but I don't know."

"Would it matter?" Oscar asked.

"What an odd question," Linda opined.

"Why is it odd?" Oscar asked in return.

"Well, she's seventeen," Linda explained. "Wouldn't it matter that a minor is flatbacking for a living?"

"It would in Nearside," Oscar explained. "This isn't Nearside. Pre-teens here pack sidearms — to school. Children here grow up very fast — those that want to — and we don't complain that 14-year-olds know how to operate hay balers. Do you think any of those farm kids don't know where calves and foals come from? This Emerson case is nothing outrageous. Both those girls had to grow up in the blink of an eye. We let our kids assume the responsibilities of adulthood the instant they show their willingness to do so. Why are we surprised at a seventeen-year-old maximizing her potential... so-to-speak?"

"I agree with the Moot," Linda said with finality. "I don't like the idea of children selling sex. It's perverted and it will attract perverts."

Tony Dinardo hung his head. "I agree with you to a degree," he told Linda, "but I have to ask: who's getting harmed?"

"Who? The teenager is getting harmed even if she doesn't yet know it."

"Okay, but she's an emancipated minor," Tony continued. "She's authorized to make bad decisions for herself, and we are not authorized to overrule those bad decisions as long as no one else is impacted."

The discussion tapered off and Barbara sensed that all viewpoints that needed to be aired had been. "Thank you for your input," she dismissed them. "Melinda, please hang around for a bit."

The council members drifted toward the front door and in a few minutes the last of them had exited and headed back to whatever they had been doing before being called into emergency session.

"That was easier than I expected," she told Melinda when everyone else had left. "Send this to St-Louis-in-Farside with a copy to Jane Emerson:

In the matter of Miss Jane Emerson, the petition for relief is granted. The decision of the Moot is reversed. Miss Jane Emerson, as an emancipated minor, is entitled to have her decisions regarding her personal life and choice of career, insofar as those choices do not harm others, honored by the citizens of Farside.

This decision is not to be construed as setting a precedent, nor as approval by the Crown for the chosen lifestyle or business model.

Regulations set in place by the Moot to safeguard the health of the community remain in full force and effect.

Floreat Farside.

"Copy to file, naturally, plus put that in the agenda package for the next scheduled Privy Council meeting. Let me know if you find anything else of an incendiary nature," and she grimaced at Melinda as she headed for the door herself.

Back at the stream, she found Ernie already at work and she grabbed a shovel.

"Reversed?" Ernie asked.

"Yes, damn it."

"It was the correct decision," Ernie told her. He wasn't sure himself that it was, but he felt Barbara needed reassurance.

"I think it was the only decision I could have come to, but I shudder at the precedent it sets — even though I denied setting one. Can you imagine Penelope..."

"Oh, please don't go there," Ernie interrupted, and they both began to laugh nervously.

5 – Quandary

In a darkened control room north-east of the South Africa Farside colony, two pilot-technicians, each flanked by a cluster of support staff, flew their reconnaissance drones over the African Farside countryside. Outside, on a quarter-acre plot in Nearside, sophisticated communications equipment talked to satellites in orbit over Nearside, which satellites talked to small dish antennas seemingly floating independently in African airspace, but actually mounted on those Farside drones. The drones each carried a pair of cameras, one to photograph Farside, the other to photograph — through a viewing portal — the equivalent Nearside terrain. On the vanishingly slim chance of a collision with a Nearside aircraft damaging the satellite antenna, each drone had enough native intelligence to turn around and go home.

The drones' job was to map Farside Africa in sufficient detail that, one day soon, a mag-lev rail line might be laid out and constructed linking the south with the colony in Cairo.

As each pair of images were snapped, they were transmitted back to the South African command center where a team of cartographers from Rand-McNally's Farside Special Projects Division got an immediate copy onto their servers along with GPS coordinates. The crew of cartographers worked three shifts to keep up with the flood of information coming in from the drones. None of them had ever been driven as hard on any other project than this one, and all of them agreed they wouldn't trade their workload for any other assignment R-M might hand them. They were making history, and every one of them knew it. The first Atlas of Farside's Western North America had devoted seventeen pages to listing all the techies that ever touched one of the 4-color plates. No other mapmaker had ever given credit down to the last touch-up artist, and they knew they'd all be remembered for this one.

Their salaries were a little on the 'exalted' side as well. Other mapmakers, not having R-M's preferential position — they were the first to come forward asking permission to map all of Farside — were forced to pay royalties to the company that had been the first Farside 'mapmakers by appointment of the Crown'. R-M corporate kept 2% of the royalties and applied the rest to bonuses for those who did the actual work. Only a little cajoling on Barbara's part had been necessary to make R-M see the light.

Thus far, 'the map' was little more than a strip of terrain almost straight north from Johannesburg angling west to avoid the

Rift, then ever so slightly east toward Cairo, although it was far from complete. There were thousands of paired images that had not even been looked at, including all the images south to Port Elizabeth and west to Cape Town. Before they could impact the map, they would have to be cataloged and assigned to the proper team working whatever section of Africa the images described. While the process was more intense than the traditional process, it was far, far easier than it might otherwise have been. At least they had latitude and longitude values assigned to the images via the GPS satellites.

Along with the mapmakers, engineers from three well-known mag-lev manufacturers worked side-by-side in a joint venture to design the rail line. No single company had the resources necessary to span the entire continent, and the cost of the project would be high enough that anyone involved would surely profit handsomely. It was assumed by everyone at the management level that as the rail line extended north from the Cape and south from Cairo, towns would spring up along its route as had happened in North America and Westeurope. Those towns would, it was hoped, start to produce wealth of a mineral sort that might help pay for the astounding cost of this 17-year project.

From the north, surveyors working from first-cut map drafts were already placing markers and making guesses about the route south from Cairo. As in Nearside, Farside's Nile flooded annually although there were few to take advantage of it. As a result, the greenbelt in the floodplain was very close to being jungle, save only for the acreage reclaimed by Farside settlers. Modern farming methods yielded, as elsewhere in Farside, bumper crops. Of the hundreds of thousands of hectares in the Nile floodplain all but a tiny fraction was overgrowth and difficult-to-impossible to survey effectively. The proposed rail line thus skirted the Nile along the western fringe across a relatively arid although not yet strictly desert landscape. One bridge was being considered about 60 miles to the south of Cairo to bring the rail line onto the eastern shore.

Ground crews composed of surveyors and wilderness guides worked their way south from Cairo and north from Johannesburg making, as they went, the first land route connecting the two points. The nearly-5,000-mile path was expected to take at least a year before the two teams met regardless of the fact they had maps and aerial photographs to help them plan their routes. Periodically, the path-cutting effort would pause as the crews staked out a landing zone where aircraft with fresh supplies could set down to unload fuel, food, water, and replacement headcount.

Gatekeepers also accompanied the teams and were used as a double-check to certify the location by reference to landmarks in Nearside. Hundreds of miles behind the surveyors and pathfinders, construction crews poured concrete stanchions for the future elevated rail line.

Jack Miller grabbed Otoyé Ngumo by the arm as he hurriedly passed by. Otoyé looked at him strangely.

"That last village we got a bearing on this afternoon..."

"Chometa," Otoyé confirmed.

"Yeah, Chometa. Is it likely to have a hospital?" Jack asked.

"Maybe. It would have a clinic or a dispensary. Maybe both. Why?"

"Kalo got hurt. Caught under a falling tree. I think something's broken and our doctor went back on the chopper this afternoon. Do you think we could get him some medical assistance back there?"

"Yes, probably. Where's Kalo now?"

"Coming in on a truck. He'll be here in ten minutes or so. Go find the gatekeeper and fill her in."

"I will," and Otoyé left to track down the team's gatekeeper.

The gatekeeper and Kalo's ambulance showed up seconds apart. The gatekeeper took one look at his legs and said: "I'll go get a wide gate and meet you back here in two." She left at a trot.

As the truck roared down the hand-cut track southward, Jeannie Denoix, the gatekeeper, used a viewer to both track their progress and look for a spot where the landscape on either side of the gate would make transit easy. As soon as they were within the bounds of the village, Jeannie signaled the driver to slow, then pointed to an open area in Farside that corresponded to a similar open area in Nearside. She hopped out of the truck, grabbed a gate pack from the bed and began setting up the frame.

"You have to go alone," Jeannie informed them. "I'm not allowed to cross into Nearside."

"Will you be alright on your own?" Jack asked as he handed her a rifle, a cartridge belt, and a radio.

"For a while," she replied. "Get it done and get back here. I'm not ready to overnight in wilderness."

Otoyé was now team leader as the senior member fluent in both Swahili and Xhosa. When Jeannie clicked the gate on, the truck pushed through and headed for the nearest cluster of buildings.

"Where do we find your doctor?" he asked the first person they came across. The young boy pointed further down the road. Eventually they found a building whose sign named it the Chometa

Free Clinic with a Salvation Army sign off to the side. They parked and gently lifted Kalo's stretcher down and carried him inside. In moments, they were surrounded by nurses and techs who took Kalo deeper into the building while the others waited.

About forty minutes later, a policeman of some sort wandered into the clinic. "Who owns the white truck behind the building?" he asked in Swahili. Otoye admitted owning the vehicle. "Papers," the policeman demanded.

Otoye produced his Farside passport by way of explanation. The policeman seemed unimpressed. He waved indicating the others. "These, too?" Otoye nodded. The policeman shrugged and left.

Another twenty minutes later the policeman was back, this time with reinforcements. Four more uniformed officers each carried handcuffs. "You're under arrest," the Farsiders were told, and they were handcuffed and led away.

At the police station, each was searched and their passports seized. The inspector questioned each separately and each gave essentially the same story — their friend was injured while surveying a course through Farside and they brought him to Chometa for medical assistance. In Farside, Jeannie began to worry as the hours slipped by. Eventually, she used the radio to call the Survey Team Eleven base station.

"They've been gone a long time, over three hours. I'm sure someone would have come back before this to give me a progress report, at least. It's starting to get dark and I'm worried. Something has happened."

"Hang tight. We'll be there in thirty minutes at the outside."

True to their word, twenty-six minutes later, Jeannie heard the rumble of a diesel engine and she waved at the approaching headlights.

"Still no sign of them," she reported. "It shouldn't take this long to patch Kalo up even with two broken legs."

Jeannie opened the gate and one of her rescuers went through to leave a note on a stick in Nearside for the benefit of any who returned here looking for their way back to Farside. The note said: "Will return to check at 2100 local time." Then the truck started off in the direction Jeannie said she had seen her party go.

There wasn't a great deal of vehicular traffic in this part of the world, so the truck's track was easy to follow. Eventually they came to the Chometa Free Clinic and the track that went behind the building. Jeannie opened a small gate and two men, each with radios, stepped through. One headed for the Clinic building; the other stayed right near the gate listening to the very short progress reports coming back from the forward scout. Soon the forward scout was back.

"I asked inside the clinic," he reported. "They still have Kalo and he's sedated but his legs are back together and he's going to be okay in a few months. I gave them 10 Crowns for their trouble and I think they were pleased. The others were arrested about an hour after they all arrived with Kalo and they've been taken to the police station. Suggestions?"

"Rescue them?" Jeannie asked.

"How?"

She pursed her lips in thought. "Open a gate inside their cells and let them walk out."

"Possible," the team leader mused. "Let's see what we can see."

The team's vehicle had been taken to the police station as well, which made it possible for the rescue team to go directly there. With darkness now fully upon them, however, it required a scout to walk ahead with a lantern while the rescue team, observing from Farside, followed. It took over twenty minutes before the first team's truck came into view.

Jeannie jumped down from the truck and began to wander around, pushing bushes aside while her escort slashed the fronds to the ground. In an instant, she was up to her knees in mud.

"Quicksand!" she shrieked, and two others raced up to help drag her clear. "This is going to be a problem," she informed them. "The holding cells are right here," and she pointed at the mire.

"Where's the front office?" the team's leader asked. Jeannie pointed to a dry, open patch of ground.

Survey Team Eleven contacted the Regent's Office by radio and reported the events of the day. It goes without saying that the Regent was not pleased but he was most unhappy that the Chometa police garrison seemed so willing to risk an international incident. He contacted the Tumbuzia Foreign Office to set up a conference with their President, Gabriel Roberts. Their Foreign Office seemed not very surprised and Gideon Matowa, the Johannesburg Regent, guessed that they had already been made aware of the situation in Chometa. They took Matowa's number and promised a call-back.

Matowa didn't wait long. By his office clock, only nine minutes had passed before his phone rang and a voice from the Tumbuzia Foreign Office announced, 'President Roberts'.

"Regent Matowa," Roberts began, "thank you for calling. My staff were unsure who in Farside we ought to contact about your invasion of our peaceful country. Are you aware of what has happened?"

"I have reports from the survey team in the Tumbuzia district, but your phrasing makes me unsure we have both gotten the same story. What has been told to me is that a worker felling trees in Farside was injured — two broken legs is what I heard — and was brought through a gate in search of a hospital or clinic where his injuries could be attended. Have you a different picture?"

"The picture I have is that Farsiders entered Tumbuzia without clearance by our Customs and Immigration ministries, bringing an unregistered vehicle in with them, and they were armed," Roberts spoke with a definite tone of animosity in his voice. "In my country, we call that 'an invasion'."

"President Roberts, you have my apologies for our people giving you the wrong impression, and my assurance that this was not an invasion as the term is commonly understood," the Farside Regent soothed. "I hope that we can come to an understanding that is mutually beneficial so that our people can get back to their Farside tasks expeditiously."

"You will have to make reparations for the unlawful actions of your people," Roberts announced. "We do not yet have a figure for that but my people are working on that right now."

"Reparations?" Matowa responded. "In what way have you been harmed by three men transporting an invalid, seeking to find medical help for his injuries?"

"You have violated our territorial integrity!" Roberts bellowed. "Our police garrison had to be called into action to secure the area of your unlawful presence! Your soldiers are now being guarded by police with other, more important duties! All of this harms our economy," he finished.

"I see," Matowa answered softly. "I should advise you that we in Farside operate strictly on a precept known as The Golden Rule. Are you familiar with it?"

"Of course," Roberts continued to bluster, "everyone knows it. Now that you have invaded our country, you must not complain when we invade yours."

"Yes, well, you have my telephone number," Matowa wrapped up his side of the conversation. "Call me when you have news. Good night."

His next call was to Deruschka who was just stepping out of his shower preparatory to an expected busy day. Ivan's personal secretary intercepted the call, collected a few salient details, and advised Matowa to expect a call-back within the hour.

When Ivan stepped into his office area, he found his secretary waiting to brief him on the status of current events. Very often, there were no 'current events' — Farside just wasn't having any conflict

situations that Ivan had to deal with — and Ivan would get straight to his ordinary routine. On rare occasions — and this promised to be one of them — Ivan would have to be a real Prime Minister.

"The Johannesburg regent is waiting for you to call back," his secretary informed him and Ivan raised one eyebrow.

"Johannesburg? What's happening in Johannesburg?"

"One of the survey crews had to transit into Nearside to get medical help. They've been arrested by the local authorities and charged with 'invasion'. Regent Matowa wants your help dealing with a very angry and truculent President Roberts of Tumbuzia."

"*Hmm...*" Ivan responded. "Alright, get Matowa on the phone. Let's see if we can't clear this up in a hurry."

A moment later, Matowa's phone rang and the secretary put him and Ivan together.

"So, this is all just extortion," Ivan summarized Matowa's report when the regent had finished speaking. "Roberts wants a payoff from the wealthy inhabitants of Farside."

"I don't see it as anything else," Matowa agreed. "He sees an opportunity to profit — personally, I suspect — and needs a little time to figure out how much he can ask for without paying a political penalty."

"I can tell you that he had better keep it to a number that can be defended as 'reasonable cost of vetting these strangers as being who they say they are'," Ivan muttered with a scowl. "If he tries to shake us down for more than that, we can make his life very unpleasant."

"Let's get that pirate on a three-way conversation."

His secretary dialed the Tumbuzia Foreign Office number and waited for a connection. "His Excellency Ivan Deruschka, Prime Minister of Farside, for President Gabriel Roberts," she announced to the operator. There was almost no delay before Roberts picked up the call.

"Prime Minister Deruschka," Roberts began, "I am honored."

"The honor is mine, President Roberts," Ivan cut him off. "Allow me to offer you Her Majesty's fondest regards and her wish that relations between Farside and Tumbuzia will always be characterized by the deepest expressions of friendship. I am calling today to make sure the bonds of friendship between us remain strong and grow stronger. We seem to have given you and your countrymen the wrong impression by our emergency entry to your nation in search of medical assistance. Tell me, has our injured worker been tended to? That is the matter that should be our highest concern right now."

Roberts was caught slightly off-guard by Ivan's opening statement. It sounded to him as though Deruschka had not been

informed of the demand for reparations. "Your worker has been tended to by the medical staff at the Chometa Free Clinic and I have been told he is resting comfortably..."

"The others," Ivan again cut him off mid-sentence, "have you by now determined that they are no threat to Tumbuzia's sovereignty?"

"Ah, that is another matter," Roberts tried to regain his rhetorical footing. "Your people were armed when they entered Tumbuzia. You talk of 'bonds of friendship', but send armed men into our peaceful communities. I do not think that is a very friendly thing to do, do you?"

"President Roberts," Ivan used his most obsequious voice, "Tumbuzia is a civilized nation, but beyond the nearest gate is an Africa that looks as yours might have 5,000 years ago. It is utterly primitive. Would you go into such an environment unarmed? Naturally, Farsiders are armed when working in such a primitive land. That doesn't mean they are a threat to you or to Tumbuzia. Tell me, did they resist being arrested?"

"I do not have any report that says they resisted arrest," Roberts admitted.

"There. You see? They did not resist arrest because they knew they had done nothing wrong and that the authorities would quickly see that. Had they been there as part of an invasion force, is that the sort of behavior you would have expected? No, of course not. I hope you are beginning to see that your concerns for Tumbuzia's safety and security are unfounded, and that our people will be released soon so they can get back to the important work they are doing in Farside."

"Yes, exactly what work are they doing in Farside that involves Tumbuzia?" Roberts demanded.

"They are scouting the route for a rail line connecting Cairo and Johannesburg," Matowa inserted himself into the conversation. "When it is complete, Tumbuzians will be able to ship and receive goods to and from all points along the line," he continued. "Of course, if Farside and Tumbuzia are not on a friendly footing..." His voice trailed off as an invitation to Roberts to finish the thought.

"Do not try to bribe me," Roberts roared at Matowa. Matowa had to stifle a laugh at Roberts' objection; he had no doubt that a bribe was exactly what Roberts was fishing for. "We still have to resolve the matter of your people illegally invading Tumbuzia..."

"So," Ivan took back the conversational reins, "you still insist you have been invaded. I think we have very little to 'resolve', as you put it. Farside insists no invasion happened; you insist it did. We see

very few options ahead of us. Farside and Tumbuzia are at war, or will be soon. When may we expect your declaration of war?"

"I don't think it's necessary to go to war," Roberts began to back-pedal. "If Farside merely reimburses Tumbuzia for the inconvenience it has been put to..."

"You just said you couldn't be bribed, President Roberts, and now here you are suggesting Farside bribe you to calm your objections," Ivan snapped. "Very well, let me offer you a bribe. If you immediately release our people and guarantee the safety of the one we must leave behind in your country while he heals, Farside will refrain from deposing you and replacing you with someone more disposed to treating us as the friends we wish to be. Do you need us to offer anything further?"

Roberts slammed the phone down onto its cradle, ending the conversation.

Ivan Deruschka suspected he had pushed the tyrant too far too fast. "Get them out of there," he told Matowa. "Do whatever you need to get them all clear as quickly as possible, including the injured man."

"Right away," Matowa answered and hung up his end of the conversation.

Ivan next called the palace to report what he had just done in Farside's — and thus Barbara's — name.

At Jeannie's direction, the locked trunk containing gate assemblies had been loaded onto a truck and moved south to the vicinity of Chometa, along with whatever construction material the team could quickly scrounge. At the site of the Chometa police station, Farside trees were being felled and moved into place over the quicksand pit to provide a platform from which to work. One team member was designated to observe through a viewer the activity within the police station and to report anything that appeared to signal danger for the prisoners. As soon as the quicksand pit was covered, Jeannie set up a gate at a point corresponding to 'inside their cell' and between them and the front office. The gate popped open and the three prisoners, recognizing their friends through the opening, scrambled back into Farside. No one in the main barracks had been on guard duty, so it would be some time before anyone noticed the escape.

At the Chometa Free Clinic, another gate opened and a team of two entered the office area to the astonishment of the staff there. "Can the injured man travel?" they asked, and were assured that his legs were sufficiently immobilized that he could be transported safely. "But go easy on him," the doctors warned. They quickly passed him

and his stretcher-cot through the gate to safety before dropping a 5-crown coin on the desk and closing the gate.

At the police station, a corporal (judging from his uniform) was on duty at the front desk. Behind him, a gate popped open and he turned in time to see Otoye Ngumo and another step through into the otherwise-empty room. They both held large-caliber revolvers pointed at the corporal who raised his hands instinctively.

"Personal effects of the prisoners," Otoye snapped in Swahili, and the corporal pointed at a cabinet across the room. Otoye motioned with his gun and the corporal grabbed a set of keys and hurried toward the cabinet. He unlocked it and retrieved a box containing four Farside passports, four envelopes containing pocket contents, and four gun belts. "Keys to the truck," Otoye demanded and the corporal fetched a set of keys from the desk drawer. The three exited the police station and circled around back where the truck was parked. The corporal sat between them as they navigated the streets of Chometa heading back toward their original drop-off point. Meanwhile, a team in Farside led by Jeannie was doing the same, bringing the spare gate back with them. In a few minutes, the truck drew to a stop near the marker placed by the rescue team and waited. As soon as Jeannie arrived, she opened the large gate to let the truck — minus one police corporal — back into Farside. Jeannie broke the gate down and stowed it with her other equipment, locking the chest with the key hanging from a lanyard around her neck. The two trucks headed south toward the last landing strip they had carved out of the wilderness. Waiting for them there was a helicopter to take Kalo back to Johannesburg's hospital where he would recuperate.

With Kalo safely on his way back to civilization, the rest of the team headed back toward their encampment.

"How long before the survey is out of Tumbuzia?" Jack asked Otoye.

"Two weeks... maybe three," Otoye responded.

"Let's have everyone be extra careful. We can't get away with this a second time," Jack told him. Otoye nodded agreement.

Deruschka's phone rang and his secretary picked it up to be greeted by a stream of vituperation she had never — as far as she could recollect — been exposed to before. She let the caller rant, there being little else she could do short of hanging up. When the volume seemed to taper off, she cautiously asked "May I ask who's calling?"

The stream of verbal abuse began anew, but at least this time it was prefaced by "This is President Gabriel Roberts of Tumbuzia!" so at least she had a name she could pass to Ivan.

Ivan picked up the phone on his desk to hear Roberts continuing to bellow insults and imprecations. He let him continue uninterrupted until Roberts ran out of steam as he knew he must. Eventually the noise abated and Ivan was able to get in a few carefully-chosen words.

"President Roberts, I can't see why you're upset. We have done our level best to restore your country to the condition it was in before the so-called invasion by Farside. All four of the Farsiders you claim were the invasion force have retreated into Farside along with their personal possessions and the unregistered truck you so vehemently objected to. No Tumbuzians have been killed, wounded, or otherwise damaged save only their pride, such as it is. The only evidence of our having been there at all amounts to a few tire ruts that will disappear with the next rain. Really, what more could we have done to make Tumbuzia whole again?"

"I will raise this issue before the U.N. General Assembly! You will be sanctioned for your outlaw ways! No one will deal with you! Your economy will be ruined!"

Ivan was trying as hard as he could to keep from laughing. There was not, as the Americans might say, a snowball's chance in Hell the U.N. might sanction all of Farside. For one thing, such a *diktat* was completely unenforceable if it could be passed in the General Assembly and not be vetoed in the Security Council. For another, nations presently profiting greatly from trade with Farside and those who hoped in the future to profit would be disinclined to throw those profits away. Tumbuzia could not even make a plausible case that they had been harmed even for those countries that hated Farside for purely ideological reasons — and there were precious few of those.

"I had really hoped that we might find a basis in friendship where Tumbuzia and Farside might work out their differences, President Roberts," Ivan suggested. "I'm disappointed that you seem so disinclined to find common ground with us. I presume that when we select locations for depots and marshaling yards on the Cairo-to-Johannesburg high-speed line we should avoid Tumbuzia? If we can't be assured of a cooperative Nearside government and a ready supply of Nearside agents, it would be difficult to make such an arrangement work in any case. And we had such high hopes..."

"You were planning a station in Tumbuzia?" Roberts asked.

"Several, probably," Ivan answered. "We normally site stations about forty miles apart to allow trains heading in opposite directions to pass each other safely. That means there might be two or three stations in Tumbuzia-in-Farside. Surely some of those would have provided a means for Tumbuzians to profit from Farside commerce and transportation facilities. It's a shame, really, because

Tumbuzia has such great potential given the right circumstances. I had envisioned Tumbuzia as an economic powerhouse for its region, but now..."

Roberts was envisioning Tumbuzia as an industrial dynamo with all the wealth that entailed, and where there was wealth, there was opportunity for a clever politician to profit from it. Tumbuzia, the illustration in the dictionary for 'backwater', was unlikely to ever become an industrial dynamo, but it did have hidden treasures in the form of unusual mineral deposits. However far-fetched Roberts' dreams of poached riches, somebody could make a nice living on what the land covered.

"Perhaps I have been too hasty ascribing ill intent to your citizens for their unfortunate incursion," Roberts soothed. "For the sake of continued international good will, let us put that all behind us and move forward."

"Nothing would please Her Majesty more," Ivan assured him. "Perhaps you should appoint a minister for trans-portal relations so that, should anything similar occur in the future, there would be a single point of contact for your police and military to coordinate with and thus avoid embarrassing misunderstandings. How does that sound to you?"

"That sounds like a very good idea, minister. I will select someone today. Shall I have the new minister contact you?"

"Oh, no," Ivan objected softly, "Gideon Matowa is the Regent for the Johannesburg region. He would be the one most likely to know what's happening in this part of Africa. Your government should coordinate directly with Matowa. I'm certain your Foreign Office has his contact information. I think you should establish a liaison with Johannesburg as soon as practicable.

"I'm so glad we were able to sort this out. I would have been disappointed to have to inform Her Majesty that there had been a falling-out between us. Thank you for your understanding and cooperation, President Roberts, and the best of luck going forward."

"And to you as well, Prime Minister," Roberts offered before breaking the connection.

6 – Unlawful Commerce

The phone at The High Commission for Pakistan was answered by a receptionist who routed it to a Public Information officer. The PIO engaged the caller in some small talk before transferring it to the military attaché who re-asked most of the questions the PIO had posed.

"I can get you a gate," the caller had offered originally.

"What kind of gate are we talking about?" the attaché wanted to know.

"The kind that lets you enter Farside," the caller explained.

"Why do we need our own gate?" the attaché asked. "Anyone who needs to cross into Farside just flashes their passport these days and walks through. Besides, our treaty with the Kingdom of Farside prohibits us owning our own gate. It prohibits you having a gate. Where did you get it?"

"That doesn't matter," he was told. "If you're not interested, I'll go find someone who is."

"If we change our mind on this, can we contact you?"

"You can't, but I'll call you back in a day or two if it's still available. Whom should I ask for?"

"My name is Taras," the attaché told him. "Ask for me."

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Barbara's phone rang. She glanced at the panel and answered the call. "*Dobryy vecher, Nadya,*" she greeted her Regent for Westasia, "to what do I owe your call?"

"*Dobryy den, Your Majesty,*" Nadya responded, "I think we have a security problem."

"Do I need to get Tony Dinardo on the line?" Barbara asked.

"I'm already on with Nadya, ma'am," Tony chimed in. "Nadya called me first." Barbara smiled, secure in the knowledge that her lieutenants were merely 'keeping her in the loop' and were already handling whatever the problem was.

"What are we looking at, Tony?"

"Nadya received a call from her counterpart in the Kremlin to let her know that someone is offering a gate for sale to the highest bidder. We thought you ought to be aware of that."

"I'm guessing the Kremlin turned the offer down?"

"Yes, the Kremlin turned the offer down cold. They're happy with the arrangement they have with Farside and are unwilling to put it

at risk unnecessarily. I suspect they also have a healthy suspicion of anyone offering them something that could so easily jeopardize the good relations they enjoy trans-gate. It could have been a test of their commitment by us, one they would not want to fail.

"That's all we have so far. The call wasn't traced before it ended, so we don't have any information about who or where."

"What is your estimate of the exposure, Tony?"

"I just got off the phone with Tricia Murphy after asking her that exact question. Tricia's estimate is that we are safe from all but the most highly-placed Gatekeepers. In fact, she suggested that no one below Larry Gordon, her Second Keeper, could successfully abscond with a working gate."

"And the reason for her confidence is..." Barbara prodded.

"We're both asking the same questions," Tony noted. "That means I'm doing my job. Tricia told me she would discuss it with you in fine detail should you ask but that I, Farside's Minister for Security, didn't have enough clearance."

"I think I need to give Tricia a call," Barbara muttered. "I never realized we had such top secrets. Tony, thank you for staying on top of this. I want you and Nadya to keep your lines of communication open to close this down as quickly as we can. *Spasibo*, Regent Simonova." She disconnected and immediately dialed Tricia Murphy.

"Tricia, can you tell me why you think we're in so little danger of losing a gate?"

"Not over the telephone," Tricia answered. "I'll come over and tell you face-to-face."

"That secret?" Barbara asked incredulously.

"That secret," Tricia confirmed.

"I'll get some coffee started," Barbara told her.

Tricia's ATV crunched the gravel in Barbara's driveway a short while later. Tricia was still in jeans from working a riverbend, something she did whenever the pace of business allowed which, these days, was often. Dan's time was heavily devoted to managing the technical side of their business, but he would occasionally also spend time working their claim. Between them, they had banked well over 17 kilos of gold with Oscar Gruder. It was peanuts compared to what the laser business brought in, but it was good exercise and contributed to the ever-expanding Farside economy.

Tricia pushed through the front door without knocking and Barbara handed her a steaming cup of coffee dressed the way she liked: lightly sweet and deep brown. They sat.

"I make it a point never to discuss gate security except 'in person'," Tricia explained. "We *think* our telephone system is secure,

but I'm unwilling to risk the future of Farside on what we think, so I never talk about this unless I can actually touch the other person.

"I have also, on my own, declared this topic 'Farside Management Top Secret', and I don't share it with anyone who doesn't have a need-to-know. And you, of course.

"Some years back, you may recall, right after the establishment of The Gatekeepers' Guild, I looked at your presentation document and realized we had a serious security hole. With Bob Larreau's permission, I re-architected the chipsets from five separate chips for the Type-II gates to one chip which is what we now use in the Type-III and -IV gates, all of the various configurations. Just after that, by your order, all Type-I and -II gate chips were destroyed. Advancing technology had already rendered them obsolete to the point that I don't believe it's possible to find chips of that sort anywhere commercially anymore. That is, even if we wanted to construct an original Type-I or Type-II gate today, we couldn't because no one is making the needed hardware.

"The Type-III gates were the first to implement all of the wave generators on a single chip, and the software for doing that is next-to-impossible to find even if someone were able to deconstruct the microcode. Along with that, there are security interlocks built in to the code such that a gate can be locked to a particular place based on the VORs that are operating nearby. When the chip starts up, it checks for the presence or absence of certain VOR signatures. If all the required signals are present, and there are no extraneous signals not on the 'ignore' list that is also built in to each separate chip, the wave generators start and the gate opens. If a chip is missing only two required signals or if there is even one extraneous signal it doesn't know about, then depending on how that individual chip was configured, it may start one or two extra wave patterns or fail to start one or two required patterns. What happens then is..."

"...the gate doesn't open," Barbara suggested.

"Exactly," Tricia finished. "There are several alternative configurations the chip selects randomly if it detects that something is, in its opinion, wrong. What this means is that you can't move a gate far from its assigned position. As little as a quarter-mile is often enough to render it inoperable. That's a Type-IIIA gate or Type-IVa gate: location-locked.

"There's another form of security we implemented shortly after location-locking started being used. We expired the software on an irregular schedule — it varies from chip to chip. When a gatekeeper powers a gate on, the gate sends a message to the assigned gatekeeper's phone with a warning about how much time remains before the software expires, or it's a message that the

software has already expired, in which case the gate doesn't open. Some gatekeepers who have responsibility for many gates have taken to affixing a strip of masking tape to the gate frame on which they write the current expiration date as a reminder to themselves. These gates, the 'b' configuration, must connect to the secure site maintained by the Guild to get a periodic download of a fresh expiration date. It's also the way we guarantee that every gate always has the latest release.

"All 'b' configuration gates are operated via an app that gatekeepers have on their phones. They won't open except for a gatekeeper or someone who has stolen a gatekeeper's phone along with the gate. Those phone apps also expire and must be refreshed periodically, and the schedule is potentially different than the schedule for the gate. Steal a gate, steal a phone. You may have 6 days left on the gate, but only 2 days left on the phone. After 2 days, you're out of business.

"So, you can see why I think we aren't in any real danger of losing a gate. The 'a' configurations must be very close to where they're supposed to be — and that will always be in Farside — or they just stop working. The 'b' configuration gates may work for a short while after being stolen, but unless their technicians are all genius level and can figure out where to zap the microcode with a new expiration date, eventually they'll just quiesce. And when they quiesce, they also wipe some operating code, including the area where the last expiration date was stored.

"If a thief doesn't get it exactly right — and 'exactly right' takes several different forms — they've stolen a gate frame and chip and wires that might as well have just been bought at the local computer hobbyist store."

"I feel much better," Barbara sighed. "How many people know what you've just told me?"

"Dan, of course. Larry Gordon is the only person other than we two who knows about security to this level. There are a half dozen programmers that are read in on the security software. They do not have passports as a matter of policy, nor do I anymore, nor does Larry. I think some of the senior gatekeepers may have guessed or suspect that the gates are theft-proof, but that's still speculation."

"So, we're in no real danger," Barbara confirmed to herself aloud. "Suppose a gatekeeper defects with a gate?"

"That's the only real exposure we have," Tricia agreed. "If it's a Type-IVb gate that's stolen — and there are very few IIb's left — there is, again, no exposure because the IVb software will only refresh if the connection involves zero Nearside network nodes. If a gatekeeper snags a IVb and moves it into Nearside, when the current

expiration date is reached the gate software itself will recognize that the new software is being shipped via a Nearside connection and it's as if someone hit the Big Red Switch: the chip erases itself. That chip will never — until we get it back here and resurrect it — operate again."

"So, we don't care that someone may have stolen a gate," Barbara confirmed.

"We don't have to care, but I do," Tricia responded. "Gatekeepers take an oath and we impress upon them during training that we are serious about them keeping that oath sacred. If there's a gatekeeper who's gone rogue, I want to know who it is so we can correct that behavior appropriately."

"What does that mean: '*appropriately*'?" Barbara asked.

"That's not up to me," Tricia replied.

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Dan Murphy read the text that had been sent to him, Tricia, and Larry. It said simply: '*Problem solved.*' A moment later, Tricia responded: '*Expo at one o'clock, my office.*'

At one o'clock on the dot, Larry entered Tricia's office, closed the door behind him, and sat down. Tricia and Neal Bennett, the team leader for gate security software, were the only others there.

"Is Dan not joining us?" Larry asked. Tricia shook her head. "Okay, Neal, the floor is yours."

Neal stood and began to sketch a diagram on the whiteboard. As he drew and talked about what he was drawing, the others nodded in understanding. "The gatekeepers' *app* will issue a very quiet *ping* to each b-configuration gate in the vicinity and as the gate software responds, it will also echo that response back to Security Central. That will give us a more-or-less constant inventory of gates. If a gate is moved into Nearside, it will no longer hear the *ping* and it won't respond. If Security Central suddenly isn't getting a periodic response from some gate, it's because it has been moved out of Farside. We can tell from the last response which gatekeeper was physically closest to that gate. That will probably be your culprit.

"If a bunch of gates suddenly go missing, it's because the gatekeeper has crossed into Nearside with one or more gates. That will definitely be your culprit.

"This software update will be rolled out later today and pushed to all gatekeepers. It won't prevent a gate being stolen, but it will tell us where (approximately) the gate was when it disappeared, and it will tell us who was nearby when it disappeared. Knowing 'which gate' and 'which gatekeeper' will also tell us how much time we have before the

gate quiesces. If it's an unacceptably long time, we can roll a team into Nearside with the gate's unique kill-code and have them remotely destroy it." He looked at his two bosses expectantly.

"Where is the new software situated?" Tricia asked.

"We're putting it in with the accounting software. It looks like a usage-logging subroutine. Roger Ennis has agreed to insert it under his project's authority. I don't think anyone will suspect what it's actually doing."

"Okay, do it," Tricia ordered.

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Within days, Tricia started receiving daily summary reports from Neal Bennett's secret inventorying routine. After a week or so of reports all of which ended with the same status — 'All present and accounted-for' — Tricia called Neal Bennett back for a face-to-face assessment.

"Does this mean what I think it means, Neal, that none of our gates have been moved into Nearside?" Tricia asked.

"That is the situation as I see it," Neal answered. "Whoever is offering a gate for sale, whichever gate is being offered, that gate is still here, still under our control. All present and accounted-for."

"And all Type-III and Type-IV gates known to exist are being reported?" Tricia pressed.

"I don't understand the question," Neal responded. His face wore an expression of concern.

"I mean," Tricia continued, "this isn't a list of 'all gates we've ever found via the *app*' but rather 'all gates we have ever built', isn't it? Have we a comprehensive inventory of all gates ever built, and have we compared that inventory against the list reported by your software?"

"Yes, that's correct. All the gates being reported match one-to-one with the inventory of all gates we've ever issued to gatekeepers and not yet withdrawn from service."

"What's the status of gates withdrawn from service? Do we know where they all are?"

"Those gates are stored in Aurora — only the frames — after the chips are removed, scrubbed, and stored separately, presumably by someone at the Guild. That's beyond my knowledge. Everything I know about that operation is what I see on annual inventory reports, so you know as much or more than I since those reports are issued out of the Master's office and countersigned by the First Keeper, you."

"Push a copy of the *app* to my phone, please, Neal. I want to see if any of the chips in storage will answer your *ping*."

"You store them powered?"

Tricia slapped her forehead. "Duh. No. But that gives me an idea. We need to certify that every chip sent to storage has, in fact, been wiped clean. I'll put somebody on it."

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When the Pakistani military attaché answered the call, he was surprised to have been given a second chance at his own gate. In the meantime, he had received clearance to make the purchase. "Eight hundred million Euros," the caller responded to his inquiry. Even so, it was less than the upper limit he was authorized to spend.

"I can deal at that level," the attaché assured the caller. "How would you like to proceed?"

"You will deposit the funds into my account and when I receive confirmation I will contact you again and make arrangements for delivery of your purchase. My account is..."

The attaché interrupted the caller. "You're saying we pay for it up front before we even see evidence that you have a gate? That doesn't sound very attractive as a proposition."

"It does require that you exercise a little faith, yes," the caller responded. "Don't you think it's worth the risk?"

"Is there a user's manual or some kind of documentation that goes along with it?" the attaché asked. "Something we could look at, perhaps, to boost our confidence?"

"I don't think there were ever 'manuals' in the sense you're thinking of," the caller told him. "There is a little device that comes with it that allows you to turn it on or off with the press of a button. I've tested it and it seems to work."

"So, you could use that gate to transit from Farside to Nearside yourself? Undetected? Why would you sell that at any price when you could use it to loot whatever you wanted from this world? Why not simply empty the cash drawers at the local bank? This is sounding more and more like a scam. We're going to need some better assurances from you before we proceed. What can you offer in that regard?"

The line disconnected.

His office door opened and a head poked into the room from the other side. "Did you get it?" Taras asked the head.

The head nodded. "Maidstone, UK."

"Disappointing," Taras muttered.

"Yes. Another few seconds and we would have had the actual telephone number. I wonder if he suspects we were tracing him."

"I would be surprised if he did not. Very well. Package the recording and send it."

A short while later an email arrived at the Watch Desk at Farside's Security Directorate. Since it was marked 'urgent', they immediately called Tony Dinardo who roused himself from sleep, signed onto the Directorate's secure connection, and checked his incoming mail. The topmost item was a note from the Pakistani consulate in London. It had a sound file attached in addition to some explanatory text:

'The call was traced only as far as Maidstone in the UK. Sound recording attached FYI'.

Tony slipped his earphones on so as not to wake Melissa and started playing it.

"...I don't think there were ever 'manuals' in the sense you're thinking of," the caller could be heard speaking. "There is a little device that comes with it that allows you to turn it on or off with the press of a button. I've tested it and it seems to work..." he finished.

A chill ran down Tony's spine. He grabbed his phone and called Dan and Tricia Murphy. He didn't care that it was 2am and he knew Tricia wouldn't care either.

"Your gate problem just went critical," Tony told Tricia when she answered the phone.

Tricia was immediately fully awake. "What happened?" she demanded.

"Whoever is selling a gate," Tony started, "is selling a Type-II gate."

"How?" Tricia asked, a note of horror creeping into her voice, "they've all been taken out of service."

"Apparently not all of them," Tony opined. "This one has a device that can turn it on or off remotely according to the person trying to sell it. That's why I pegged it as a Type-II. It has a kill switch."

"I have to think about how I'm going to handle this," Tricia told him. "Let me be the one who breaks the news to Barbara."

It goes without saying that Barbara was less than pleased with Tricia's news.

"How can there be an unaccounted-for Type-II gate still functioning?" Barbara fumed. "Didn't we log them all in? Wasn't there a list that we checked each gate against to make sure we had them all?"

"I don't think I ever had such a list," Tricia begged off. "I don't believe we ever knew how many gates there were in existence. We just issued a notice that all gates were being replaced with Type-IIIs and gatekeepers around the world sent orders for enough IIIs to cover their needs. When the IIIs were put into service, we expected an equal number of IIs to be returned. That's the only gate inventory I ever knew of, and it was strictly honor-system."

They both went silent, thinking, as minutes passed. Finally, Barbara spoke up:

"Kill-codes," she announced. Tricia looked up expectantly, so Barbara continued: "Every Type-II ever issued that was able to be remotely-operated had two four-digit codes associated with it and they were all unique. One code was just an on-off signal. The other was a kill-code. There's a book around here somewhere that lists every Type-II gate with its two unique codes. That's the inventory we should have been working from."

"I'll put a team on it right away," Tricia told Barbara, and then she left to make it happen.

7 – Gotcha!

Office assistants throughout the Guild offices were told to 'drop everything and go help compile the gate inventory'. In fact, when more than three people were involved in the effort the work slowed to a crawl due to each of them getting in the way of the others. In the end, a small group figured out a way to get the data they needed in a form the programmers could use, and the inventory was completed in barely over a day. A second team proof-read the data to make sure nothing had been missed. When the team leaders reported the results to Tricia, they had been checked and double-checked and everyone would stake their lives on its accuracy. Eight hundred seventy-nine Type-II gates had been created and configured (or re-configured) for remote operation during the time Type-IIs had been standard issue.

A separate effort examined the Type-III gates issued as replacements for Type-IIs returned to stock. Eight hundred seventy-seven Type-IIIs had been shipped to various gatekeepers around the world who had turned in eight hundred seventy-seven Type-II gates. A short matching routine quickly identified the places where two Type-II gates had been issued but never returned to stock in exchange for Type-IIIs: a gatekeeper in Ensenada, Mexico turned in four and should have surrendered five, and a gatekeeper in London, UK, had turned in five instead of the six logged out to him. Both gatekeepers had died in the interim and their duties taken over by their assistants.

The current Ensenada gatekeeper was notified and a short search soon turned up a completely unused, still-in-its-wrappings Type-II gate which was immediately shipped back to the Guild offices in Boulder for decommissioning.

"Who's that other one?" Tricia asked the personnel liaison.

"Clarence Prestwick. He was until his death the oldest gatekeeper on the roster. Some of us wondered if he was starting to show signs of mental lapses; indeed, we wondered why he was appointed at his already-advanced age in the first place. It's possible he just misplaced a gate, but the London crew has been unable to quickly locate it and have no idea how to find out where it went. It's a virtual certainty that Clarence's missing gate is the one being offered for sale."

"According to some old documentation I have access to," Tricia began, "we should be able to blink that gate on and off a few times and see a blip at 288.02 MHz FM. Harry Tumulty left us a real crude listener — three of them, actually — and we should get those placed

strategically around the area where we suspect the gate might be. Then we'll 'ping' each of the six gate codes until we get a return. That will simultaneously tell us which gate it is, and allow us to issue its kill-code."

"Is that how you want to proceed?" the personnel liaison asked. "I thought you said you wanted to hunt the thief down and bring him — or her — to justice."

"I did. Thanks for catching that. Okay, we can't kill the gate immediately; we can only locate it so we can locate its current owner. I wonder if we have to send Harry's old equipment or if we can arrange to have a replica built there?"

"If you know the characteristics of the signal," the liaison mused, "I would imagine anyone adept at electronics would be able to recreate it. I'll ask the London office to check."

The London office did, in fact, know of someone who claimed to be able to build a detector. They ordered four built to provide better coverage and a wider selection of angles when and if they were able to start. Two remote transmitters were pulled from storage, loaded with fresh batteries, tested using a similarly revamped receiver, and shipped overnight express to a London address under a Farside-to-Farside waybill.

As soon as the direction finders were ready, they were deployed on a line roughly bisecting the line from London to Maidstone and the four team leads kept in contact via a conference call.

"Ready... Sending '1188' now... no response. Sending '2020' now... no response. Sending '2021' now... no response. Sending '2022' now... no response. Sending '7504' now... no response. Sending '9002' now..." no response."

"No response to any of the codes?" the project chief asked and received muffled confirmations from each of the station coordinators. "What does that mean?"

"Either the device is unable to respond because its power is completely off, or it isn't in Farside," one of the team leads suggested.

"Plausible," the project chief allowed. "Regroup at approximately the same spots in Nearside as quickly as you can. Rejoin the conference in two hours."

Two hours later after each of the teams had crossed into Nearside and made their way back to the places where — in Farside — they had previously set up their listening posts, their team leads re-established contact with their project leader.

"Stand by to re-try," they were told.

"Ready... Sending '1188' now... no response. Sending '2020' now... no response. Sending '2021' now..." Four stations reported

pings on 288.02 MHz and tried to get a better angle on the residual low-level signal. "Sending '2021' again now... Sending '2021' again now... Sending '2021' again now..." The stations in Dartford and Croydon reported 'solid, unchanging vector'. "Sending '2021' again now... Sending '2021' again now..." The stations in Epsom and Rayleigh also reported solid vectors. Charting the vectors reported by the four stations, the project leader announced: "It's near East Mailing. Reposition according to protocol and be ready to retry in 45 minutes." The call dropped.

Three-quarters of an hour later with the four teams positioned in a ring around the center of East Mailing and all reporting 'ready', the project lead pinged '2021' again. In minutes, four stations reported back vectors for their signals. The chief reissued the ping to turn the gate off again and the stations reconfirmed their vectors. Thanks to satellite mapping software, the project chief could now give the breaching team from the Security Directorate an address.

A moving van rolled past the address the team had been given and stopped at the end of the street. Inside the cavernous, nearly-empty trailer, a gate opened and metal scaffolding went hand-over-hand into Farside. Twenty minutes later the scaffolding resembled a tower standing solidly upright on the uneven ground of Farside and team members were starting to scan the basement and ground floor of the house the survey crew had said would ping at 288.02 MHz FM on command.

"No people," one called to those below, "but I don't see anything that looks like a gate, either. Shall I go through?"

"Yes, go through. We'll keep a lookout and warn you if anyone arrives."

As breachers entered the basement area and ground floor apartment, others continued raising the scaffolding to provide access to the upper floors. In Nearside, one breacher keyed his remote device and waved a parabolic dish antenna left and right looking for the tell-tale dimple on the screen to grow. When the antenna was pointed down, the dimple became more prominent. "Downstairs!" he shouted having leaned through the gate into Farside.

Downstairs in the basement, mostly devoted to long-term storage, were several sets of rough shelves along the outer walls, along with a work bench and some power tools. The breacher continued scanning the area with the antenna until he zeroed in on a tarpaulin wrapped around something. He switched the gate off, then two of them lifted the package down and unrolled the tarp revealing a folded-up gate, batteries still hooked into the circuit. Witnessed by

two team members, the team leader carefully removed the five chipsets from their sockets and dropped them into insulated bags.

Carefully they re-wrapped the gate, as nearly as they could tell the way it had been stored, and backed out of Nearside. The scaffolding they left in place, but they switched their gate to "viewer-mode" and left it running to be able to see anyone who entered the basement.

Most of the breaching team went through their original gate back into the lorry which then departed the area, leaving a team of two to guard the now-useless skeleton of what was once a gate. Their orders were to apprehend anyone who so much as touched the tarpaulin that once hid the gate and to bring that person back to Guild Headquarters, London. They set up a campsite complete with tent, cots, camp stove, and porta-potty, contacted the Directorate via phone to let them know their status, and settled down to wait for someone to walk into their trap.

They didn't wait long.

A few minutes ahead of 6:30 a sedan pulled into the driveway in front of the house and the driver grabbed two bags of groceries from the boot before making his way to the front door, unlocking the door and carrying the bags into the kitchenette, all this activity photographed in detail through the viewer. The man, a thirty-something, began preparing what seemed to be his evening meal, pulling together a short list of simple ingredients and microwaving this and that while other parts warmed on the stove. As he cooked, he made a telephone call. Because only light, not sound, penetrated the viewer, the watchers had no idea what was transpiring, but they hoped he was making a deal for the gate.

"Are you ready to do business?" he asked the Yemeni attaché.

"I am," the attaché replied. "I'm prepared to transfer the money to your account as soon as I have the routing information. Are you prepared to deliver the gate?"

"As soon as I have confirmation from my bank that the transaction has completed," he said. "The routing code you need is..." and he rattled off a long series of numbers. "I'll be checking my account online and when I see my money, I'll be on my way to London with your package."

"The payment has just been made," the attaché announced. "You should see it in just a few minutes."

In East Mailing, the man tapped a few keys on his computer and examined his Cayman Islands bank account. "I see it," he told the attaché. "Give me an hour." He disconnected the call, poured various food items onto his plate, and sat at the kitchenette table to have his dinner.

He spent barely ten minutes feeding, put the kitchenware into the sink to soak, and headed for the basement. The two watchers moved their gate, powered for viewing, to the lower level and prepared to launch themselves into Nearside the instant he touched the folded-up gate. They screwed suppressors onto the threaded muzzles of their Beretta 92FS's and racked the slides to make sure each had a round chambered. The man reached across the workbench to the shelf above and pulled the wrapped gate down into his arms. When he turned around, he faced two men with pistols aimed directly at his head.

"Come with us," he was ordered, and he obeyed. They escorted him through the gate still carrying his package, and switched the gate off. "Have a seat," one of them pointed at a camp chair. He put down the wrapped gate and sat in the chair whereupon he was immediately handcuffed to its arms, and one of his ankles to the leg of the chair.

"Got him," one of the watchers reported when his call to the Security Directorate had connected. "We'll be waiting."

"How did you find me?" he asked the watchers.

"No idea," he was told, "but we knew your address."

Before an hour had passed, the moving van was back in front of the house in East Mailing. A crew opened a gate, passed some portable light racks through, powered them up, and began disassembling the scaffolding they had erected earlier in the day. The last thing through the gate into the truck was the camping equipment and the prisoner.

On the ride back to London, the senior Security operative questioned their thoroughly rattled prisoner.

"Your name?"

"You knew my address. Are you telling me you don't know who lives there?"

"We like to have independent confirmation," he was told.

"Winston Churchill," the prisoner snarled.

"Okay, we can play by your rules."

"What does that mean?" the prisoner asked. His captor just shrugged.

At Guild Headquarters, London, a search of the prisoner's pockets finally disclosed his real name: Gerald Lawson. A review of Clarence Prestwick's personnel file finally made clear the connection: Clarence's sister, Geraldine, had married a Lawson and produced four children, Gerald being the youngest.

"Were you close with your Uncle Clarence?" an interrogator asked Gerald as he sat at a small conference table in a room devoid of other furniture.

"I wouldn't say so. The old man was dotty. Pretty much kept to himself, especially as he got older. Even me Mum didn't have much to do with him."

"Well, how did you come to possess your Uncle's gate?"

"He gave me some power tools a few years before he died," Gerald admitted. "He had a lot of that stuff. He called to ask if I were interested and I said I was. He invited me to come over and haul it away. He said he knew he was getting too old to safely use things like electric saws and other dangerous stuff, so he decided to give it to me as a way of making up for anything he might have done in the past to alienate his family."

"And what had he done to alienate his family?" the interrogator probed.

"He was always going 'missing'," Gerald admitted. "He seemed to be... I don't know... unstable, I guess is how you'd describe it. Whenever he came to dinner, there would be a fight and it was always started by Uncle Clarence. It always seemed like he visited just for the opportunity of getting into a row with Dad, which he always did. Dad didn't help, of course. He never learned to ignore Uncle Clarence's baiting him."

"So, you took the tools from your uncle. Then what?"

"Well, I piled all this stuff into my pick-up and went back home. A lot of it was wrapped in blankets or tarps and I just unloaded it into the basement without much thought as to what it was or what I was going to do with it all. Years passed, and then Uncle Clarence died. It was then we found he had been a gatekeeper for Farside. I guess that explains all the absences. He didn't live here; he lived there."

"And the gate?" the interrogator tried to get the train of thought back on its track.

"Oh, it was mixed in among all the stuff I took from Clarence's workshop. I didn't even know I had a gate until years after he died. One day I decided to inventory all that stuff and maybe sell some of it for the cash. When I unwrapped the gate, I still didn't know what it was. I had to figure out that it needed to be set up. Then I realized I had a gate."

"When was this?"

"About six months ago, give or take. I've been wondering what to do with it since. I finally decided to see if I could get some serious cash for it. I just got paid this evening a few minutes before

you nabbed me. Somebody's going to be pissed when the gate they paid 800 million Euros for doesn't show up."

"And who would that be?"

"Yemen. I was on my way to deliver their goods when your guys jumped me."

"Maybe we'll deliver it on your behalf," the interrogator suggested.

"Why would you do that?" Gerald asked.

"Oh, you know, meet new friends, develop business contacts..." The interrogator winked at him. "When was this supposed to be delivered?"

"There wasn't a set time. Between eight and nine, maybe. I think they'll be happy whenever it arrives. Why are you giving them a gate?"

"Oh, so you know this is contraband, then?"

"Sure. Everybody knows gates are proprietary Farside technology. If they weren't, everyone would have one."

"And you know the penalty for possessing one?"

"I imagine I'm headed for jail," Gerald shrugged.

"Hmm..."

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Tricia sat across from Dan as their cook/nanny served their dinner. "Have you decided what to do about him?" she asked.

"I have," he started, "but I'm going to make sure Barbara doesn't object to us executing him."

"I should expect some push-back on that if I were you," Tricia warned. "Barbara doesn't like solutions that aren't subject to correction by the cold light of day."

And, indeed, Barbara objected.

"I recognize the severity of the offense, Dan, but I'm unconvinced the death penalty won't bring us unintended and unwanted consequences. I imagine His Majesty's government might object as well."

"His Majesty's government has no basis for a complaint," Dan retorted. "The treaty between us clearly gives us plenary authority when the topic is 'gates'."

"That won't stop them complaining. It wouldn't stop me complaining were the situation reversed. I really dislike being placed in this position, but I'm putting my foot down. The answer is 'no', and that is your Queen speaking. Find a different solution. The topic is closed."

"You're making a mistake," Dan snapped.

"It's my mistake to make. I'm allowed to make mistakes and I'm happy to make them when I err on the side of caution. I said the topic is closed. I've made my decision and I expect you to carry it out."

"I don't agree, and I don't believe I can find an alternative solution I would be happy with."

Barbara looked at Dan for a long time in silence before finally speaking. "I'm saddened to hear you say that, and even more so that you cannot carry out policy decisions I am tasked with making. If you cannot exercise your office in accordance with my policies, you cannot exercise your office, period. Dan, you're relieved of duty."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

Barbara dialed Tricia's number and it was picked up on the first ring. "Tricia, I have just relieved Dan of his position as Master. I think you should come here so the three of us can talk."

"I quite agree," Tricia told her. "I'll be there in ten minutes."

She arrived in eight, and rushed into Barbara's living room.

"What caused all this?" Tricia demanded even before taking a seat next to Dan.

"Dan insists on the death penalty for our British gate thief, which I have forbidden. I can't have one of my senior officers be this resistant when I make a policy decision," Barbara explained.

Tricia paused and looked at her husband, then back to Barbara. "I hereby resign as First Keeper, effective immediately," Tricia announced. Dan made a start to object, but Tricia silenced his protest with her hand. "While I agree with you regarding the death penalty," she continued, "I have a duty of family loyalty that precludes me being publicly opposed to Dan. Beyond that, it is probably not a good thing to have a split family in such a sensitive ministry as the Guild. You should have the opportunity to fill such positions with those whose loyalty to you is unquestioned."

"I don't believe your resignation is appropriate, Tricia," Barbara soothed, "and I think Dan would agree on that score..."

"I do," Dan interjected.

"...nor is your loyalty to me or the Guild in question, now or ever. This is entirely unnecessary."

"I appreciate your kind words, Barbara, but that decision is final. You need to replace us both." They stood as if to leave.

"Very well," Barbara spoke softly. "I owe you both an enormous debt of gratitude for being ready to shoulder an enormous burden when I needed it most. I hope that we will remain friends even though you are no longer in the Guild, and thus no longer, strictly speaking, my employees."

"A difference of opinion on policy matters, regardless how deep, could never get in the way of our friendship," Tricia answered, "nor does it diminish in the least our loyalty to Farside or our respect for its Queen."

"Then I ask you to pick your successors and to brief them on all the things they will have to know to do as good a job as you two have done for Farside."

"It will be done," Dan assured her.

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Marcel d'Hourtin sat across from Britain's ambassador to Farside, Brian Trehane. "I'm glad you were able to find time for me this afternoon, Your Excellency," Trehane began.

"Is that the normal form of address for a regent?" d'Hourtin asked, "Your Excellency?" Trehane shrugged. "We Farsiders don't usually go in for such diplomatic niceties. 'Regent d'Hourtin' is about as formal as anyone ever gets with me and that's usually just once at the start of a conversation. I would much prefer you addressed me as 'Marcel'. I intend to address you as 'Brian' if you have no objection."

Trehane shook his head side-to-side with a slight smile. "There was much snickering and giggling when His Majesty appointed me to this post. Everyone said I would find Farsiders an odd bunch. I'm beginning to see what they meant. I imagine there won't be much beating about the bush with you, either; that you'll go straight to the point."

"Our primary rule for getting along in Farside is what you call 'The Golden Rule'. I don't want you beating about the bush when you deal with me, so, no, I'll deal with you as an old friend and I'll expect you to do the same for me. If you ever think you need to lie to me about something of importance, you will, as they say, 'poison the well'. Better you should say nothing than go down that path."

Trehane nodded soberly. "Given that, I think I should get right to the point: Mr. Gerald Lawson who is presently being held under guard somewhere in Farside, charged with the crime of 'unauthorized possession of a gate'. Might I ask what you know or suspect may be the punishment levied upon Mr. Lawson when he is tried and, it seems quite clear, convicted?"

"That is usually a matter left to the jury hearing the case. In a 'worst case scenario' for Mr. Lawson, he might be expelled into the wilderness. Word has it that Her Majesty has taken 'execution' off the table. Given that Mr. Lawson is a subject of a friendly nation, 'expulsion' may also be precluded since it is, for all intents and purposes, also a death sentence for all but the hardiest of

outdoorsmen. The next step down is that Mr. Lawson would become Farside's first and only long-term prisoner. May I inquire as to the question behind your question?"

"Indeed. Our intelligence leads us to believe that Farside does not have a well-developed penal system. In view of that, His Majesty has authorized me to offer the services of HM Prisons to carry out the sentence levied by a Farside jury upon Mr. Lawson should that sentence involve incarceration. Would Her Majesty be amenable, do you think, to such an arrangement?"

"From personal knowledge of Her Majesty, I expect her to receive that proposal favorably. She is particularly careful where foreign relations are concerned and typically reluctant to endorse decisions of such finality that they cannot be corrected upon reflection. That is why there is no chance Mr. Lawson might be executed.

"Thank you for this most generous offer. I will transmit it to Boulder immediately and let you know her decision as soon as I receive it. I expect that will happen quite soon."

The two shook hands and the meeting was over.

Within the hour, d'Hourtin was on the phone to Linda Rossi-Larson, briefing her on the British proposal.

"I happen to be at *chez Walsh* for breakfast, Marcel. Let me put you on speaker and you can ask Barbara yourself."

The sound from the phone changed and Barbara's voice greeted d'Hourtin: "*Bonjour, Marcel, comment ça va?*"

"*Tres bien, Majesté, merci.* I have just met with our ambassador from Britain who offered the services of His Majesty's Prisons should Gerald Lawson be sentenced to incarceration. He asks if such an option would meet with your approval."

"Well, it saves us the trouble of setting up a penitentiary, doesn't it?" Barbara mused aloud. "Would we still control the conditions of parole?"

"I can't imagine we would not," d'Hourtin offered.

"If we do, you may send the thanks of the Crown of Farside for His Majesty's gracious offer and inform them we will keep them apprised of the progress of the trial and the disposition of prisoner Lawson."

Within the week, Gerald Lawson stood trial at a Regent's Court in Farside for the charge of 'unlawful possession', pled 'guilty' in the presence of Brian Trehane and two members of his staff, and was sentenced to twelve years' imprisonment. Later the same day he was escorted into Nearside and remanded to the custody of the warden of HM Prison Belmarsh.

8 – Foreign Intrigue

Normally, the act of Tumbuzia invading its peaceful neighbor, Transgava, would get covered on page 6 of any newspaper, and that's where it wound up, buried so deep only current-affairs wonks would know about it. Both African countries were generously described as 'small', and were notable only for the fact that they had thus far avoided being annexed by somebody bigger. Tumbuzia, apparently, had decided to remedy that oversight.

Barbara heard about it only because it was local news for Gideon Matowa and he made sure it was mentioned in Barbara's morning briefing. Matowa thought it important because the rail line between Cairo and Capetown would, when complete, bisect both countries, and the rail workers (and Ivan Deruschka) had already crossed swords with Gabriel Roberts.

"What time is it in Johannesburg?" Barbara asked dreamily as she sipped coffee and read Matowa's report.

"It's late afternoon," Linda Rossi-Larson — who always had breakfast at 'the Palace' — answered, "4 or 5pm. You're reading Gideon's report?"

"Yes. This is very worrisome. President Roberts seems to be trying to be an extraordinary pain-in-the-ass, don't you think?"

"I've long held Roberts in low esteem," Linda responded. "He seems to be channeling the ghost of Idi Amin."

Barbara snorted and coffee spurted from her nose. Linda handed her a paper napkin as they both laughed.

"He is," Barbara agreed. "Perhaps we ought to have a 'come to Jesus' meeting with him. I don't like the idea of our future trading partners acting like pirates. As much as I don't like interfering in Nearside politics, I think Gideon needs to put a stop to Roberts' depredations. Agree?"

"Well..." Linda started, "I think we ought to start with some friendly advice from Gideon and give Roberts a chance to show what a swell fellow he really is before moving on to actively stopping him. I'm a big fan of gradualism."

"Me, too. Ask Gideon to open a dialogue with the tyrant and see if we can't get him to correct his own behavior."

"Done," Linda agreed.

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Gideon Matowa had his deputy start the conversation with the Tumbuzia Foreign Office by calling to set up a conference call between Matowa and Roberts. Roberts, still sensitive regarding his last clash with the Farsiders, pushed the call up on his schedule and an aide called Matowa back within the hour.

"President Roberts," Matowa greeted him, "I hope you are well."

"Very well, thank you, Regent Matowa, and I hope you are as well. To what do I owe the honor of this call?"

"Her Majesty has expressed to me her distress over the recent unpleasantness surrounding Tumbuzia's relations with its neighbor to the North, Transgava, and has instructed me to make you aware of her concern."

"Please assure Her Majesty that there is no need for concern," Roberts began. "The Transgava region has long been peopled by ethnic Tumbuzians who have longed for reunification with the rest of their people. At their request, Tumbuzian forces are liberating them from an oppressive regime not of their own choosing."

"At their request'?" Matowa prodded. "I don't understand."

"Yes, the people of Transgava, largely immigrants originally from their native Tumbuzia, recently appealed to me to help them throw off the yoke of tyrannical Transgava oppression."

"That's what I don't understand," Matowa pushed back. "If they felt oppressed in their new land, surely the simplest solution to that is for them to return to Tumbuzia, is it not? War seems an unnecessary complication. What facts am I overlooking here?"

"But they have developed land there and made investments of labor and money into homesteads where their families have begun to put down roots. They don't want to leave all that behind, and why should they? That land is now their land by virtue of having worked it and made it productive. They feel they should not have to give up the fruits of their labor because of an overbearing tyrant, and so they asked the people of their former land to assist them in becoming free again. They are still our brothers and sisters. How could we refuse?"

"Was there any attempt at negotiation with the Transgava regime?" Matowa inquired.

"We have dealt with the Transgavans before and they are completely unreasonable where their territory is concerned. No, we did not think it would have been productive this time, especially given the circumstances."

"...the circumstances...?"

"Their President Izama is already characterizing this as a 'land grab' by immigrant Tumbuzians. Given that attitude, where might negotiations start? There is no common ground for any discussion."

Izama is essentially accusing us of 'theft of land by immigration' and has already started to expel the pioneers back to Tumbuzia."

"To be honest, President Roberts, it looks very much like 'theft of land by immigration' from where I sit. I can sympathize with President Izama, in that respect.

"Understand, Farside has no real interest in your local politics, but we are building a very expensive high-speed rail line through the Farside equivalent of Tumbuzia and Transgava, and it is in our enlightened self-interest to do all we can to see that those nations — and the others through which the rail line will pass — are stable enough that when we need to buy supplies trans-gate we can; that when we need to get medical assistance trans-gate we can; that when the line is complete we will be able to operate stations with access into Nearside so our equipment can service more than just the wilderness of Farside. If the lands through which the rail line passes are at war, we are not going to be able to buy supplies, get medical assistance, or to do business trans-gate, and that very substantially reduces the value of the track through those lands.

"Bluntly, this war could impose costs on Farside that we have no control over and we think very poorly of people who cost us money. Am I making myself clear?" It was an ultimatum, and Roberts knew it.

"I am the President of Tumbuzia. Tumbuzia's concerns are my primary obligation. Anything else, including objections from Farside, are no more than secondary. Nevertheless, I will take your concerns into consideration. If my council of ministers agrees, perhaps we will be able to come to terms with Transgava and settle this dispute. I will keep you informed." Matowa heard the line disconnect.

Matowa's next call was to Derek Izama in the capital of Transgava. Izama was present and unoccupied when the call arrived so his secretary connected Matowa immediately.

"Good evening, Regent Matowa," Izama greeted him. "It is a pleasure to hear your voice again."

Matowa was somewhat taken back by Izama's use of the word 'again'. As far as he knew, he had never before met or talked to Izama. "Do we know each other?" Matowa inquired.

"We may have brushed past each other at Wits," Izama suggested, referring to the University of the Witwatersrand. "You took your Science degree two years ahead of my Engineering degree. I recall you being very voluble about political issues, and I often went to hear you debate other factions. Those largely convinced me to mellow my own political positions."

"That's a surprise," Matowa admitted, "I thought no one was listening, but I really called today to get your view of the conflict between Transgava and Tumbuzia. What can you tell me?"

Izama sighed and began: "Yesterday, troops from Tumbuzia crossed into Transgava and established a base of operations. There has been no actual 'fighting' going on... yet. The local population in that region is overwhelmingly ethnic Tumbuzians who immigrated to Transgava over the last half-dozen years or so. They appear to be supporting the Tumbuzian invasion force, which is not actually a surprise. It now appears that the migration was a long-term plan by Tumbuzia to seize a part of Transgava or all of it: establish a population, claim oppression, call for help from their former country, then annex enough territory to make it worthwhile. The Tumbuzian farmers in the area are accusing Transgava of treating them disparately from the ethnic Transgavans who now make up a minority population in that part of Transgava. I assure you that is a fabrication, but I can also assure you that if that southern region is successfully annexed by Tumbuzia, those ethnic Transgavans presently there will be treated as second-class citizens by the Tumbuzians.

"Our military has been called up and is preparing to engage the invaders with the goal of expelling them and the Tumbuzian immigrants back across the border. Our too-welcoming immigration policies will then get a serious review with an eye toward avoiding a repeat performance."

"You're not planning a punitive crossing-of-the-border by your own troops if you're able to push them out?" Matowa inquired.

"We have the 'home court advantage' north of the Gava River," Izama explained. "South of the Gava, the advantage shifts. It's not worthwhile in any case. The land beyond the river is of marginal value because of the Tumbuzians' wasteful farming practices. Our own Ministry for Agriculture has managed to educate our farmers to avoid spoiling their land. That's probably why Tumbuzia wanted it."

"Well, thank you, President Izama, for that enlightening tour of Transgava. I will try to keep you informed as to Her Majesty's plans. If you don't hear from me, please keep the lines open to our offices in Johannesburg. Good evening."

Matowa disconnected and immediately redialed Barbara in Boulder to give her the summary of what he had just learned.

"I think it's important that you know that Derek Izama and I both have diplomas from Witwatersrand. Given that we have a history between us, if you wish me to recuse myself further, I will quite understand."

"I'm perfectly alright with that, Gideon, if you will simply assure me it will play no part in whatever follows."

"I am confident that should it interfere with my duties to the Crown, I will recuse myself, but I am equally confident that I am not compromised... thus far."

"Then please stay on and guide this for me. Here is what I think we should do..." and she proceeded to outline her plans for bringing the conflict to a halt.

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A small party of Transgava military slowly approached the village of Zivu in the disputed area. Their leader's headset informed him that two Tumbuzian snipers were secreted ahead of them, one on each side. He picked two of his best infiltrators and sent them on a flanking path that would bring them in behind the snipers while the main body held their position. Within a few minutes, they reported that they were in position under and behind the ambushers.

The Transgavan flankers took aim on the snipers in their tree stands, and in voices deliberately softened so as not to attract too much attention, called up to them: "You, up there! Come down or get shot." The Tumbuzians, surprised at Transgava soldiers appearing beneath them as if out of nowhere, obediently slung their rifles and climbed down to the ground where they were disarmed and handcuffed for the trip back up the road to become prisoners of war.

After a brief interrogation of the prisoners, the Transgavans rushed the town center and captured six more Tumbuzians, the remainder of the invaders in Zivu. Not a shot had been fired.

At the headquarters for the Tumbuzian invasion force, little colored pins on a wall map one by one disappeared as reports filtered in of the Transgavans taking back town after town. The commanding officer snarled at his lieutenants: "How are they pushing forward so fast? It's as if they know where all our forces are located! Our forward units are being captured so fast they don't even get to report that they are under attack!"

As the disputed border slowly retreated toward the Gava River, formerly Tumbuzian farmers gathered their portable belongings and fled south, eventually finding ferries or bridges to carry them back to their native land. They knew or suspected that they would soon find Transgava a far less hospitable place than it had been just a week before.

In Farside, drones flitted hither and yon like mechanical dragonflies while their controllers — always two — navigated Farside and observed Nearside through the viewer panel each drone mounted. Every now and then, the Nearside observer would direct the pilot to move this direction or another so that the drone could get a good look

at a Tumbuzian outpost. Then the location would be echoed to the Transgavan headquarters and sent down through channels to the forward units who could then sweep down on the invaders without having first given away their presence by risking scouts reconnoitering. In this way, the bulk of the Tumbuzian invasion force became prisoners of the Transgavans. In more than one town, Transgava scouts swept around the town to capture sentries back-to-front in a way that left their officers unaware — until they themselves were captured — that their position was threatened. Because nearly 100% of the Tumbuzians were being captured rather than killed or wounded, the battles proceeded as if they were being fought in a library, with few shots being fired and no shouting or cheering. Midway through day three of the Tumbuzian invasion, the remainder of the Tumbuzian invasion force received orders to retreat behind the Gava River. The invasion had collapsed with 977 Tumbuzian officers and enlisted men missing-in-action, and 45,000 acres of prime Transgavan farmland and pasture abandoned by immigrant Tumbuzians as they fled.

Matowa's phone rang and he picked it up. His secretary reported "President Derek Izama of Transgava on line one."

Matowa pushed the flashing "1" button and started speaking: "What can I do for you, Mr. President?"

"You can pass along to Her Majesty my personal thanks for her assistance with the Tumbuzian invaders, and the thanks of all Transgavans everywhere. Then you can tell me how we can express our gratitude more concretely."

"I need you to understand, Derek," Matowa began, "that had Farside no national interest at stake, there would have been no help forthcoming. We did this for our benefit rather than yours. That you benefited was merely a happy coincidence. We need no more thanks than that Tumbuzia and Transgava are once again untroubled by war."

"Nevertheless, Gideon, we did benefit, and we wish to thank her who, even if accidentally, provided that benefit."

"I'll try to think of something."

"President Roberts of Tumbuzia on line three," Matowa's secretary announced. Matowa reached for the phone and pushed the "3" button with his middle finger, then chuckled inwardly at the Freudian symbolism.

"President Roberts, good morning. To what do I owe the honor?"

"I know you Farsiders were instrumental in the defeat of my army yesterday," Roberts sputtered. "I demand an apology. And reparations."

Matowa paused for much longer than was necessary to formulate an answer, mulling several alternatives and trying to assess the consequences of each.

"Well?" Roberts prodded.

During the last set-to between Roberts and Ivan Deruschka, Ivan had suggested Farside might actively depose Roberts, yet here he was again demanding bribes, the very thing that had brought him within inches of replacement by Ivan's hand-picked successor. Did the man never learn?

"Well?" Roberts screamed into the phone when Matowa failed to respond immediately.

"What do you plan to do after you are no longer President of Tumbuzia?" Matowa challenged.

"What are you talking about?" Roberts squeaked.

"I'll have to pass your concerns up to Farside's Prime Minister," Matowa explained in a soft voice. "Expect a response from PM Deruschka shortly. Good morning." Then he hung up without waiting for a response.

Barbara's phone rang. She glanced at the display to see who it was. Caller-ID said "Deruschka Ivan."

"Yes, Ivan?"

"I waited as long as I dared before ringing you. I have been up since receiving a call from Regent Matowa at four this morning playing scenarios in my head. All of them are aggressive enough to require your permission before I implement."

"Over the phone or in-person?"

"Either way," Ivan agreed. "I'm parked in your driveway."

Barbara peeked through the curtains. "I see. I'm putting you on speaker while I get dressed. Tell me what trouble we are about to create."

"President Gabriel Roberts of Tumbuzia continues to be a problem. He now accuses the Crown of Farside of siding with Transgava in their recent conflict and demands an apology and reparations. Naturally, we will grant him neither, but the demand foreshadows a continuing problem with him. His accusation is, as you well know, correct, although there is no way for him to prove it. He simply looked at how easily his army was routed and concluded that even their intimate knowledge of their own terrain could not have allowed the Transgavans as many quick, clean, bloodless victories as they managed.

"Regardless, he has not learned the lesson we too gently applied earlier, and it appears we will have to repeat the lesson much less gently. I suggest the time has come to end our grief."

"By?" Barbara probed.

"By permanently removing Roberts from the Presidency of Tumbuzia. This could be achieved in any of several ways.

"Roberts could be assassinated quite easily. The methods we Farsiders have available to us would leave little in the way of 'evidence' and we could easily deny — plausibly — responsibility.

"That could be avoided if Roberts would depart voluntarily, however unlikely that seems.

"There are two up-and-coming Tumbuzian politicians either of whom might make pliable replacements for Roberts, and a small scandal — easily arranged, I believe — might topple Roberts quickly, making way for one or the other to replace him.

"Of the various options, the one that most appeals to me is to suggest to Roberts that he needs to move on to somewhere he would be appreciated or at least tolerated. I would be pleased to hear your opinions, ma'am."

"I'm inclined to go with your gut feeling, Ivan. See if Roberts can be convinced to abdicate. If he won't and you are convinced he must be removed, I suggest you 'disappear' him into Farside. So much cleaner..

"You may come inside now. I'm prepared to receive visitors."

Ivan pushed the front door open in time to see Barbara transiting to the kitchen where she started coffee for the soon-to-be-awakening household.

"I had not considered kidnapping Roberts," Ivan remarked as he leaned against a kitchen counter listening to the coffee brewing. "Thank you for the idea. The reason I raise these points to you is that all of them — even your idea — give me a vague uneasy feeling: we are beginning to behave as if we were Nearside politicians, and I had always hoped we might somehow avoid that since it's so demonstrably associated with their failure to internalize the Golden Rule.

"From here, it's just a few more steps before we become what we hoped to escape by founding Farside."

Barbara had her chin in her cupped hands and stared at some point in space next to Ivan's head. It was some time before she spoke again.

"You seem to have perfectly articulated what has been giving me what I hope is not an incipient gastric ulcer. I have been feeling less and less healthy and less and less pleased with myself since the first signs of trouble with Tumbuzia's leader — even before that, actually. The incident with Lawson and the conflict I had with the Murphys has left me feeling like a failure..."

"Don't say that," Ivan interjected.

"Yes," Barbara continued, "when Farside was a pristine wilderness, we had no trouble absorbing even the wretched refuse of Nearside and turning them into productive, loyal citizens. Now we're contemplating murder and kidnapping. 'Failure' is putting it mildly.

"I knew I had made a good choice when I tapped you to be part of my inner circle of advisers. You're a good PM, Ivan, and you're about to make me a better Queen." Ivan looked at her strangely but stayed silent.

"We are not going to assassinate Roberts," Barbara pressed onward, "nor are we going to kidnap him. Instead, we will treat Gabriel Roberts as we would wish him to treat us were our situations reversed. We will extend the hand of friendship once again and risk another bite. We will not honor his demands for bribes, just as we would not, ourselves, demand bribes or expect anyone to bribe us. We will, in fact, ignore his character flaws and demonstrate by good example what can be accomplished among people of goodwill. His neighbors who maintain good relationships with Farside will be shown to prosper while those whose dealings with Farside are less than perfect will themselves demonstrate the effects. I want Farside to return to first principles in our dealings with Nearside. All of Nearside.

"Make Gideon aware of the new... the revised foreign policy and work with him to smooth — to the extent possible — relations with Tumbuzia.

"I intend to apologize to Dan and Tricia Murphy for my petulant behavior, and I will personally notify His Britannic Majesty that Farside has no further interest in seeing Gerald Lawson punished for his actions.

"I imagine there will be some 'fallout' among the regents. I trust you to handle whatever comes of it, but feel free to bump any problems upstairs. They're my fault, after all, and I should take the blame."

Ivan gulped. "I cannot imagine a better ruler for Farside than the Queen we all love."

"How do you like your coffee?" she asked.

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Ivan Deruschka in Aurora, with Gideon Matowa at his office and Gabriel Roberts in Tumbu City exchanged brief pleasantries before Ivan started this conference call.

"If I understand correctly, President Roberts, you accuse Farside of interfering with the recent military action against Transgava. Feel free to interrupt me should I get anything wrong. You are

demanding an apology and reparations from Farside for butting in where we have no territorial interests.” Roberts grunted in agreement.

“First,” Ivan continued, “Farside neither admits nor denies having any part in recent events because it is immaterial. Your invasion of Transgava was wholly unjustified, so if Farside did interfere, we interfered on the side of right and justice, but Farside’s alleged action, if any such actually happened, is of no legal or moral consequence. It is therefore unproductive for you to make such accusations and, in the spirit of friendship between our nations, we do not acknowledge the existence of such accusations. Let us forget that harsh words were uttered and move on.

“Then, the notion of ‘reparations’ for us being on the side of right and justice — if, in fact, Farside were involved at all — seems itself somewhat unjust. Why should we pay for doing the right thing? So, there will be no reparations. We of Farside will forget you even made such a demand so that relations between us will not be marred.

“Third, we here present you with a preliminary survey map of those sections of Farside corresponding to Tumbuzia on which map are marked the probable sites of rail sidings used when two trains must pass each other on the single-track line. It has been our experience that such places are so ideal for station-siting that new towns seem to spring up like weeds around them. The sidings are generally 40 miles or 65 kilometers apart, give or take. At present, only one such site is marked; there may be one or two more. If you anticipate future good relations between Tumbuzia and Farside, you may wish to begin planning for Nearside stations at or near those sites. We will, of course, keep you apprised of any changes as they occur. As the line nears completion, our engineers will assist with fine tuning such as platform elevations, lengths, and curvatures, as well as where we intend to install portals. If this meets with your approval, we can move on to other things.”

“Other things?” Roberts asked.

“Yes, other things,” Ivan confirmed. “Farside, as you know, operates strictly based on the Golden Rule. While we cannot control our trading partners’ behaviors absolutely, we can and do dictate which behaviors we find unacceptable. Naturally, we abhor things like war, political repression, and unequal treatment, but we also insist that to maintain good relationships trans-gate, our partners also refrain from fraudulent or unethical dealings, and that includes — especially — bribery. If it is the practice of your government’s officials to solicit bribes from anyone for favorable official action on lawful requests, we insist that you put a stop to that immediately. Because this is so important to us, when we discover such practices, it has an immediate

and chilling effect on how and when trans-gate commerce is conducted. Am I making myself clear?"

"The tradition of soothing and grooming officials with gifts and emoluments goes back centuries in our culture and in many other cultures," Roberts objected. "People automatically offer the local mayor or district overseer a chicken or a goat as a way of thanking them — in advance — for their assistance with any endeavor. Stopping that will be next-to-impossible!"

"I didn't say it would be easy," Ivan soothed the President, "I just said it was necessary. Because it will take a long time to undo those centuries of cultural conditioning, you should start soon. Today would not be too early. May I suggest a Presidential decree forbidding the practice of accepting gifts or funds?"

"Naturally, I will do as you ask, but I warn you, how much attention is paid to such a decree is not under my control. Outlying regions operate as if they were entirely independent countries."

"But they're not, are they?" Matowa challenged. "When they step out of line, the capitol imposes penalties, sometimes severe penalties, isn't that true?"

"Of course," Roberts agreed, "but it's always after the fact, sometimes long after the fact. That's not what you're aiming for; am I right?"

"Do what you can," Ivan advised him.

Ivan and Gideon held a postmortem on their meeting with Roberts for Barbara's benefit.

"So, you think the meeting was a success?" she summed up.

"A qualified success," Gideon suggested. "When dealing with pirates like Roberts, no negotiations can ever be unqualified successes. He will do as we demand as long as he thinks it benefits him personally. Beyond that, it's anybody's guess."

"I'll take what I can get," Barbara told them.

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Tricia Murphy rapped twice on the door of the Walsh residence and, as was her long-established practice, pushed the door open and entered. Ernie turned at the sound of the door and smiled.

"Come in. Dinner's almost ready. Something to drink?"

"G&T for me," Tricia answered, and glancing at Dan, added "make it two."

"Four gin and tonic coming up."

"Oh, is it Happy Hour?" Dan asked.

Ernie winked. "Easier if everyone is on the same menu."

Barbara exited her bedroom and joined the others. "Thanks for coming. It's been far too long since we've all had dinner together."

"Well," Tricia started a response, "since we aren't Gatekeepers anymore..."

"But we're still friends," Barbara explained, "and friends need to stay in touch. As for not being Gatekeepers, perhaps that's something worth remedying as well."

"Tonight is something of a special occasion. I invited the two of you over so that I could apologize face-to-face for our recent falling-out. It should never have happened, it was all my fault, and I intend never to be in that position again — never to put myself in such a position again. I have desperately missed the wise council you both have offered time and again, even though I sometimes felt required to ignore it — I refer specifically to Gerald Lawson. Your advice, Dan, was technically correct even if I could not bring myself to support it. I should have simply commuted the sentence from what policy required and left it there. I acted impetuously and I'm sorry."

"I hope that I can get the cornerstones of the Guild back where they..."

Tricia held up her hand to stop Barbara's monologue.

"You're not thinking of demoting Larry Gordon and Neal Bennett and Lyla Deane to slip us back into our old positions, are you?"

"I've already consulted with all three and they have no problem with that plan," Barbara assured her.

"I have a problem with that plan," Tricia protested. "You can't discard them like used tissues because you've had a change of heart. Besides, it's a sign of poor decision-making to have to constantly revisit those decisions. I, for one, will not accept an appointment that depends on displacing any of them. It would reflect poorly upon my Queen."

"Nor I," Dan added.

Barbara's mouth crinkled in frustration. "Help me," she implored them. "I need my cornerstones back where they belong. How do I do that?"

"I will be happy to serve in an advisory capacity to the current Master and his Keepers. I just can't bring myself to cause their replacement," Dan explained. Tricia nodded her agreement.

"So, I could appoint you both as Special Advisers to the Guild and you would accept that?"

"Sure," Dan agreed.

"Done." She hoisted her glass aloft in salute. "Back in the saddle," she said. "Let's eat."

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Matti Suokinnen's face appeared on the display in the Moot Hall next to Leif Thorvaldsson's. Matti executed a slight bow to his sovereign seated in a chair on the Moot Hall's stage.

"I asked you to this teleconference, Matti, to get your assistance with a problem. Thank you, Leif, for helping to arrange the meeting.

"The problem, Matti, involves gray wolves. Reports I have received via Leif suggest that wolves are being hunted simply because they are wolves rather than because they are a nuisance."

"They are a nuisance," Matti interjected.

"Are you talking about 'all wolves' or 'particular wolves'?" she asked.

"All wolves are a nuisance," Matti explained. "Particular wolves are a special kind of nuisance."

"That's what I thought," Barbara agreed. "Matti, tell me how I can keep your Sámi from trying to wipe wolves from the face of Lapland?"

Matti paused before replying. "Expel all the Sámi back to Nearside?" he suggested.

Barbara didn't know whether to laugh or cry, but realized neither was an appropriate response. "You're not being helpful, Matti. I require you to be helpful. My question was serious and I need a serious response."

"My Queen," Matti began, "our livestock is our life. We rely upon reindeer for almost everything that is central to our culture. Wolves prey upon that livestock and are therefore preying upon our culture. The act of killing wolves preserves our culture. There is no middle ground where we might meet and compromise. Either we preserve our culture or our culture dies. That is, either wolves die or we do. If you insist we cannot kill wolves, you insist we all die the slow death of a culture in decline.

"Farside is yours to rule. We Sámi will accept your decision, but if wolves must live, we must die — or depart from Farside. It is your choice."

Barbara looked at her Regent. "Leif, have you anything to add?"

"Matti," Thorvaldsson picked up the conversational thread, "about how large would you say the average herd was in Nearside?" Matti thought for a moment before suggesting it might be in the range of thirty to fifty head. "And how large in Farside?"

Matti hesitated much longer. He knew where this line was going. "Forty-five to seventy head, I would guess."

"So, your herds are forty to fifty percent larger in Farside than they are in Nearside, would that be correct?" Matti grunted his acknowledgement. "Perhaps such large herds are just too difficult to manage," Leif suggested. "Yes, perhaps you Sámi would be better off moving back into Nearside where herd sizes are closer to your skill levels." He smiled so Matti would know Leif was baiting him.

"Perhaps there might be room for negotiation," Matti Suokinnen smiled back. "Those whose herds are larger than fifty would be forbidden to take wolves..."

"Forty," Barbara interrupted him. Matti frowned.

"Allow me to suggest that any strict numerical limit is ripe for abuse," Leif cut in. "If a father gives a son a small herd, that son would automatically be eligible to hunt wolves. Splitting a herd between two or more family members could give them all *carte blanche* to go wolf hunting.

"The question we ought to ask is: *'Is the herd growing or shrinking and if it's shrinking, why?'* If it's shrinking because the family is harvesting meat, that's a different problem than if wolves are harvesting meat.

"If wolves are putting our people at risk, then the wolves need controlling. We can define what it means to be at risk after we get the fundamental principle nailed down. Until we get the fundamentals straight, no other question is worth asking. What I would like to see is a long-term balance between what the Sámi need and what the wolves need." Leif watched Matti scowl and knew he had to proceed carefully.

"Yes, Matti, the wolves have needs. They are a natural part of the environment and we can't allow them to become extinct. 'No wolves' or even 'too few wolves' is worse than 'too many wolves'. For all our sakes, we must find and agree to what that balance is, and we have to get it right. It may not even be possible to get it right today. We may have to watch what happens to wolves and reindeer over time, but what I can tell you now without any further study is that wolves and reindeer had already established a balance before we ever showed our faces in Farside. What we have done in Farside is to artificially alter that balance in favor of the reindeer, and the wolf population has adjusted to the new reality. That's what you're complaining about — I get it. I don't yet know what the solution is, but I know we can re-establish that balance pretty quickly by expelling all the Sámi. Obviously, we don't want to do that. That's why we're talking today. This is your chance to help us find a solution more to your liking than *'good-bye, Matti'*, so when Barbara asks for your help, help. Don't give her a smart-ass answer because that's not what she needs and therefore it's not what you need."

Matti nodded. "I apologize," he began. "I thought the solution had already been agreed to and this meeting was a mere formality to impose it upon us. As it turns out, I do have a solution to propose.

"There is a wild reindeer population beyond the settled land. We don't care if wolves feed on them; we care about our breeding stock. Suppose we agree to hunt wolves only within the boundaries of the settlement, and not hunt them outside the settled area?"

"On the surface, that sounds like progress," Barbara offered. "Over time, however, the 'settled area' will grow and the wolves' hunting area must consequently shrink. That solution works today, but not tomorrow. I don't want this to be an ongoing debate. I want a solution or, at absolute worst, a method for deriving future solutions. Let's press onward."

"Don't you have a zookeeper on staff?" Matti asked. "I've heard people talk about your 'Father Noah'..."

Barbara laughed. "Greg Urbaniek! Matti, would you be satisfied if Dr. Urbaniek captured enough wolves to solve your problems and issued hunting licenses for what he couldn't snag?"

"If he's not too stingy with the licenses that might work," Matti agreed. "Why don't we include him in the next discussion?"

When the conference reconvened early the following week, Greg and Susannah Urbaniek sat next to Barbara on the Moot Hall stage.

"When I first heard Matti's proposal I sent out an email blast to all my contacts asking if any of them might like a pair of Farside grays in their collections. I have positive responses from forty-one and negative responses from two. Six of the positives mentioned wanting a breeding population. We can easily relocate a hundred or more wolves and I think that will be enough to push Matti's problem off for several years if not several decades. At worst, it will give us time to develop a more long-term solution. At best, it may be the solution."

"I like it," Matti agreed. "I even have names of five volunteers who think they can trap wolves and who would take that up as a new career if Dr. Urbaniek needs and wants assistance."

"Always better to have someone on site who knows the land," Urbaniek agreed.

"That sounds like a solution to me," Barbara offered. "Greg, please iron out the details with Matti and let me know if you need anything else from us."

The meeting adjourned.

9 – Crossing Borders

In a quiet neighborhood in Kent, Connecticut, many of the houses fly Farside's Golden Ring from their porches and flagpoles. Except for the occasional national holiday like the Fourth of July and Memorial Day, the Stars and Stripes are rarely seen on these houses, and the local homeowners' association board has begun to notice. The practice started when one resident who happened to hold a Farside passport and citizenship because of his occasional employment by the local group in Farside began to fly the blue and gold banner whenever he relocated temporarily into Farside to fulfill one of their contracts. He meant it merely as a sign to his neighbors that he was not in residence but others, some of whom wished they, too, could get Farside citizenship and migrate through the gate as a way of escaping the high taxes and deteriorating business environment in this area of western Connecticut, began to follow suit as their way of protesting what they considered 'bad government'.

The covenants these homeowners were obligated to follow said nothing specifically related to flags or banners, but they did prohibit 'objectionable displays' without going into much detail regarding what might be objectionable. Several of the board members, understanding the purpose of flying the Farside flag as a protest, objected. There followed the expected demand from the property manager to cease and desist and, when that proved ineffective, threats from the association's attorney to involve the local courts in the dispute.

The next meeting of the board included, not unexpectedly, an angry delegation of homeowners ready to protest the board's high-handedness and, should it become necessary, work to oust the tyrants. Such meetings, you may suspect, are rarely amicable and this one ran true-to-form.

"The next item on the agenda is 'audience remarks'. Is there anyone present who wishes to address the meeting?" the president asked. A flurry of hands sprang into the air.

"Three minutes, Nelson," the president nodded toward one of the attendees.

"You all know me. I'm Nelson Parks and I just want to say that making us take down our flags violates our First Amendment right to peaceably protest the treatment we're getting from the state. If the board presses on with this harassment, we members are going to correct that at the next election, and you on the board know we can do

it, too. If you want to keep your seat, make sure this doesn't go any further. If you think that's a threat, you're right." Nelson sat down.

"Now, Nelson," the president responded, "you know as well as all of us that the First Amendment protects you from government blocking your free speech. You may have noticed that this board is not government, and we aren't prohibited from enforcing our own documents. If you want to replace us, you go right ahead, but in the meantime you take down those flags. Dolores?" he indicated the next speaker.

"I'm Dolores Grant and I oppose the board interpreting our covenants to suit their own political positions. You should always be interpreting them to maximize the enjoyment of us members to our own property. You aren't doing that when you sic your legal dogs on us for actions that harm nobody except they hurt your feelings, not to mention that we have to pay the bill for you suing us. Your actions on this matter have made lots of your neighbors hopping mad. That's the only thing that should concern you right now." She sat down.

Several others rose and objected to the board's action when their turn came. None made any argument that had any visible effect on the board. Eventually the meeting moved on to other topics. Some left the meeting early while others stayed until adjournment.

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Dick Schoonover's phone rang and he picked it up immediately because the display said "T Plummer". "Good afternoon, Tom. What's up?"

"I just wanted to give you a 'heads-up' about our latest plans for trans-gate commerce," Tom began. "We're about to exploit a loophole, if you can call it that, in our latest trade agreement, and I just didn't want it to come as a surprise for you.

"Farside retailers have been bugging me about this prohibition on retail sales we let you put into its provisions, and they've been so vocal that I'm even getting flak from above: Barbara Walsh keeps asking me for suggestions for reducing the number of complaints she gets. I'm just letting you know what's about to happen.

"Farside is instituting a number of 'free trade zones', all located in Farside, where there will be no barriers to entry from Nearside. Those zones will operate like a flea market or a county fair, with Farside retailers selling their wares to all comers who may then take what they've bought back into Nearside. The agreement between us spells out how much a visitor to Farside may bring back duty-free but doesn't define 'visitor'.

"This is how we think it will work:

"In Farside, we will fence out an area to be used as the market area. To exit the market area into Farside-proper will require a passport or a visa letter. Farsiders will bring their wares in and set up booths or stands for displaying the items for sale. We will open a large personnel gate between Farside and Nearside and allow anyone to transit that gate. That means Nearsiders can enter the market area, buy stuff either to consume on premises or to take back into Nearside with them, and depart back into Nearside. At closing time, we'll hustle everyone not otherwise authorized for access to Farside back through the gate and into Nearside before we close it for the night.

"I expect you will want to set up a customs and immigration checkpoint to handle the traffic and check that nobody is bringing back stuff you don't permit."

Dick Schoonover listened intently and tried to envision what the crossover site would look like. "Are you saying your people might be selling contraband in the 'free trade zone'?"

"It's not impossible," Tom Plummer explained. "You allow Nearsiders to enter Farside and, while here, consume substances and engage in practices that your Nearside laws discourage. Those same opportunities will be available to visitors to our free trade zones. If they buy what you consider contraband while in the free trade zone and don't consume it on-site, I imagine they will try to export it to Nearside.

"If that seems like a problem for you, you may want to take precautions against it. It's up to you, of course, how to handle it."

"Where are you planning these free-trade zones? It would be nice to have a list so we can know what kind of Nearside resources we're likely to need."

"Not a problem, Dick. As soon as we have one or more firmly scheduled, you'll get an email with the details."

The first 'proof-of-concept' Farside Trade Fair was held on the grounds of the Aurora complex, the only place anyone could think of where there was common area held by the Crown on both sides of the proposed location of the main gate into Farside.

In Farside, a large corral enclosed an area filled with portable canopies of various sizes beneath which vendors displayed their wares. At one end of the corral, the two ends of the fence terminated at the gate. At the other end, the corral opened to a Farside passport control station.

In Nearside, a similar arrangement funneled those exiting Farside through a customs inspection station where uniformed guards checked packages for the presence of drugs, plants, and animals. Some of the customs inspectors had done a walk-around of the booths

early-on so that vendors would know which of their products could pass unmolested into Nearside. Most vendors thus already had signs saying "exportable" or "non-exportable" or "export subject to limits". Buyers could not later claim not to have known something would be confiscated when they tried to sneak it back home.

A team from the Security Directorate prowled with clipboards, making notes about this or that not going smoothly or noting suggestions for the next fair.

Colorado being a permissive state, few of Farside's pot-growers bothered. Mike Mullalley had a makeshift bar set up and did a roaring business on the bright, sunny, hot day the schedule had given its promoters. The Smiths had an ice cream parlor decorated as it would have been in the late 19th century and people were raving about the astounding quality of her treats. An executive with a national grocery chain left his card with Connor, Edie's son, emphasizing that his mother should call the number first thing tomorrow morning.

A few vendors sold handicrafts, but most were hawking food and drink. This caused many Nearsiders to understand for the first time the effect Schoonover's negotiations had had on them.

"I wish I could ship this to you, madam, but the trade agreement between Farside and the United States absolutely forbids me shipping this wine directly to you. You would have to be a distributor licensed by your government in order for me to ship this through the gate. You can certainly take it with you as long as you do not exceed your personal allowance, but I strongly advise you to make this your last purchase today and to take it directly home in an air conditioned vehicle. Fine wine can spoil if left to get hot and we cannot be responsible for damage caused by mishandling."

This message was delivered several times by the proprietor of Chalky Creek Vineyards and resulted in one angry letter-to-the-editor and several calls to various Congressmen's local offices.

In ensuing months, fairs were held in several locations. To support the program, additional customs agents would be rotated in on a volunteer basis. At Pecos, Marathon Oil prepared 5,000 glass droplet-shaped vials each containing 250cc of Farside West Texas crude, with Marathon's logo etched onto each vial and a plastic base shaped to present the vial for display. The first of these was sent as a gift to the Queen.

"Is that crude oil in the droplet?" Walter Denton, Farside's Petroleum Minister asked when he saw it.

"That's what the letter from Marathon's CEO says it is," Linda Rossi-Larson answered.

"Does that mean you're going to allow Marathon to export unprocessed crude oil?" he asked Barbara. "Because that's what they're about to do: some Nearsider enters the fairgrounds, obtains a quarter liter of Marathon crude, and takes it back through the gate."

Linda pulled her phone from her back pocket and tapped a few keys. "Call the CEO of Marathon and patch the call back to my phone. Thanks." She hung up and waited. Four minutes later, her phone purred and she answered it.

"Mario," she opened the conversation with Mario Casella, Marathon's CEO, "it's Linda Larson, Chancellor of Farside. I have Walter Denton with me, and Her Majesty. I'm going to put you on speaker." She pressed another button and nodded to Walter.

"Good afternoon, Mario. This is Walter Denton. Thanks for taking our call so promptly. We're all admiring this quarter-liter droplet of Farside West Texas crude oil and wondering if you've forgotten that you cannot export unprocessed crude. Had you?"

A groan issued from the phone's speaker. "I suspect no one in Marketing connected the prohibition for the wellhead area with a promotional item amounting to, at most, a few hundred gallons. Does this mean we have to pull out of the Pecos Fair?"

Barbara chuckled. "No, Mario, but we do wish you'd be more observant of our agreement in the future. I now grant you a special dispensation for individual gifts or retail sales of crude oil in unit quantities not to exceed 275 milliliters, this dispensation to continue for 90 days. Marathon is one of our most valued well operators, and it would hurt me more than it would hurt you should you make me yank your leash."

"I quite understand, Your Majesty. Rest assured it will not happen again."

"Have a pleasant day, Mario," Barbara offered before Linda disconnected the call.

"I expect news of this will be thoroughly spread throughout the well operators before nightfall," Walter finished.

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Edie Smith called the number on the card when she got a break in her Monday chores. "My son tells me you were very insistent, Mr. Carswell, that I speak with you this morning. How may I help you?"

"The ice cream I tasted at your booth yesterday afternoon, Mrs. Smith, is without exaggeration the best ice cream I can ever recall. Your product is better by far than the most expensive premium

ice creams anywhere. Have you ever considered doing that commercially?"

Edie Smith paused in thought. "My ice cream is as good as it is largely, I suspect, because of the ingredients. The milk products that go into it come from our own dairy, so we have absolute control of its quality. Also, I'm pretty sure that making such things in small batches gives a far different result than commercial processes. I guess that's the long way of saying 'no, I've never considered doing it commercially'. Were you about to suggest something?"

"I'm the regional manager for a national-chain grocery whose name you would instantly recognize. I would love to carry Mrs. Smith's Ice Cream at our stores, but we would need many thousands of gallons, far more than the 5-gallon buckets I saw yesterday. If you're at all interested, I would like to put my food process engineers together with you to see if your recipes could be scaled up enough to be practical."

"I think you should be talking with Tom Plummer," Edie Smith told him.

Tom Plummer listened intently to DeShawn Carswell's presentation, trying hard not to let his thoughts wander away toward 'implementation'. Such things would come later. For now, it was important to acquire the big picture.

"I absolutely agree, Mr. Carswell. Edie Smith's ice cream is legendary in this part of Farside. I think if we were ever to have a community pot-luck without her, there would be a revolution. I'm delighted you agree with the opinion of everyone else who's tasted it."

"Absolutely," Carswell agreed. "I want to get a sample for my boss to try. I know he'll flip over it. I need to arrange a shipment of a couple of sample flavors, but Mrs. Smith seemed to think that was going to be a problem."

"Is your company registered to do business trans-portal?" Plummer asked. "Are you a registered receiver for Farside produce?"

On his end of the phone conversation, Carswell had a stunned look on his face. "A *what?*"

"Our trade agreement with the United States government operates to prevent Farside businesses shipping goods trans-portal to clients not registered as authorized receivers," Plummer explained patiently. "It's a long story. The executive summary is that your government wants to be able to tax what comes through the gate and the only way to do that is to know who's getting what. Knowing 'who' is step number one. My understanding is that your State Department handles the paperwork. Let us know when you have a business identification number and we'll ship your sample."

The corporate purchasing department did, as it turned out, have a license to import goods from Farside even though it hadn't yet been necessary. Edie Smith whipped up a batch of chocolate, another of strawberry, and another of vanilla, and had them, fifteen gallons in all, packed in dry ice and shipped with a very narrow "*must clear customs by...*" window direct to DeShawn Carswell.

The corporate executives tasted the product and were suitably impressed, enough to begin working on a marketing plan for "*Mrs. Smith's 1888-style Ice Cream*". The food process engineers shook their heads in dismay. *It would take magic for them to be able to replicate this stuff in a factory*, they muttered to themselves.

"The problem," the lead Food Process engineer explained to the executive committee, "is that she makes her ice cream in 5-gallon batches. We make ice cream in 3,000-gallon batches. It's not just a matter of batch size, although that plays heavily into it. When she cools the mixture, she takes it down a few degrees below freezing and it's congealed in a few minutes. For us to get the mixture to congeal in a few minutes, we have to drop the temperature a dozen degrees or more below freezing. If we use her formula, it takes hours to cool and congeal. Either method affects how the result turns out, and both yield a product that both feels and tastes different than Edie Smith's small-batch ice cream.

"She uses whole milk, but the butterfat content of that Farside milk is off the chart. P.s.: that's why it tastes so smooth; it's naturally lubricated. P.p.s.: the calorie count is also off the chart.

"You asked if we can replicate her method, and I'm here to tell you 'yes, we can', but you'll have to price that ice cream north of seventeen dollars per gallon just to break even. We can manufacture equivalent product only if we make it in units of five gallons or less and convince some dairy to provide us with equivalent ingredients. Some of your customers will look at the 'nutrition information' panel on the carton and run screaming from the store.

"If you want to go that route, we're standing by waiting for the green light."

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Linda Rossi-Larson's phone rang and she answered it immediately because the caller-ID identified the call as emanating from within Farside's State Department: "Larson."

"Ma'am, it's Diane at the Prime Minister's office. The PM wanted me to alert you to an inquiry from The Pentagon. He feels a face-to-face meeting is called for. May I tell him when you will be available?"

"You may tell the PM I am in transit as we speak. I am at his disposal at any time. Should Minister Dinardo also be alerted?"

"He's next on the call list, ma'am," Diane assured her.

"I'll be there in thirty minutes or less."

She made it in twenty-one minutes, straight-arming the door into the Moot Hall where most of the Crown offices were located. She made a bee line for Ivan's office and found him and Tony Dinardo waiting for her. She took the seat Ivan indicated for her.

"Are we about to go to war?" she asked breathlessly.

"No," Ivan soothed, "but we're being asked to support a military operation." Linda and Tony both leaned forward as if to object, but Ivan kept talking. "Let me fill you in on the details before you jump to any conclusions.

"The Tugali People's Revolutionary Front has begun a revolt, and their first action was to kidnap several diplomats including the British, French, and U.S. envoys. They are threatening to execute them all and the captives are being held in such a location that extricating them unharmed will be impossible. The Pentagon is asking whether we have assets that might be brought into play. I have already informed them that we have no diplomatic presence in Tugali. I wanted to hear what you have to say.

"Now I'm done talking. Your turn."

"I don't think we should get involved in somebody else's shitstorm," Linda began. "Every branch of their services has elite insertion forces all of whom are far better trained and equipped than we are. If they can't do it, what chance do we have?"

"I raised that point," Ivan answered her. "They countered that they felt a force large enough to overcome the rebels' defenses would of necessity be large enough to be detected before the captives could be secured. They look to us because we have the means to get in close undetected and secure the captives before they can be harmed."

"That's true," Tony admitted, "but do we want to get our hands dirty with something that is clearly not our problem?"

"It's another IOU in our pocket," Ivan suggested.

"And sets a really bad precedent," Tony countered. "Has Barbara chimed in on this yet?"

"She has not. When I raise the issue to her.. if I raise the issue to her.. I want to present a fully-formed plan to which all of her involved Privy Council has agreed."

"Do you have something in mind?" Linda asked.

"I thought we might send in a small team to take out the guards closest to the prisoners, and whisk the prisoners away through Farside, but I haven't worked out all the details. I was hoping you two would help with that.

"Understand, we don't have to kill anybody — Barbara would forbid any such operation anyway — all we have to do is un-kidnap a bunch of non-combatants."

Linda dialed her phone, switched it to 'speaker', and waited for Tricia Murphy to pick up. "How do you kidnap someone from Nearside to Farside?" she asked when Tricia had identified herself.

Tricia paused briefly, then: "If you can get the target alone or with at least some margin of space around them, open a gate above them and drop it to the ground. Boom! They're suddenly in Farside. Switch the gate off and there's no trace of them in Nearside. If nobody was looking, as far as anybody can tell 'they just disappeared'.

"What's this all about?"

"Pop over to Ivan's office and we'll fill you in."

"On my way," Tricia replied before disconnecting.

"So we can do it," Tony mused, satisfied now that Farside's part in whatever happened could be restricted to humanitarian rescue of innocent prisoners. "Let's get the details out of the way. First detail: where the hell is Tugali?"

"West Africa."

"Do we have any presence in or near Tugali?"

"No, we'd have to chopper-in and trek overland from whatever served as a landing zone."

"Do we know where the prisoners are being held?"

Ivan tossed a few faxed images onto the table. "I also had the survey guys redirect a mapping drone to these coordinates to give us side-by-side pictures of the landscape. I'm no expert, but it looks do-able to me."

"How many prisoners? We'll need one gate per each and two operators per gate."

"Six in total: one U.S., two Brits, one French, one Egyptian, and one South African. So, six gates, twelve operators?"

"...Plus a few helpers, sentries, whatever..."

Tricia pushed through the door and sat down.

Tony turned to her and began a briefing: "The view from 10,000 feet: in Tugali in Western Africa, six assorted diplomats have been kidnapped by revolutionary forces who threaten to execute them all if their unspecified demands are not met or if there is any attempt to rescue them. The U.S. government asks if we are able to rescue them without getting them all killed. It has been suggested — by you — that we can drop opened gates on them to pull them into Farside and deliver them to safety. Do you see any problems or obstacles?"

"Uh... six gates? Most gatekeepers have three, maybe four. When does this have to be done?"

"The revolutionaries have threatened to start shooting in—" Ivan looked at his watch "—seven hours and twenty minutes."

"Impossible," Tricia opined. "We'd have to fly gates in from France or Italy, maybe both. My knowledge of African geography is crud, but it's got to be 2,000 miles or more. Locate the gates, fly them to Tugali with their gatekeepers and assistants, infiltrate the prison compound, and pull off the grab-and-go? If they had asked us yesterday we might be able to do it today. Seven hours? Forget it."

"Realistically, how long would it take if everything went like clockwork?" Ivan asked Tricia.

She paused in thought mulling dozens of alternatives and discarding most of them. "Twelve hours, maybe eleven, if we have the 100% cooperation of everybody's military. There are probably a dozen gates in and around London. We could pull enough gates, gatekeepers, and assistants from the London area and do it with a single flight."

"Get the plans pulled together. Use my spare office as a workspace. If I can get Barbara's permission, I'll try to get the U.K. to lend us a hand. Start now."

They all moved to the empty office next to Ivan's and began planning.

Ivan dialed Barbara, gave her the 'executive summary' including his promise that no harm would come to anyone on account of Farside actions, and got her okay to proceed.

He next called Brian Trehane at the Foreign Office in London to bring him up to speed and to get him moving on getting the RAF to assist with their plans.

Within a half hour Ivan was speaking with Air Vice-Marshal Gregory Matson-Brooks to arrange an emergency flight aboard an RAF C-5 Galaxy direct to Tugali's largest airport. Tricia had already contacted her Senior Gatekeeper for U.K. and charged him with mustering twenty volunteer gatekeepers equipped with eight doorframe gates and assorted viewers. The volunteers gathered with their gates pre-packaged in secure duffels in Regent's Park and were met there by an RAF helicopter. From Regents Park they were ferried to a nearby RAF base where they boarded the jet transport for the four-hour trip to Tugali. In flight, the team leader briefed his technicians on the mission and the tactics planned for rescuing the captives.

On the ground in Tugali, the gatekeepers were met by Tugali National Police who convoyed them in six trucks to the location where the rebels were holding the diplomats. The walled compound was surrounded at a distance by National Police and local police.

"We have only fifty-five minutes before the kidnappers start shooting the diplomats," the senior gatekeeper explained to the senior police officer. "We still have some preparations to complete and we need your troops to back away and give us room to operate."

After a little bickering, the police finally capitulated and withdrew from the gatekeepers' area of operation.

"Let's pull the gates through," the team leader ordered. In minutes, a gate was opened and the entire team transited with their duffels. Once on the other side, a second gate was opened, the first gate was shut down and carried through, putting all the gates safely in Farside.

Three viewers were started and the three scouts holding them began wandering through the area, walking through the wall surrounding the rebel's compound, walking through the walls of the buildings, checking each room until...

"I found them," one of the scouts called out, and the others quickly homed on the same room.

In the room, four men and two women sat bound to chairs with light ropes while four rebel guards armed with AK-47s sat around the perimeter of the room. The air was thick with cigarette smoke.

"Graham, take your viewer to the far side of that door, and when I give you the signal, switch it to 'open' and give the door a rap." Graham nodded his understanding. "You others, get ready to switch on, drop, and switch off." Six pairs of gatekeepers got their gateframes ready for the signal. When they all signaled their readiness, the team leader instructed: "Graham, knock on 'two'. Everybody else, switch on at 'one', drop at 'zero'. Don't screw this up or we'll decapitate the ones we're trying to rescue. Ready? Five... four... three... two..." — Graham flicked his viewer to 'on' and rapped the door once with his knuckle, then switched back to 'view' — the guards inside all turned toward the door expectantly — "one..." — six gates came active above the heads of the prisoners — "zero..." — six gates dropped to the ground in Farside instantly transiting six captive diplomats. Six gates switched off.

When the guards turned around, the room was empty. All Hell broke loose in Nearside.

In Farside, gate technicians flicked open pocket knives and cut the ropes holding the prisoners' hands to their chairs. "Welcome to Farside," they were told. The technicians, guided by years of experience, disassembled the six gates and stowed them in duffels.

A scout with a viewer led the group, six diplomats and twenty gatekeepers, toward freedom beyond the walls of the compound.

"Keep going," the team leader instructed. "Let's find a secluded place where we can pull the gates through." They walked

past the police cordon and found a makeshift parking lot where most of the vehicles, including the six trucks that had brought them here, were parked. There were no police guarding the area.

"This will do." A gate was opened and all but one went through into Nearside. A second gate opened in Nearside to allow the Farside gate, now powered down, to be pulled through, then both gates were disassembled and stowed for transport. Devices attached to the zippers on the duffels would guarantee that anyone who tried to open the duffels without knowing the code would destroy every gate inside.

The diplomats, after shaking hands with and profusely thanking each and every member of the rescue team, were escorted back to their embassies and consulates while the rescue team reboarded the trucks that had brought them and were transported back to the airfield where waited their flight back to London. On the return trip, the team leader composed a report on the action for dispatch to Guild Headquarters in Okambo. The report would note that the operation was complete before the rebel's deadline for killing the captive diplomats.

Ivan's personal cell phone rang and he glanced at the display: Brian Trehane. "Deruschka," he spoke.

"Your Excellency...", Trehane began.

"Brian, this is Farside. We don't have titles like that. Call me 'Ivan'."

Trehane laughed. "I swear I will never get used to you Yanks."

"Or us *Ruskiye*," Ivan added. "Please convey to your AVM Matson-Brooks Her Majesty's congratulations and mine on a masterful execution of our most casual planning."

"By an odd coincidence, I am calling to offer my sovereign's congratulations and my own and Air Vice-Marshal Matson-Brooks' as well on a truly spectacular demonstration of what Farside can throw together on a moment's notice. God grant we never feel obliged to go to war with you."

"God grant we never have to raise an army," Ivan added.

"Those were not military?" Trehane asked with a note of surprise.

"We don't have a 'military', *per se*. We have *militia*, seriously unorganized but capable of pulling together when needed."

"You don't have an army *at all*?"

"Why would we need one?" Ivan countered.

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"Do we need an elite corps of gatekeepers that can be activated on a moment's notice to repeat what we did in Tugali?" Ivan asked Larry Gordon.

Larry thought for a moment before answering. "We could. If we decide we do, that task should be assigned to Dan or Tricia. They each have insights into the finer points of gate technology that I have yet to develop."

"Do it," Ivan instructed. "Organize them as if they were Minutemen. Tell Tricia it's her baby now." Larry understood Ivan meant 'small scattered groups prepared to drop everything and spring into action'.

"Are we creating a combat group?" Larry asked.

Now it was Ivan's turn to mull. "It's possible," he said at last, "but I think we will all face the wrath of the Crown if anybody actually gets killed and we can't make a rock-solid case for it being necessary or unavoidable. I see these minutemen – and minutewomen – as being more akin to a 'search and rescue' unit. After Tugali, I expect others will want the help of technology that can undetectably thwart evil actors before they can do damage. We neglected to swear those captives to secrecy and tales of being whisked away into Farside as if by magic are now making the rounds of the diplomatic corps.

"Someone naïve regarding the technology may get the finer details wrong, but they get the gist right, and those stories are impressive enough to get people's attention."

The August Gatekeepers' Bulletin contained a short article by Tricia Murphy explaining the task given her by the PM, asking for volunteers from the ranks of experienced gatekeepers, and hinting there would be future openings for apprentices. Within the day, the special e-mail account set up to receive offers from volunteers was bulging. There were only 460 gatekeepers Tricia considered 'qualified' and it appeared all 460 had volunteered, along with a few hundred others who wanted to be the first picked as apprentices.

With few exceptions, mostly limited to exempt or unqualified guild headquarters staff, the entire corps of the guild had volunteered.

Tricia set to work building lesson plans for training those who would eventually be selected as teachers for the others.

"From what we have gleaned by debriefing our two diplomats," AVM Matson-Brooks began his exposition, "we know that this was done by moving the gates rather than the persons or objects to be shifted from Farside to Nearside or *vice-versa*. One of the intelligence analysts we interviewed — one — was not surprised at this. Everyone else just *assumed* gates had to be stationary, perhaps because we've

never seen anything but stationary gates. Whatever the cause of such an assumption, it is now shown to be false. Gates can be moved, and anything in their path transits as it moves from one side to the other through the moving gate.

"The diplomats said it all happened in the wink of an eye. They had the impression of seeing sky above them for an instant and then they were in Farside surrounded by staff operating a half dozen gates. Note, they were still seated on the chairs to which they were tied and had to be cut loose.

"As soon as the Farsiders reported everyone safe and sound, the Tugali army assaulted the compound and killed or captured everyone inside. We have been unable to interview any of the soldiers guarding the diplomatic prisoners, so we have no idea what it was they might have seen, but we can speculate:

"If those subjects were whisked away into Farside, it's likely that something of Farside changed places with them, so there is probably some Farside grass or dirt on the floor of the cell where they were held, left there when the gates closed. It must have seemed like magic."

"As, indeed, it was," the head of MI-5 added. "We ought to thoroughly groom Farside as an ally for several reasons:

"We want never to be at war with them. Some of the stories passed along to me by my contacts within the Yank intelligence services make shivers run down my spine, but they were at the time not on the best of terms with Farside. That has since been remedied, and I can assure you we don't want to repeat their mistakes.

"More importantly, we can use Farside technology the way we use helicopters: places you wouldn't dream of sending an airplane are often places where a helicopter is the obvious answer. The same is true for special operations as we all saw in the recent Tugali incident: they were in and out before we could have briefed SAS." He nodded toward the AVM. "I think SAS with Farside support — or Farside with SAS support — make feasible operations where we would otherwise just throw up our hands in despair or resolve to accept the inevitable casualties. Yes, we need to be on the absolute best of terms with Farside, whatever the cost."

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When Farside was a-borning, the only people admitted were self-starters with a talent that made them valuable to a primitive community, and all were under the requirement that they produce enough wealth for themselves and their families that they were not a burden upon others. The exceptions to this were rare: Dennis

Cameron, for instance, never worked a farm and rarely (if ever) worked a sluice, but his business connections and his air taxi service made his presence welcome, and Farside saw to it that he was well-compensated at attractive premiums over typical Nearside commercial rates.

In more than a score of years, Farside's economy had already grown robust enough that obligations of self-sufficiency were honored more in the breach than the observance. Tourists now regularly exercised their visa privilege to vacation in Farside's still-rugged wilderness, mostly to revel in its Pleistocene ecology, but occasionally to enjoy pursuits that were actively discouraged beyond the portal.

Many communities accepted new members who brought with them assets not otherwise common in Farside, and allowed them to make a living by supplying goods and services that would normally require a shopping trip to Nearside.

William Hammaker spent nearly a half-million dollars to equip his yacht for ocean-going exploration and move it into Farside. The Ministry of the Interior happily endorsed his proposal. Hammaker felt sure he could 'do well by doing good' as he phrased it. The Gatekeepers' Guild equally happily assigned a team of four senior- and mid-level gatekeepers to Interior to assist the project. Rand-McNally's Farside Special Projects Division contributed two cartographers and three long-range surveillance drones.

From its base near the mouth of the Patuxent River which, in Farside, nearly replicated its Nearside namesake, the newly-renamed *Farside Explorer I* could resupply from the many ship chandleries located nearby in Nearside, and set sail for any port in the world. On a chilly April morning, *Farside Explorer I* slipped its moorings and headed south to survey the coast down through the Florida Keys. With no GPS satellites in orbit to guide them, traditional navigation skills became valuable to the point that Hammaker and one of the gatekeepers held daily tutorials for any who wanted to learn 'the craft'.

On day 6 of the cruise, all the 'students' were called topside with their sextants and told to determine the latitude. All of the answers were within acceptable range of 27° 15' N. A drone was launched to scan Nearside for landmarks and confirmed that Jensen Beach would have been off the starboard beam had the ship been in Nearside. At approximately that latitude, Farside's equivalent of 'Florida' ended.

The drone was recovered and Captain Hammaker changed course ESE to investigate the Bahamas — if they existed.

The Bahamas did not disappoint, and the reconnaissance drone managed to deliver several hundred pairs of images showing

Nearside and Farside terrain, but no one seeing these Farside islands from aloft would mistake them for the familiar shapes Nearsiders expected.

The ship continued cruising SE mapping the chain of islands that mimicked their Nearside cousins until the navigation students agreed it was time to head south through the pass between Cuba and Haiti.

A drone now patrolled the sea 27 miles ahead looking for the gap between the islands of Cuba and Hispaniola. At 1200 feet above the surface, the drone could see over eighty miles from horizon to horizon. The Nearside view now clearly showed the eastern tip of Cuba and the western tip of Haiti, but the Farside camera showed a continuous band of dry land. In Farside there was no gap allowing access to the waters south of Cuba.

"If we have to skirt Hispaniola," Captain Hammaker announced, "we ought to top off the tanks at the first marina we come across." Cuba being unlikely to harbor many marinas for recreational boaters, he turned eastward toward Hispaniola, intending to round it to the east if that were possible. The drones proved invaluable here, being able to scout ahead for marinas whose location would allow *Farside Explorer I* to get close enough to its diesel pumps. A marina that was landlocked in Farside was disqualified. Only those near or on Farside water could be used.

One such was located near Monte Cristi, and *Farside Explorer I* beached nearby so someone could go ashore and negotiate the purchase of fuel while those on the ship observed them with a viewer and followed closely along. When the crewman signaled the ship to come alongside the fuel dock, a gatekeeper opened a gate near the fuel intake, the hose was passed through and secured, and 1,100 gallons poured into the tanks. When fueling was complete, the crewman signed the credit card slip, a door-sized gate opened at deck-level, and he jumped through.

Now with full tanks, *Farside Explorer I* resumed her eastward course and two hundred miles later passed through the strait, just 3 miles wide in Farside, between Hispaniola and Puerto Rico. Hammaker turned the ship SW.

As the ship approached the coast of South America, the drones took to the air again to assist with navigation and to supply the mapmakers with image data.

"I think we're all going to need some shore leave pretty soon," Hammaker announced at dinner. "We should be getting close to Cartagena by tomorrow. If it provides a decent anchorage, I'm going to release the entire crew for a few days. We'll need to resupply, of course, but Cartagena's a big town and there shouldn't be any

problems. Anyone have any concerns or problems that need to be addressed?" They all agreed that 'shore leave' sounded like what they all needed.

Around noon the next day, *Farside Explorer I* dropped anchor in shallow water very close to what looked like a fueling dock. A crewman was put ashore to find the business office and negotiate the purchase of food and fuel and was back inside an hour with news.

Yes, the chandlery would be glad to assist with re-provisioning, but the authorities from the Republic of Colombia were very anxious to examine the passports of anyone who intended to come through the portal and go ashore. The crewman assured the staff at the business office that the crew would be happy to present their papers.

Aboard the ship, the short wave radio was in more-or-less constant communication with their Patuxent River base and Hammaker informed them of this and asked that Farside's State Department open a dialog with the Colombian State Department as a way of smoothing out any potentially unpleasant interactions.

In due course, a delegation from Immigration arrived at the dock. Their approach was observed through the viewer panel that was constantly 'on', and the duty gatekeeper opened the portal when they were about 5 meters away. One by one, the crew hopped through onto the dock, presented their passports for validation, and each received their entry stamp from the inspector.

"Welcome to Colombia," they were told. "We hope you enjoy your time ashore."

One rotating 'duty gatekeeper' and one person capable of captaining the ship always remained aboard, but the rest of the crew were allowed to go ashore when off duty. On land in Nearside the crew found they could use their phones to make calls home, and use their credit cards to make purchases at the local stores.

"I have a few errands to run today, so I'd like someone to stay with the ship while I'm ashore," Hammaker announced at Friday's breakfast. Tomorrow is Saturday in Cartagena. I'm not a party person, so I'll stay aboard tomorrow with the duty gatekeeper. The rest of you should feel free to take the whole day ashore as long as you're back on board — sober — by 4 a.m. The tide turns at 4:37 and I'd like to depart on the ebb. Enjoy yourselves."

With the whole crew gone, the captain spent much of Saturday reading and catching up on his memoirs. "There's one last delivery to be made," he told the gatekeeper. "It should be here by early afternoon. Call me when it arrives."

Indeed, shortly after 2 p.m. three uniformed deliverymen were seen wheeling hand trucks along the pier.

"This may be your delivery," the gatekeeper told Hammaker over the phone. Hammaker put aside what he was doing and went topside to supervise.

Nine wrapped bundles were passed through the portal and collected on the deck. Hammaker signed the receipt and the deliverymen departed the way they had come.

"You stay on the viewer," Hammaker told the gatekeeper. "I'll put this stuff below." One bundle per trip was all Hammaker could manage, but he soon had all nine neatly stowed in cabinets in his quarters.

By 3:15 a.m. the following morning, the last of the crew was aboard and the ship was being made ready for sea. At precisely 4:37, the anchors were secured and *Farside Explorer I* turned NW toward Cancun.

10 – Crossing Swords

At the annual members' meeting of the Royal Oaks Homeowners Association, a slate of candidates led by Nelson Parks and Dolores Grant and running on a platform based around making the board more focused on protecting the rights of its members swept away the prior board and took control of the association. The first item on their wish-list was to allow non-board members to insert agenda items onto the monthly meeting agendas. Any member could, for the price of gathering seven co-sponsor signatures, place a topic onto the next meeting's agenda for consideration by the board. Pete Findlay, their neighbor who sometimes did contract work in Farside, had been forewarned of this change to the association's policies and had a proposal primed and ready.

"Farside's Crown Office for Nearside Commerce has recently begun holding trade fairs where Farside producers offer their wares to Nearsiders in a flea-market-ish setting. Royal Oaks has a section of common ground that could serve as an entry point to Farside, and we ought to sponsor such a fair as a service to our neighbors and as a way of establishing liaisons with nearby neighborhoods that may enable us and them to leverage our common concerns into effective state and local policy-making. I would like the board to consider sponsoring such an event, and I move that this request be placed on next month's agenda."

"Pete, would you volunteer to chair the committee that would be in charge of this?" Nelson Parks asked, and Pete agreed that he would. "Then, would you gather a team and put together a presentation for the next board meeting so that we can have all the details ready to consider? Thanks."

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Farside Explorer I snuggled up against its Patuxent River berth and the crew made it fast. The rest of the day and the following morning were devoted to offloading the crew's personal items and refitting the ship for its next cruise.

"Say, can you keep one of the gates aboard for a while?" Hammaker asked the senior gatekeeper. "My Nearside house is a few miles upriver and I'd like to dump some of my stuff off there if that's okay."

The gatekeeper thought about it for a moment, then: "Sure. Are we going to do this soon?"

"Yes. Give me ten minutes to finish fueling and we'll leave directly." The gatekeeper nodded his understanding.

Shortly the fuel lines were retracted and Hammaker and the lone gatekeeper departed upstream. A few minutes later, *Farside Explorer I* eased between two pylons carefully positioned in the water.

"We should be right at my dock," Hammaker announced. The gatekeeper opened a gate to reveal an empty wharf. "If you want, you can go check out my McMansion," Hammaker offered. "It's pretty nice. I'll transfer the cargo."

"I'm not allowed to cross into Nearside while my gate is active," the gatekeeper explained, "but I can help. What are we transferring?"

"Curios and souvenirs of my expedition," Hammaker offered. "Stuff to decorate the house. Someday it may be worth something. You can mind the gate if you want. I'll do the work."

Hammaker brought up the first 30-kilo bundle from his cabin and pushed it through the gate onto the dock. He did the same for the other eight bundles before fetching a hand truck from the shed at the land-end of the dock and moving the bundles, three at a time, into the shed.

Finished, the gatekeeper closed the gate and *Farside Explorer I* backed out of its slip and returned downstream to its regular mooring. The gatekeeper packed the remaining gate and went ashore with it.

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Lee and Edie Smith sat across their dining room table from Tom Plummer while their children looked on.

"That Mr. Carswell asked me if I had ever thought of making ice cream commercially and I told him I had not," Edie explained to Tom, "but that's no longer true. I have been thinking about it and that's why I invited you over tonight. Tom, if we were to try to make ice cream in commercial quantities, what would we need?"

Tom mulled the question as Edie formulated it. "A building, certainly, and lots of refrigeration equipment, an engineer or two to help you get the processes set up correctly. Maybe you ought to talk to somebody who's already in that business. I'm sure there's someone who would lend you their expertise for a cut of the proceeds. We could find someone in the business of providing ice-cream-making machinery and get them on your team. They'd help you just to sell you their equipment. There are lots of ways to play this. It's really up to you, but I'm ready to help you in whatever way you think best."

Two process engineers from The Lentz Food Machinery Company rolled through the County Road 28 gate and showed their passports and visa letters to the officials there. Waiting for them was Connor Smith and his ATV. Connor introduced himself and instructed the Lentz engineers to follow him. In twenty minutes they were all parked in the Smith's driveway and Edie was leading them into the dairy where she made her ice cream.

As Edie explained her process, the engineers continually jotted notes on their tablet computers, occasionally asking questions of Edie and exchanging ideas among themselves in engineer-speak.

"I'm sure you realize, Mrs. Smith, that bulk processes never deliver the same product as the paradigmatic small-batch process does. We can build you a process that will closely mirror your original process, but it won't exactly replicate it. We estimate the cost would be in the neighborhood of \$320,000.

"Would that be satisfactory?"

"Are you saying it's strictly not possible to get the quality I want regardless of cost? I ask because I'm thinking I could build a shop floor that's nothing more than fifty or a hundred copies of the setup I use, train a crew to make ice cream according to my specifications, and turn out however many 5-gallon buckets I care to produce. With a setup like that, I could produce fifty or a hundred different custom flavors, and it wouldn't cost me anywhere near what you're proposing. I think you have to start thinking outside the ice cream carton if you want to sell me some equipment. Would you like to try again?"

"The name of the game, Mrs. Smith, is 'automation'. You would have, when we finish, a production line that is largely hands-off and staffed by fewer than twenty people who would load ingredients at one end of the line and pull finished product off the other end with a few supervisors to watch the line and make sure everything was being done correctly."

"But that's not being 'done correctly,'" Edie protested. "If the quality isn't there, that's incorrect. What I want from you is to replicate my process with an automated line that turns out product indistinguishable from what I can produce 5 gallons at a time."

"Impossible!" the lead engineer declared.

"Not impossible," Edie Smith corrected him. "Make it happen.

"Dinner is at 5:30 and you're welcome to stay overnight and continue this tomorrow if you feel that would be a valuable use of your time. If you don't think you can productively continue and wish to leave, my son will escort you back to the gate."

The two engineers looked at each other and nodded. "Thank you for the offer. I think we would like to brainstorm some alternate ideas and present them when they're ready."

"Bring your luggage inside the house and I'll show you to your rooms."

Jim Proctor pushed himself away from the table. "That was with no exaggeration the best meal I've had that didn't come from a kitchen with multiple Michelin stars. Thank you for an astounding dinner, Mrs. Smith."

"I second the sentiment," Arturo Flores, his partner on this mission echoed. "I normally think of 'pot roast' as a down-scale meal, but this was an eye-opener. And your ice cream makes me understand why you're so adamant about keeping the quality up. Jim and I are going to do our level-best to meet your requirements.

"Would it be okay if we worked in your living room for a while?"

"Arturo, *mi casa es su casa*," Edie assured them, "but do it quietly, please. We all have an early day tomorrow."

With several pads of notepaper and their tablet computers close by, Jim and Arturo sketched ideas and discarded some while others got put aside for further elaboration. By half-past ten, they were closing in on what they hoped would be the solution to Edie Smith's problem. They were, by then, the only people still awake in the house, all the Smiths having turned in hours ago against the requirement to be up before dawn to get the cows milked.

"I think that might do the job for her," Arturo said, finally putting his mechanical pencil aside. "The boss is going to have a fit when he sees what we're suggesting, though. We have nothing in our inventory that will do what we need."

What they had converged upon was closer to the overhead trolleys used by dry cleaning stores where garments are hung at numbered slots on a continuous motorized chain. Their plan was to have individual 5-gallon buckets first filled with the ice cream mixture, then capped, rinsed, and dipped into an ammonia-cooled salt water bath long enough to harden the liquid before coming off the chain at the freezer station where the 5-gallon containers would be stored until shipment.

Each container was to have a barcode individually identifying it from the hundreds before and after it. Just before going into the salt water bath, the container would be weighed to the milligram, and that weight had to match its weight after it emerged from the bath. A weight difference out-of-tolerance would cause the container to "kick

out” for manual inspection to ensure it had not leaked and taken on salt water into the mixture.

Satisfied, they turned out the lights and furtively climbed the stairs to their rooms for a well-deserved night’s rest.

Deb Smith, Lee and Edie’s youngest, sat at the dining room table poring over her schoolwork while she waited for the Lentz engineers to wake and show themselves. Just about 7:30, the two made their way downstairs to — hopefully — get some breakfast before putting the finishing touches on their proposal to the Smiths.

“Good morning, sleepyheads,” Deb greeted them. “Are you ready for breakfast?” They both nodded vigorously. “What’ll you have? I can do eggs, pancakes, sausage, bacon, cereals... almost anything you’d like,” she informed them as she closed her books and put them aside for later.

They both agreed on pancakes and sausage as a way of easing the burden on her, and Deborah set to work at the griddle. Before they knew it, they each had a plate of pancakes before them and they tore into them with gusto.

“Anything else?” Deb asked. The two engineers explained that they still had some fine tuning to do on their proposal and were going to work inside the main house until it was ready. “Mom will be by around lunch time in case you have any questions,” she informed them before heading out to get started on her chores that were now being worked by her siblings so that she could stand by to get breakfast for their guests.

A little past noon, Edie Smith returned to the main house to see how the ‘Lentz guys’ were getting along.

“It’s not pretty,” Arturo apologized for the roughness of their presentation, “but we think you’re going to like what we put together.” He proceeded to sketch out for Edie their plan for a continuous production line that would produce ice cream the same way Edie would were she making just 5 gallons. “It will be a slow process, but so is the original on which we modeled this. We think you will be able to set up a several-thousand-gallon reservoir of mixture and use that to fill several hundred 5-gallon containers each of which will then be cooled almost exactly the way you would do it one at a time. We think this method will keep the quality you demand. It won’t be able to produce as much product as our original proposal, but it will be miles ahead of what you’re doing now, and if it works as well as we hope, the process can be tweaked to handle smaller containers like half-gallons. That would greatly expand your market.”

“How much?” Edie demanded.

"We don't know yet," Jim Proctor admitted. "It won't be as high as we originally proposed because the conveyor is going to be much simpler, but we don't have good figures because — well, to be perfectly honest, we don't know where we're going to get the mechanism for the line."

"I beg your pardon..."

"Lentz doesn't make the kind of hardware we think this line will need," Proctor explained. "We may have to outsource it."

"Give me a ballpark number," Edie pressed.

Proctor hesitated. "Seventy thousand, maybe sixty."

"That's a whole lot different than \$320,000. What happened?"

"We started out assuming this was going to be a more-or-less standard application. It's actually much smaller than that. What we laid out as our preliminary design is — frankly — unlike anything we've ever done before. That number, of course, doesn't include the building or the freezer. You'll have to build a structure adequate to house the line. We have no idea how much that will cost."

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Don Wright knocked on Dan Murphy's already-open door and walked in. "Can you review this and tell me if you see anything out of place? Page 17 in particular." He handed the printed report to Dan.

Dan flipped it open to page 17 and began reading silently. "Does this say that he opened a gate and transferred material into Nearside without going through U.S. Customs?"

"That's what it sounded like to me," Wright agreed. "I can almost see how it might happen, too. He mentions that the cargo was headed for Captain Hammaker's home. What's suspicious about that? He obviously didn't even connect it to Rule 19, or he wouldn't have even mentioned it. It appears an innocent mistake, a gatekeeper who knows the requester well and is eager to help a friend and colleague. How would you like me to handle this?"

"Who's the senior gatekeeper for the area?"

Wright crinkled his mouth. "He is. He's attached to the Interior Ministry, so there's not even a regional supervisor we can ask to step in and handle it. This one is mine, and thus yours."

Dan Murphy handed the report back. "Before we act, let's get profiles for everyone on the same team and see what we're dealing with."

"You want to meet again after lunch?" Dan gave him a 'thumbs up'.

With the door now closed, Dan and Don spread the printed profiles for each of the gatekeepers assigned to *Farside Explorer I* across Dan's desk. They discussed the alternatives in hushed tones for several minutes before Dan put his finger on one.

"Agreed," Don confirmed.

Dan punched a series of numbers on his desk phone and a phone somewhere began to *burr* on the speaker.

"This is Lara," she answered.

"Keeper Gunn, this is Senior Adviser Dan Murphy and Don Wright, Supervisor for Special Operations, calling from Guild Headquarters..."

Lara Gunn suddenly went 'all business'. "Yes, Master Keeper."

"Listen very carefully, please. You are to immediately relieve Senior Keeper Spellman of his duties and assume those duties yourself. You are now the Senior Keeper for your group. Have Keeper Spellman call back on this number to confirm that action. Repeat your orders back to me, please."

"You have ordered me to relieve Keeper Spellman immediately and to assume the post of Group Senior Keeper. Keeper Spellman is to call you on this number to confirm the action."

"Correct. Carry on."

"Yes, Master Keeper." She hung up.

By Dan's reckoning, it was little more than twenty minutes before his phone rang. "Murphy," he answered it.

"This is Keeper Will Spellman, Master Keeper Murphy, calling you back as ordered."

"Hold the line, Will." Dan went to his office door and waved at Don Wright to join him on the call. Don trotted over and closed the door behind him as he entered. Dan put the call on 'speaker'.

"Will, I have Don Wright, Supervisor for Special Operations, with us on this call. Do you know why you were relieved?"

"No, sir, I do not."

"The report you submitted on the recent voyage into the Caribbean contains what seems to be an innocent or inadvertent violation of Rule 19. Do you know what I'm referring to?"

There was a pause on the other end as Will Spellman mentally reviewed Rule 19 and the remembered contents of his report. "Captain Hammaker's souvenirs?" he asked.

"That's correct," Dan confirmed. "You put ashore into Nearside nine unexamined bundles of something that you described as 'souvenirs' that should have been cleared through U.S. Customs..."

"I'm sorry," Will interrupted. "It didn't even occur to me..."

"Doesn't matter," Dan took back the conversational lead. "We need to find those packages, recover them, and treat them according to our several agreements with the local government. When did they come on board?"

"I don't know, sir."

"Okay, Will, you now have a special assignment straight from HQ: interview all the keepers on the team and discover who was on duty when and where those packages came on board and under what circumstances they came on board. I'm presuming here that they were not part of the ship's original cargo if they were 'trip souvenirs'. Is that your understanding?"

"Yes, sir."

"Concurrent with that, the team is to locate and reacquire those nine bundles, if they still exist, and hold them in Farside until they can transit according to Rule 19. Repeat back to me your orders."

"I am to interview the team's gatekeepers to determine who supervised the loading of those nine packages, and when and where and why, and to report my findings back to HQ. The team is to bring the nine bundles back into Farside for proper handling."

"Correct. Senior Keeper Gunn can verify those orders, should she wish to, by calling my office. Carry on."

Spellman knew he hadn't been the duty gatekeeper when those bundles came aboard. He interviewed two others, neither of whom admitted to knowing anything about the packages. That left Lara Gunn.

"Oh... my... God...," Lara gasped, making each word sound like its own sentence, when Will Spellman asked her about the nine wrapped bundles. "Is that what this is all about? Yes, I recall them coming aboard. It was our last day in Cartagena. The whole crew was ashore and I was the duty gatekeeper. Captain Hammaker was busy all day in his cabin making preparations for sea and warned me there was a last-minute shipment arriving. Three uniformed deliverymen with hand trucks dropped off nine wrapped-and-taped bundles at the end of the dock. Captain Hammaker did all the work putting them on board and stowing them below. I never saw them again after that. What was in them?"

"I don't know," Will admitted, "but to bring them on board a ship in Farside without having them clear Colombian Customs seems to also be a technical violation of Rule 19. Regardless, we are ordered to reacquire them. I'm not sure how we'll do that given it's been four days since they finally went ashore.

"I think, though, that I should update HQ on what we've discovered so far."

"Yes," Lara agreed, "do that, and ask them if they have any bright ideas for the other part of your orders."

Dan listened to Will Spellman's explanation without speaking, soaking in as much detail as he could manage. The bundles had been dropped on a wharf several miles upstream of the team's base on the Patuxent River four days prior. The terrain in Farside was a semi-tropical swamp. Sending his team of gatekeepers on an overland hike to Hammaker's Nearside residence would be a difficult task even for experienced outdoorsmen. These tenderfeet might all easily become 'casualties'.

"Where's Hammaker?" Dan asked.

"Captain Hammaker transited into Nearside two days ago and hasn't been back," Will told him.

"I'll call you back," Dan told Spellman. "Don't do anything until you hear from me." He disconnected the line and immediately dialed his wife.

"Sweetie, I need a raid party. Six to twelve, I think, in the vicinity of DC."

"More hostages?" Tricia asked with a note of trepidation.

"No. This is a simple search-and-recover operation for things, not people, in the Patuxent River basin," Dan started, then gave Tricia all the necessary detail. "Three hundred kilos of contraband, estimated. How soon can you get started?"

"I'm about to find out," Tricia told him and hung up.

Her next call was to the Senior Gatekeeper for the Potomac Region. "Yes, ma'am," he answered having recognized the source of the incoming call.

"You're scrambled," Tricia told him. "Twelve for a search-and-recover of contraband in the Pax basin. There's a gate-team already in the area, but they're not trained. You'll use them as your intel and take direction from their leads, Lara Gunn and Will Spellman. I'm texting you all the contact info I have. Let me know when you roll."

"We're on it. I'll call you back shortly."

Forty-two minutes later, two trucks loaded with inflatable boats and supplies and two vans loaded with raiders headed east out of DC and onto secondary roads south into semi-rural Maryland. Tricia wandered over to Dan's office to let him know and to follow the progress of the operation from Don Wright's situation room.

At *Farside Explorer I's* base, the boats were passed through and inflated, supplies were stowed aboard and the boats shoved off for Hammaker's upstream wharf.

"We will come ashore in Farside," the leader of the raiders explained, "and work our way overland to the house, examining any

possible cache-points along the way. When we find what we're looking for, we will hump it back into Farside and call the operation."

"What if we don't find it?"

"Our orders say 'find it', not 'if you find it,'" he replied with a grimace.

Eleven hours later, the team had searched every nook and cranny within the house and on the grounds and had found nothing matching the description given by Lara and Will: nine wrapped and taped packages roughly cubical, 30 centimeters or so each side. This disappointing result the raid team leader reported to Guild HQ.

"Not worth re-doing the search in case you missed a spot?" Don Wright asked.

"I don't believe so," he was told. "The team was very thorough. We didn't miss anything that was there."

"I'm assuming you have already figured out why we're so concerned about this seemingly innocent breach of Rule 19. Have you?"

"Three hundred kilos of something that came aboard without a customs inspection in Cartagena, Colombia... If it were three hundred kilos of cocaine, it might be worth Hammaker's while to abandon *Farside Explorer I* and just live off the proceeds of the sale of his souvenirs. Did I get it right?"

"You got it exactly right," Don admitted. "The wholesale value of 300 kilos of pure cocaine would be north of 10 million dollars. If Hammaker could net 8 million from a bulk sale, he could buy two yachts to make up for the one he left behind in Farside, and I suspect he already had a buyer lined up before the cruise started.

"Alright, your problems seem to be over. Mine, unfortunately, are just starting. Move your team back to their regular duties. I'll let you know if there's anything further."

It goes without saying that the Customs Branch was less than thrilled with the report Dan Murphy made regarding Bill Hammaker and nine unexamined bundles of 'stuff'. Within the day, the FBI had issued a notice to all agents east of the Mississippi in an attempt to locate and apprehend Hammaker. It turned out to be far easier than they could have hoped for.

Three days after he had transited to Nearside, Hammaker presented himself at the Patuxent River immigration gate, flashed his passport at whoever was monitoring it via a viewer, and was rewarded by having the gate pop open for his passage. He was immediately placed under arrest.

"Wow, some 'welcome home, Bill!' Would somebody please tell me what this is all about?"

"Yup," Lara Gunn confirmed, "you're going to be fully briefed as soon as we get the video link to Boulder up and running."

"Boulder?"

"Yes, Senior Adviser Dan Murphy — and others — wish to chat with you."

"Regarding what, may I ask?"

Lara Gunn shrugged her shoulders. Her orders did not include sharing information with Captain Hammaker.

"The subject of this morning's meeting is 'nine wrapped bundles of miscellany taken aboard *Farside Explorer I* in Cartagena, Colombia and transferred back into Nearside without clearing U.S. Customs,'" Don Wright began the briefing. "Acting Group Senior Keeper Lara Gunn was the duty gatekeeper when the bundles came aboard. Group Senior Keeper Will Spellman was on duty when the bundles transited back into Nearside at the home of Captain Hammaker. That is the summary of what we know at this moment. Would anyone like to add anything?"

"If I may, I have a question," Hammaker interrupted, and continued without waiting for permission: "Why is this an issue?"

"If you went on a cruise to a foreign country and bought things there to bring home, you would be expected to declare those things to Customs on your return, would you not?" Don Wright could see Hammaker nod via the video link. "In the same way, things you acquire elsewhere may remain in Farside, but must be declared to Customs as they move into Nearside. That appears not to have happened, and our agreement with the local government requires us — and by extension, you — to make that happen. Our gatekeepers follow a series of rules governing their behavior as regards gates, and one of those rules, Rule 19, requires them to comply with Customs regulations. It's the reason Lara Gunn is now Acting Group Senior Keeper for your expeditionary mission."

"Do I understand you correctly: that you want that material brought back into Farside so it can be formally presented to U.S. Customs?"

"That is actually 'locking the barn door', so to speak, but, yes, we must present all that material as per Rule 19. Do you still have it?"

"I have most of it," Hammaker answered. "Much of it has been gifted to friends, but I'm sure they will return the items — temporarily."

"We will assign a crew to assist you in collecting the material, repacking it, and moving it back into Farside. Keeper Gunn will be in charge."

"Is it possible," Dan Murphy asked Don Wright later during their wrap-up, "that all of that stuff was truly innocuous souvenirs and gifts? That none of it was contraband?"

"I suppose it's possible..." Don's voice trailed off. "But why," he continued, "would Hammaker get all of his souvenirs, six hundred pounds worth, in a single port? And all of the wall hangings on this inventory are roughly the same size, about a foot-square or smaller. Isn't that slightly weird? Coffee mugs, neckwear, shirts... it's all junk. Hammaker's not some poor *schlep* on vacation in a tropical port; he's rich enough to be able to splash two million bucks on a ritzy yacht so he can make believe he's Jacques Cousteau. Why is he buying crap-o-dime store souvenirs for his friends who — one would assume — are in the same socio-economic demographic?"

"Yeah, he exceeded his Customs allowance, but he didn't save any receipts? All we have is his credit card statement: \$244 here, \$390 there, \$375 someplace else, \$411 yonder, all of them within six blocks of each other. It looks like he dashed from store to store: 'give me twenty of these; I'll take a dozen of those; I want two boxes of that stuff', and did it all in the space of four hours, give or take.

"Yeah, it's possible, but if I were a detective, I'd be asking my buddy Enrique with the Cartagena PD to round up all those transaction records so I could see exactly what the store thought he bought."

Dan Murphy smiled. "I understand what you're suggesting, but I feel very confident that, were you to get 'Enrique' to do some legwork for you, he would find exactly what Hammaker says he would find and nothing more. He would find what Hammaker says he would find for one of two reasons: one, because that's exactly what Hammaker actually bought; or, two, because a \$10 million dollar operation deserves enough planning that we would find the truth only in the most fortuitous of circumstances. Either way, we're wasting our time and risking ulcers pressing this issue further. I say 'drop it'."

"As much as I hate to agree," Don grimaced, "I'm forced to conclude you're right. Checkmate."

The Customs Inspector examined Hammaker's inventory, then waived the paltry duty overage.

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"You're fired!" Herb Lentz yelled at his two engineers. "If you're not out there selling my equipment, what in hell do I need you for?"

"You're missing a golden opportunity, Herb," Arturo Flores pleaded. "There's got to be a huge market for inexpensive conveyors..."

"I'm not interested in selling inexpensive conveyors, Flores. I'm interested in selling my equipment for which the shop floor is already tooled-up. I'm not going to re-tool the whole place for a measly \$70,000 sale!

"Now you've gone and sold this client on an idea only my competitors are going to be interested in! Instead of just firing you, I should probably sue you for sabotaging a sale. You're fired. Get out!"

Proctor and Flores exited the boss' office and went back to their desks. Someone from HR. was already waiting for them with two boxes, one for each, so they could pack their personal belongings. When they were ready, they were escorted to the front door and out.

"Feel like a farewell drink?" Proctor asked Flores. Flores nodded. They each chucked their boxes into their cars before driving to the local watering-hole, the Shamrock Tavern.

Inside The Shamrock, they took a table and sat across from each other.

"What do you say to a partnership?" Proctor asked his former co-worker. "If Lentz doesn't want this business, maybe we could make a decent living at it and what might be lots of similar contracts. Lentz aims at the big operations and ignores all the down-scale accounts like Edie Smith. It's possible he's right, but I have the feeling there's a very comfortable living to be made with his rejects."

Flores clinked his glass against Proctor's. "What shall we call it? 'Proctor & Flores'? 'Flores & Proctor'? Shall we flip a coin?"

"How about 'ProFlo'?" Jim Proctor suggested, "because that's what we do: we flow like a pro."

"I could live with that," Arturo agreed, "but I don't think we should get into manufacturing." Proctor nodded and Arturo continued: "There are lots of manufacturers out there already, and we should concentrate on learning how to apply other people's technology to the problems ProFlo wants to solve."

Jim Proctor clinked his glass against Arturo's. "Let's go find a lawyer to help us incorporate."

Within six weeks, Proctor and Flores DBA 'ProFlo, Inc.' had contacted several conveyor manufacturers and had received proposals from all but one, and none of them exceeded \$30 thousand. They winnowed the list based on 'company reputation' and finally settled on a bid of \$22 thousand that met or exceeded all the requirements of their specification. With the addition of a half-dozen handymen Edie Smith assured them were to be easily found near Okambo, the

conveyor, the chiller vats, and the freezers could all be assembled and emplaced in no more than two weeks from delivery, barring catastrophe. Edie had agreed to meet their original high-estimate of \$70,000 on condition that both stayed on-site long enough to prove the operation would produce ice cream she would be willing to put her name on.

Edie and Lee were present to watch the first 5-gallon cartons come off the line and move into the industrial freezer Edie had purchased when she first got the idea of going into the commercial ice cream business. The first 300 gallons were chocolate at the request of all three Smith children. Laura and Deborah selected one container at random and moved it to the factory's work table, ripped the safety seal, pulled the cover off, and dished out seven bowls of dark brown goodness.

"Oh, yeah," Deborah exclaimed after her first taste, "I think they got it right, Mom."

Edie dipped her spoon into her bowl and brought it to her lips.

"Pay them, Lee."

11 – Crossing Oceans

Linda Rios sat across from Jorge Sepulveda. “Her Majesty wishes to know if you are capable of crossing the Pacific,” she started. “She is looking for someone who will be able to travel to Australia and back.”

“Once?” Jorge asked.

“No. A regularly scheduled route moving people and goods back and forth.”

Jorge looked at her for a long time, thinking, before answering. Then he shook his head side-to-side. “Not me. I’m too old for that. Maybe Marco...”

Marco Polo Sepulveda dropped what he was doing at the summons and headed immediately for his father’s office where he found their Regent, Linda Rios. Linda repeated the situation synopsis for Marco.

“It can be done,” he assured her. “It would take a lot of planning and I’d want a bigger ship, but it can be done. But why the Sepulvedas?”

“We want to keep it in the family,” Linda explained. “If you turn it down, we’ll find someone else, but we felt you should have the right of first refusal. Okay, if you don’t want it, at least help us refine our search. What kind of questions do we need to be asking?”

“Wait. Not so fast,” Marco protested. “Let’s not let me be rash.” Linda smiled. “I want to look at it a little deeper. I don’t have a boat.”

“You could take *Stella*,” Jorge suggested.

“What would you use for fishing?” Marco asked. “Besides, *Stella* smells like a fishing boat. If I’m going to spend weeks crossing the Pacific, it won’t be on a fishing boat. What are you shipping?”

“Uranium” Linda admitted.

Marco whistled. “So, not very much space, but high-value.” Linda nodded. “Where is it going?”

“Singapore.”

“Australia to Singapore? That’s not trans-Pacific. Why do you need a boat that will cross the Pacific?”

Linda had a dumbfounded expression on her face. “I... just assumed the origin point would be here, but you’re right. We don’t need a deep-ocean vessel.”

Marco had by now pulled up a mapping application on the office’s computer and was starting to rough out a distance line.

"Where's the origin?"

"Adelaide or thereabouts," Linda mused. "I'm not 100% sure what the coastline there is like."

"Four thousand miles by sea, maybe forty-five hundred," Marco began thinking out loud. "If you're sold on marine shipping, my advice is to look for a good sized sailboat, catamaran maybe, in the fifty-foot-plus range. Don't buy it here. Buy it there and use it locally. The price will be anywhere from half-a-mil to around two-mil. That will get you all the glitzy electronics including radar you'd need for that part of the world. But Adelaide to Singapore is only about 3,000 miles as the crow flies. You can shave a thousand miles or more and several weeks of sailing if you fly the route instead of sailing it, and I think you can get an appropriate aircraft for barely more than you'll spend on a suitable boat.

"As long as the cargo is relatively small and relatively light, I would recommend shipping it by air."

Linda Rios passed that problem over to Mike Foster since he was far more knowledgeable about that part of the world than she was. Mike, in turn, tapped a newcomer to Farside, Jimmy Dhapalany, a pilot, for ideas on how to establish an air service between Adelaide and Singapore.

Jimmy, it turned out, had just what Mike Foster was looking for: a lead on a plane for sale that had an impressive range. True, it was from the era of World War II, but the Dakota had been lovingly maintained and was in flying condition. As well, with the removal of a few seats, it could be retrofitted with additional fuel tanks for an even more extended range.

"But do you want to risk your life on a plane that old?" Mike Foster asked Jimmy.

"In a Dakota?" Jimmy replied. "It's a workhorse and one of the most reliable and easy-to-fly aircraft ever produced! I'm not risking my life, Mike. I'm itching to fly that thing! I just need to find a million dollars before somebody snaps it up."

A brief consultation by phone with his sovereign in Farside's Capital District made Mike more comfortable with the idea of buying what he considered 'a relic'.

Mike called the prospective seller's agent. "Would you be amenable to being paid in opals?" Mike asked, and the agent re-quoted the price in carats — 1500 carats, 300 grams.

"You've just sold an airplane," Mike told him.

Opals Farside turned over 300 grams of raw opal with glee. Mike Foster had promised them a share of the bonus AMAX had offered

for a low-tariff alternative to Australian customs, and their share of the bonus would easily cover the loss of 1500 carats of opal. Everybody left smiling, including Jimmy Dhapalany.

Rand-McNally's Farside Special Projects Division tasked a mapping drone to scan the northern reaches of Western Australia and the Northern Territory for potential refueling bases, as well as possible emergency landing sites between Singapore and the north coast of Australia.

By greasing the proper palms with AMAX funding, Foster was able to construct proper asphalt airstrips in Farside at Adelaide, the start of the route, near Fitzroy Crossing WA, another east of Surabaya for use in emergencies, and the end-of-route at Singapore, each fitted with radio homing beacons, enabling the pilots to fly point-to-point. Since the sturdy DC-3 variant was not normally going to be used for passengers, additional fuel tanks were fitted inside the fuselage over the wings and those piped into the wing tanks. This gave the craft a range exceeding 2,200 miles and made it possible to do the 17-hour trip in just two legs, typically Adelaide-to-Fitzroy-to-Singapore and return. The addition of several more modern navigational aids and the fact that neither GPS satellites nor other airlines operated in Farside's skies made it relatively safe to take off and land in darkness as long as the VORs and ground lighting at the airstrips were working.

While these modifications were being made, the Dakota got a fresh paint job: "AMAX Airways" on the fuselage, and a yellow halo on its new blue tail.

All of the airstrips provided both fuel and lodging so that a fresh crew could, if needed, take over and fly the remainder of the trip while the original crew rested until the plane returned, but the plan called for each flight to carry at least two spare crews who could relieve each other *en route* as necessary.

As soon as all the airstrips were operational, Jimmy Dhapalany and a crew of five flew a proof-of-concept trip without cargo to make sure the route was feasible. Jimmy flew the first leg into Fitzroy, where they refueled, and he and his co-pilot slept while another crew flew Fitzroy-to-Singapore. Then, after a day of rest, Jimmy flew the leg back to Fitzroy and the second crew brought it home to Adelaide.

AMAX Airways was operational.

To protect Australian uranium mining interests, Customs Australia slapped a substantial tariff on Farside-originated shipments of uranium pellets. Formal complaints from Mike Foster mostly generated yawns from Australian government authorities. They all knew they

had their own industries to protect, and uranium mining in Farside was causing those industries grief of the financial sort.

Opals got the same treatment from Australian customs as did Farside's uranium, and for the same reason.

Jimmy's first trip was to be with a short cargo, 300kg of refined metal, a natural mixture of U-235 and U-238, packaged as sixty 5kg pellets each in its own lead capsule and eighteen kilograms of opal. Within the cabin, rigged now with reclining seats suitable for sleeping, the alternate crew members could relax until called forward to take control of the aircraft. Taking off in Adelaide's pre-dawn darkness, the flight landed in Fitzroy Crossing eight hours later, refueled, swapped crews, and was back in the air in forty minutes. Another nine hours put them in Singapore where the cargo would finally move into Nearside and clear customs ahead of being loaded onto a ship bound for Los Angeles.

The difference between the duties levied by Australia on the cargo and those levied by Singapore more than paid the amortization of the plane and its maintenance, its fuel, and the salaries of its crew.

Mike Foster's phone rang and he pulled the handset from its cradle. "Australia's Minister for Farside Affairs is holding on line 2," his secretary informed him.

"Good morning, George!" Foster opened the conversation effusively. "To what do I owe the honor?"

George Gladstone was less effusive. "I'm reviewing a report prepared out of Customs Australia that has been forwarded over to me for comment. Before commenting, it occurs to me that I should check with you for your opinion.

"Specifically, the customs branch has noted a significant but not critical drop-off in dutiable shipments and a corresponding contraction in import duties collected. It looks as though your uranium mining operation is slacking off. Are you experiencing any difficulties?"

Mike smiled. He had suspected for some time that a call like this was coming, and was not at all surprised at its timing.

"I haven't heard of any difficulties, George. That doesn't mean there aren't any. What sort of drop-off are you seeing?"

"Fewer shipments, and the volume seems twenty to thirty percent under for the shipments that are coming through. All told, you seem to be passing about half the volume and paying about half the duty. That's why I wonder if there are problems. Veins petering out, perhaps?"

"No, I haven't heard anything about veins petering out. I can check with AMAX and get back to you if you're really that interested..."

"No," George demurred, "I was just curious." There was a longish pause as George seemed to be composing his next sentence. "I also wondered if this were a change in policy. You would certainly know about something like that."

"Ah, well," Foster responded, "now that you mention it, I have heard — unofficially — something about that. AMAX complains on a regular basis about the steepness of Australian duty rates on their product. You may be aware we require them to export only smelted uranium pellets, a mixture of U-235 and U-238 if I have that right, so there is some processing that goes on here in Farside to convert the ore to a form suitable for export, and that the Crown retains ownership of a substantial fraction of that material."

"I was unaware of that," George admitted.

"So any of those pellets being shipped to Her Majesty also get charged what everyone I've spoken to considers a punishing duty. I'm certain you have heard that complaint before."

"I understand the rate is quite high, but I'm surprised to discover it's levied on Crown property. I would have expected that to be exempted."

"As a result," Mike continued, "the Crown currently retains its portion in Farside since it's not needed immediately. That may account for some of the drop-off. In addition, there are rumors that AMAX has rerouted some of its shipments to other ports."

"Ports not in Australia?" George asked. "How is that possible?"

"Apparently it is possible," Mike Foster allowed. "Probably what you're seeing is AMAX shipping through the gate only what is critically needed and rerouting low priority shipments elsewhere. This shouldn't come as a surprise to anyone in the Australian government."

"I can guarantee this will come as a surprise to some," George replied. "Do you know where the uranium is transiting into Nearside?"

"Officially? No. Unofficially, I suspect it's some port in Indonesia."

"You don't know?" George seemed surprised. "Don't you control the export of your natural resources?"

"Why? Do you think AMAX is stiffing us? We do have a resident auditor on site at the smelter, and our auditor ensures the output of the process is reported accurately for royalty purposes. What do you think we should be doing beyond that?"

"That... that sounds like anarchy!" George stammered.

"Yes, pretty much," Mike Foster agreed, "but that's life in Farside."

"I suppose," George continued, "that the only way to get AMAX to export through Australian ports is for us to lower our rates?"

"Supply and demand," Mike replied. "It never fails. Yes, if you want more business for your customs operation, you'll have to make it attractive. I don't know what that entails — it's not my area of expertise — but 'rates' seems the most likely area for improvement.

"As well, the opal producers report the same problem..."

"Yes, I was going to raise that issue separately. Customs seems to be having the same sort of fall-off in opals. I presume the solution there is the same."

"I don't doubt it in the slightest, George. Do let me know what your government decides?"

They each disconnected.

12 – Crossing Lines

Jeannie Denoix, official gatekeeper for Survey Team 11, always kept a drone monitor active at her desk within the administrative truck where it was air conditioned, and she put drones aloft every two or three hours just to see what was happening in both Farside and Nearside. Her policy in that regard was that there was no such thing as being too careful or knowing too much.

Today, Jeannie was transfixed before her monitor at the scene unfolding in Nearside. She grabbed her walkie-talkie and keyed it.

“XO from Gates, urgent.”

Jack Miller's voice answered her almost immediately: “What's happening, Gates?”

“I need you to see this,” she told him. There was a frantic tone to her voice.

“I'll be there in ten,” Jack assured her.

“Make it six,” Jeannie pleaded.

Jack stepped into the cool admin truck and Jeannie pointed to the view screen for the drone hovering at 100 meters three quarters of a mile away. Jack peered at the group of men armed with scoped rifles and obviously stalking a herd of elephants. “Poachers?” he asked Jeannie.

“No uniforms,” she observed. “They're sure not official. Isn't there anything we can do?”

Jack thought for a few seconds. “Yeah,” he said at last, “I can do something. Bring a gate.”

Jeannie grabbed a door-sized gate in a carrying bag and a small hand-held viewer and followed him, locking the office door behind her.

As Jack's Jeep lurched through the underbrush, Jeannie directed him using the image in the viewer as her guide.

“I see them!” she exclaimed. “Three hundred meters.”

Jack slowed the Jeep to a stop and dismounted with his rifle. Jeannie set the big gate up landscape-style across the hood of the Jeep and switched it to 'view'. Jack took aim at a tree next to one of the men who looked as if he were setting up for a shot.

“Open,” Jack ordered. Jeannie switched the gate to 'open' and Jack took his shot. Jeannie switched the gate back to 'view'.

The sound of Jack's shot stayed entirely in Farside, but the bullet slammed into the tree trunk next to the shooter hard enough to

throw splinters, and the poachers heard that noise as well as the *snap* as the supersonic bullet passed by. The shooter looked around for the source of the shot while his crew took cover. He knew it had to come from his left behind him, but there was nothing and no one in that direction.

The poachers conferred among themselves in Swahili, a language Jack and Jeannie were only noddingly familiar with, so they couldn't know the poachers had decided this must have been a stray round from a different group very far away. The shooter put the rifle to his shoulder and began to aim again.

Jack looked at Jeannie. "What do you want me to do?"

Jeannie hesitated but a moment before answering. "Kill him."

"Open," Jack ordered, then fired at the man's mid-back.

The poacher flinched and fell, blood pouring out of a gaping wound in his chest. One of the other poachers grabbed the dead man's rifle and turned to run. Jack's second shot dropped him in mid-stride. The third poacher just ran as fast as he could go, and Jack let him.

"I think it would be a good idea if word of this never reaches Boulder," Jack observed to Jeannie.

"I'm inclined to agree," Jeannie told him.

The Transgavan constable knelt beside the dead man and silently admired the marksmanship of whoever had killed him. The shot had blown through the man's heart and had taken out two vertebrae as it exited his back. It's possible the man never realized he had been shot, he would have gone into shock that fast. The other had also died from a heart-shot, but from behind, and it seemed to the constable that that one may have been the first target. There was evidence of elephant fewer than 400 meters away in the direction his supine body seemed to hint he had been looking.

Beyond that, his deputy recognized both men as having long records of unpleasant interactions with the local courts, primarily if not exclusively centered around charges of poaching ivory.

One bullet had embedded in a nearby tree and was virtually unrecognizable when it was finally extracted. The other two bullets had exited their targets still with plenty of kinetic energy and could be anywhere, even hundreds of meters away. Finding either of them would require incredible luck, and the constable judged it not worth the effort. It was even marginally possible their magistrate might decline to punish the shooter given the service he or she had just rendered to the region's protected wildlife.

The constables body-bagged the two corpses, dumped the bags onto the truck's floor, and the crew returned to their station.

Bala "Buzzy" Ndalaga managed to make it to Zivu before darkness set in, but it was touch-and-go for a while as he learned how to drive the truck by trial-and-error along the way. He parked the truck — if you'll allow the term for such a shoddy job of 'parking' — in an out-of-the-way spot on the outskirts of town and abandoned it there. Its true owner was dead, lying in a pool of his own blood in the shade of a tree out there on the veldt. For his part, Buzzy had already promised himself to get a job that didn't involve being shot at. He had also promised himself never to mention the fate of his two partners no matter how drunk he got. It was a promise he would never be able to keep.

The constables easily connected the abandoned truck to Jimmy the Hyena, towed it to the impound lot, and dusted it for fingerprints. The steering wheel and gearshift were covered with Buzzy Ndalaga's swirls. They would have picked Buzzy up for questioning, but it all seemed so unnecessary. There was plenty of time for that.

In due time, word of Buzzy's tale of being fired upon by unseen snipers made its way back to the Chief Constable, and Buzzy was brought in for formal questioning.

Of course, he told them everything he knew, which was quite a lot.

"There's a Farside survey crew in the vicinity," the deputy constable suggested. "I wonder if they had anything to do with this."

"I suppose it's possible," the Chief Constable agreed, "but why would they bother? Besides, they live their lives by the Golden Rule. I don't see that they would have any incentive to become involved.

"In any case, Occam's Razor says it was someone in Transgava, not someone in Farside. Have you looked for footprints?"

"We did, but between the killings and us scouring the area, zebras and buffalo moved through the area. If there was anything, it's gone now."

"Bad luck," the Chief opined. "So, we're left with — what? — probable vigilantes sniping poachers?" The deputy nodded. "I don't like it, but it does ease our workload."

"One thing you may want to consider," the deputy finished. "One of the three shots hit a tree, and we found fragments from the tree under one of the dead men. That means it was fired before the killing shot. That man didn't have a rifle, but the other victim had two when he was shot. First shot into the tree, possibly as a warning? Victim #1 didn't heed the warning and got shot for it. Victim #2 picks up the dead man's rifle and gets shot while running away. Buzzy

escapes cleanly, unarmed, and manages to make it back to town somehow, probably in the truck. This was vigilantes, not 'probable vigilantes'. We should report this up-channel."

Derek Izama read the report his assistant had left for him with interest. He picked up his phone and speed-dialed Gideon Matowa.

"You have a survey crew near Zivu about now, don't you?" he asked Gideon. Gideon allowed that he thought that was a good assumption. "Where, exactly, were they on Thursday the 13th?"

"Is there a question behind that question, Derek?"

"Two poachers were killed on that day, and the sole survivor said he never heard gunshots, just bullets *whizzing* by. I wondered if someone in Farside might have been involved."

"I'll check and get back to you."

When Gideon did get back to Derek Izama, it was to tell him that a survey crew was about sixteen miles WNW of Zivu on the 13th but that no one he had talked to on the crew admitted knowing anything at all about Nearside poachers being fired on.

"Are we about to have a problem?" Gideon asked.

"Not from me, certainly, Gideon," Izama assured him. "In fact, until I read this report I hadn't considered that Farside might be the solution to our poaching problem."

"Solution?"

"Yes, solution. Even though Transgava is a small country, it's still pretty big. We have lots of wilderness where poachers can find prey, and there aren't enough constables to patrol it all or even 'most of it'. Every time a poacher is caught or, as in this case, killed, it makes that lifestyle less attractive. We Transgavans would very much like to make that lifestyle less attractive. If Farside can help us make it less attractive, it would put us even deeper in debt to Her Majesty."

"Let me see what I can do."

"Well, certainly, Gideon, we can do surveillance for poachers in Transgava, but couldn't Transgava do that themselves? Modern military drones can loiter at very high altitudes for very long times, and the technology is now so common that it's quite affordable even for the smallest of nations. We would be happy to share our experience with our mapping drones with our friends in Transgava and introduce them to the companies that provided the equipment to us.

"Having us do surveillance for them seems an unnecessary complication. Besides, it will take us some time to set up such a program and by that time the survey will have moved on and we'll be too far away to do a good job.

"No, I really think the solution to their problem lies entirely in Nearside."

Gideon relayed that message back to Derek Izama, and it was well-received.

"Thank you, Gideon! It never occurred to me to do it ourselves, but that makes perfect sense. I'll have someone at Army headquarters research it. Please pass along my thanks to your aerial mapping unit for that suggestion."

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Ivan Deruschka always kept his phone on "do not disturb" whenever he was teaching a class. If someone really needed him, they would call FIPS and the front office would page him. Non-urgent messages he would pick up when he switched the phone back to normal operation.

He now had a missed call from Marcel d'Hourtin within the past half hour.

"*Bonjour*, Marcel," Ivan began when his call was answered, "are we about to have a problem?"

"Opportunity, more likely," Marcel replied. "I received today a call from a high-ranking official of *DCPJ* asking if it would be possible for us to collaborate with them on a delicate matter. They have, he says, credible evidence of a terrorist operation and would like very much to shut it down before it can be put into effect."

"*DCPJ*?" Ivan asked.

"*'Direction Centrale de la Police Judiciaire'*," Marcel explained. "It's France's national police force, something like the FBI."

"And they want us to...?"

"I think they have heard about the Tugali raid and want us to help them do something similar."

"I'll run it past Barbara later today," Ivan assured Marcel, "and let you know her position."

Barbara listened carefully to Ivan explaining what he had heard from Marcel. "Marcel seemed to think there was some urgency to the request," Ivan finished.

"And you favor us doing this?" she asked her PM.

"I neither favor nor oppose the idea, ma'am. There are risks and benefits on both sides and I have not come to a conclusion as to which is greater. I brought this proposal forward only because Marcel asked that I do so and you have the right to hear what concerns your regents."

"We have traditionally remained neutral as regards Nearside politics and it has served us well. The one instance where we departed from that policy, the Tugali raid, has also served us well. It's possible this presents another instance that could also serve us well.

"I suppose that's my way of saying that I have no idea how to judge this. I am, therefore, to use your words, 'kicking it upstairs'."

Barbara gazed at some spot on the floor for a few more moments before speaking. "I think I would like to have more detail before I authorize anything. Our gates allow us to easily snoop in places where Nearsiders absolutely expect absolute privacy. We maintain good relations transgate because we do not deliberately violate anyone's privacy, and I value those good relations. Perhaps we need to open a dialog with the *Police Judiciaire*."

"I will see to it," Ivan agreed. "Would you like to be part of that dialog?"

"Yes, I think I should."

Inspector René Forêt's image appeared on the wall monitor in the moot hall and he gave a slight nod toward his own monitor on which was Barbara's image.

"There's no need for formality today, Inspector," Barbara remonstrated. "The crown is not present. I asked for this meeting so that I might develop a better understanding of what the *DCPJ* expects to accomplish should Farside allow them the use of a gatekeeper. What sort of assistance are you asking for? Can you elaborate?"

"Certainly, Madame Walsh. We have received information about a terrorist cell operating out of Crécy-la-Chapelle that may be planning an operation in or near Paris within the next few days. As this cell is rumored to have access to explosives, we feel a direct frontal assault is ill-advised because of the risk of injury not only to the police, but to local residents as well.

"We have heard of an operation in Tugali that our British contacts say was cleaner and quicker than anything they could have executed conventionally and we wonder if something similar might allow us to quickly shut down a plot that could, if allowed to proceed, cause widespread death among our people."

Tricia Murphy, seated next to Barbara in camera range, answered for her. "We, ourselves, were very pleased with the Tugali raid, but what you're describing doesn't seem to be quite analogous. You want to capture the perpetrators of a crime before that crime happens, essentially 'on suspicion', yet without tangible proof. Americans — even 'former Americans' such as we — shy away from such things. Am I mistaken that you have no credible tangible

evidence beyond something you might have heard from your informant?"

Forêt turned his gaze toward Tricia. "We consider the information given to us by this informant to be credible, but if you mean photographs or video showing the culprits engaged in nefarious deeds, then, no, we have no tangible evidence. If you insist we wait until a bomb explodes, we would then have ample tangible evidence and be able to investigate without further assistance from Farside. Is that what you are demanding?"

"I see your point," Tricia replied. "So we are being asked to do a little spying to see whether the informant's information is good and, if it is, to inject your raid team from Farside into Nearside to capture the terrorists and seize their explosives."

"Yes, that is how we see this operation proceeding."

"And Farside's only involvement is providing the means for your police to enter the premises without warning?"

"Correct."

Tricia turned toward Barbara and in a not-quite-whisper opined "I wouldn't want to make a habit of it, but should it ever come out that we had the opportunity to save many innocent lives and declined, it would be a P.R. nightmare. You ought to consider it on that basis alone."

"Who will you have handle it?" Barbara asked her.

"The Paris unit is headed by Bernard Maupin. This should only take one or two gatekeepers. I'm sure they can handle it easily."

"Good."

"Inspector Forêt, Keeper Murphy will put you in contact with her Paris unit and you should meet with them and supply them with all the relevant details. Let us know if there is anything further we can do to assist you."

The connection broke.

René Forêt sat across from Bernard Maupin at Le Saint Jean on Rue des Abbesses as they discussed the details of the operation.

"We have the ability to observe undetected the goings-on within the target venue," Bernard explained. "When you give the signal, we will open the portal, your men will rush in, and capture the terrorists. I think there will be no need for your team to come back into Farside after that. It should be a simple matter to call for whatever *PN* assistance you need all within Nearside."

"That sounds very neat," René agreed. "When can you be ready?"

"All we need is the address. We have a truck adequate to transport up to eleven people. We will deliver your men to the proper

spot, open a gate into Farside, your men will pass through into Farside with their gatekeeper who will be able to set up the second gate where it's needed for your men to re-enter Nearside and capture the terrorists. At that point, our gatekeeper will shut off the second gate, return to the truck in Nearside, shut off the first gate, and be driven back to Guild headquarters.

"The only thing we have to worry about is whether there is enough congruence between the ground levels in Nearside and Farside. We should check that before going further."

"If you have some time," Forêt began, "we could drive out there today and check that."

"*Allons-y,*" Bernard replied.

Barely an hour later, Forêt rolled slowly past the house on Rue de Montbarbin in Crécy-la-Chapelle while his passenger looked at Farside through a small viewer panel.

"I think you're in luck," Bernard told him. "The Farside ground-level seems to be only a few centimeters off. Let's assemble the teams."

"Excellent," Forêt chortled.

As dawn started to paint the eastern sky with color, a 10-meter delivery truck rolled to a stop 30 meters from the house. Inside the truck, a gate came active and eight *Police Nationale* dressed in SWAT gear and carrying machine pistols jumped through to the ground in Farside. The gatekeeper passed the second gate through, then his assistant shut the first gate off. The portal snapped shut. In Nearside, the truck rolled away to a remote parking spot, to return when it was called.

Using a small viewer, the gatekeeper guided the *PN* team to the spot the planning diagrams had indicated was the probable location of a bomb-making factory. Through the viewer panel, they could see two men sleeping on daybeds against one wall of the room, while the rest of the room seemed to be devoted to work benches and assorted equipment and tools.

The raid team leader gave the gatekeeper a 'thumbs-up'. The portal came active and eight raiders flushed through, two guarding the sleeping men while six others bounded up the stairs to the rest of the house.

With all of his charges safely through the gate, the gatekeeper shut it down, collapsed the framework and headed back to the spot where he had been dropped initially. On the way, he called the truck driver to come back and retrieve him, then called Guild headquarters to report that the mission was complete.

Shortly, a portal appeared 30cm in the air. The gatekeeper passed the folded-down gateframe to his waiting assistant, who then helped him climb up into the truck.

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Bernard Maupin listened to the news report on the TV:

Early this morning, Police Nationale executed a raid on a safe house reportedly belonging to the infamous Action Direct. All the occupants were killed in a furious gun battle and the bomb factory in the basement of the house was neutralized...

Maupin switched off the TV and reached for his phone. Moments later he was speaking to René Forêt:

"I was under the impression that this mission was to capture and bring to trial the terrorists in that house, not to execute them," Bernard began. "The report I had from my gatekeeper earlier today indicated to me that at least two of the targets were captured rather than killed. Since I will have to make a post-operation report to the Queen, I think I should have all the relevant detail, don't you agree?"

"I will see that you have a copy of the operation report as soon as it becomes available," Forêt assured him.

"And when will that be?"

"Such reports are generally filed within 72 hours."

"Unfortunate," Bernard grumbled. "The Queen has asked for my report today. That means I must have your account, even if unofficial, this afternoon. Shall we say '1400'?"

"I'm afraid I will be unable..."

"1400," Bernard cut him off mid-sentence. "You should get started on it very soon."

Preliminary report of the PN raid at Rue de Montbarbin in Crécy-la-Chapelle. (Unofficial)

Eight SWAT-trained officers from the Special Division were injected via the basement of the targeted safe house, with two assigned to the bomb factory in the basement and the other six assigned to secure the remainder of the house above. Substantial resistance from the occupants provoked a gun battle in which all seven occupants were killed.

There were no casualties among the participating SD personnel. The bomb factory was secured and its contents transferred to the PN Laboratory-Pontoise which subsequently reports receiving material sufficient to construct at least 3 anti-personnel bombs.

** * **

Report of Marc Belanguer, Gatekeeper 2nd class, regarding the Farside-assisted DCPJ raid in Crécy-la-Chapelle:

At approximately 0530 Thursday morning, following the plan laid out by Senior Gatekeeper Bernard Maupin, I and my assistant, Guillaume Marcil, Gatekeeper 3rd, were joined by eight DCPJ armed with machine pistols in the Guild's operations truck. Together, we reviewed the operations plan while the truck drove to Crécy-la-Chapelle.

Arriving at the target location at approximately 0610, I accompanied the eight DCPJ into Farside with a spare gate. A viewer panel allowed us to ascertain that we were at the proper location. I opened the portal at 0616.

Two DCPJ immediately captured two men sleeping on cots or daybeds in the basement while six more went upstairs to a different part of the house.

With my part of the operation complete and no further need for an open gate, I shut the gate off and returned to the operations truck. (Report ends.)

"You all should have before you copies of the unofficial report I received earlier today from Inspector René Forêt, DCPJ Paris, regarding the raid conducted on an AD safe house in Crécy-la-Chapelle, a suburb east of Paris, where seven suspected terrorists were killed, plus the report of Marc Belanguer who was lead gatekeeper during the operation.

"Note that Belanguer's report says nothing about 'resistance'. In fact, he notes in his report that the two men he did see were sleeping and presumably not providing any resistance.

"I therefore reluctantly conclude that the *DCPJ* report is a complete fabrication. The seven 'terrorists', if indeed they were terrorists, were not killed in a *DCPJ* gun battle against resistant defenders; they were executed — by *DCPJ*."

There was silence from the Privy Council until Barbara spoke:

"Your recommendations?"

"I beg your pardon, madame, I think it is far above my station to be making recommendations here," Maupin answered.

"Let me put the question in a different way. Would you volunteer for another *DCPJ* operation?"

"No, madame, I would not."

"Do you have an opinion regarding Inspector Forêt?"

"I think Forêt lied to us, in person and in this so-called 'report'. I would not trust him to give me the correct time."

Barbara crinkled her mouth in thought.

"Thank you for your time, Keeper Maupin. The Privy Council will take it from here. Regent d'Hourtin, please stay with the meeting when Keeper Maupin disconnects." Maupin's image disappeared from everyone's monitor.

"Marcel," she continued, addressing her Regent, "do you have a preference for how we ought to proceed?"

"Reading these reports and hearing Maupin's testimony has left me in a very emotional state. My initial reaction, given that state, would almost certainly be imprudent. We definitely need to put the French government on notice that the actions of their agents has roused our ire, however. Given France's history, I'm reluctant to use the phrase '*heads should roll*', but I definitely think we should be ready to demand some sort of personnel corrections."

There was a murmur of something like 'assent' from the rest of the Privy Council.

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*To His Excellency Gerard Lemieux
President of the Republic*

Your Excellency,

Within the week, Farside's Gatekeepers' Guild was instrumental in a raid by DCPJ on a suspected terrorist laboratory in Crécy-la-Chapelle during which seven alleged terrorists were killed.

All the planning leading up to that raid was clearly focused on capturing, rather than killing, the

alleged terrorists, and it was our understanding, speaking for the Crown of Farside, that unnecessary force was not only not planned, but was enjoined. We are certain that the planners of DCPJ shared that understanding, yet our operative, Gatekeeper-2 Marc Belanguer of our Paris office, reports that two suspects he observed being captured were apparently later executed.

This is a serious breach of the amicable relations France has historically shared with Farside.

We are sure that you are as anxious as we to correct what can only be described as uncivilized behavior. Consequently, we insist that all members of the raid team and all DCPJ management up to and including the head of DCPJ be summarily terminated from employment and prosecuted for murder under applicable French law.

For and with the assent of Her Majesty, Barbara I Regina of Farside,

*Ivan Deruschka
Prime Minister*

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“They will never agree to that!” d'Hourtin squeaked. “We're just asking for an international... an interdimensional incident.”

“Marcel, you may think you were furious at the Privy Council meeting on Saturday, but I assure you that you were calm, cool, and collected compared to your Queen later that day. For the first time since I received my summons to FIPS so many years ago, I observed her pacing the floor, muttering almost incoherently to herself, and nearly cracking the enamel off her teeth. She is angrier than I have ever seen her, and I have seen her in the most trying of times. Lemieux had damned well better take this seriously... as seriously as Barbara is taking it. Whatever you can do to make the President aware of that will go a long way toward avoiding that interdimensional incident you worry about.”

“I'll do what I can, Ivan, but I'm making no promises.”

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"Absolutely not!" France's ambassador to Farside erupted. "No nation would have the audacity to demand such a thing!"

"You must admit," d'Hourtin responded, "that the behavior of your police was indefensible."

"Nonsense! Their actions are easily defensible! They eliminated known terrorists!"

"At the time of their easily defensible actions, those were suspected terrorists," Marcel pointed out. "They only became 'known terrorists' after they were dead. That is the core of Her Majesty's objection. That, and the fact that two terrorists who had been captured were later summarily executed."

"That's not true," the ambassador snapped back. "they were shot when they tried to overpower the police."

"Oh," Marcel raised one eyebrow, "then you will not object to us reviewing the body camera footage of the raid."

"Our officers do not wear body cameras."

"Really? Such simple technology isn't used to document such a high-profile operation? That, alone, invites speculation there was malice aforethought at work here. I most strongly urge you, Gaston, to forward this note to President Lemieux with your recommendation that he implement her demand posthaste. That is all I have to say on the matter. The ball, as they say, is now in your court. I hope you play it well." Marcel closed his notepad and rose to leave.

"The note does not address the consequences should Her Majesty's demand not be met," the ambassador added.

"True. She is supremely confident Lemieux will see things her way. There is thus no need for an 'or else'. Good day, Gaston."

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"The Farsiders are totally unwilling to entertain any suggestion we have treated them fairly," the ambassador addressed his President. "They are insisting that we fire and prosecute the entire chain of command within *DCPJ* that was responsible for what they insist was a fraud perpetrated upon them, specifically that they were assured from the start that the intent of the raid in Cr cy-la-Chapelle was to capture rather than kill the terrorists operating out of that location."

"And what are the likely consequences should we decline to meet her demands?" the President asked.

"I asked that of their regent for Western Europe and he side-stepped the question. Marcel d'Hourtin seemed to think there was little doubt you would comply with the Queen's demand."

"What is your assessment of their seriousness and their ability to generate unpleasant consequences?"

"Of their seriousness, I have no doubt they consider this a most serious matter that requires your cooperation," the ambassador began, "but their ability to cause French tears is extremely limited due to their reliance on the Golden Rule. We haven't done anything directly to them, so they are prohibited from doing anything directly to us. We can ignore this angry diplomatic note in complete safety."

Lemieux had been prepared for that recommendation — was expecting it, in fact — and knew his reaction in advance.

"That's what we're going to do," he told the ambassador, "ignore it."

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FLASH MSG TO ALL GATEKEEPERS:

EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY ALL FRENCH (RDF)
PASSPORTS ARE INVALID FOR ENTRY TO
FAR SIDE UNTIL NOTIFIED OTHERWISE

L GORDON GGHQ

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"I'm sorry, Madame Deloitte, your passport is invalid for entry to Farside according to a directive received within the half hour."

"This is outrageous!" Sylvie Deloitte stormed. "I have important business in Farside. I'm due to meet with the vintners of the Medoc later today. What can be done about this?"

The gatekeeper handed her business cards containing the contact information for Gatekeepers Guild Headquarters in Aurora and Marcel d'Hourtin's office and suggested she raise the issue with them.

Seventy-one others were turned away from the Bordeaux personnel gate that day, and 102 from the Paris gate. The phone lines into Marcel d'Hourtin's office began singing with all the activity they were getting.

"I'm sincerely sorry for your inconvenience, *Monsieur*, but by the order of Her Majesty herself, no French nationals may be permitted entry to Farside unless they are also citizens of Farside... *Oui, monsieur*, this is the result of a diplomatic dispute with the Republic... Yes, it is related to the Cr cy-la-Chapelle incident... *Non, monsieur*, I do not have any further information as to when the ban will be lifted... I appreciate your good wishes, *monsieur*... *Merci beaucoup*..."

"I quite understand your objection, Monsieur Ambassador," d'Hourtin soothed him. "You must understand that Farside is depriving

itself of the benefits of contact with their neighbors in Nearside because of deeply-held principles that forbid us to conduct commerce with nations we consider morally compromised. This is hurting us more than it's hurting you."

"What do you mean: '*morally compromised*'?" the ambassador demanded.

"I think the meaning of the phrase needs no further explanation, and I'm distressed that you would press the issue, but if you insist..."

"We Farsiders consider that your government has demonstrated that it is untrustworthy. We do not, as a matter of principle, conduct business with untrustworthy governments or their populaces. In this instance, we Farsiders are now incurring additional costs to transport elsewhere goods we would normally have sold through the nearest gate. That material is being stored for later use or reserved for distribution within Farside itself. In other words, you're going to have to drink your own wine."

The ambassador frowned. Over the past eight years, the vintners of France's Farside had trounced their Nearside competitors and not just by a hair. Last year's contest had seen every medal handed over to Farsiders in nine different categories. There was no doubt about it in the minds of the world's wine connoisseurs or French winemakers themselves that the wines of Farside were in an entirely different class than Nearside's.

D'Hourtin continued: "Her Majesty personally ordered me to survey the local moots to see if they would support this action. Two communes — two, only — expressed reservations about cutting off commerce with the people of France, but reservations only. All the others — all of them — insisted that The Republic had to be brought to heel. Since we do not, as a matter of policy, wage war, this is our only vehicle for concretely showing our distaste for your moral failings."

"I object to your use of that wording," the ambassador huffed.

D'Hourtin shrugged. "We Farsiders are unpracticed in the ways of diplomacy," he offered. "Sometimes we phrase things more harshly than would an experienced diplomat, but we never fail to transmit the intended message. I'm certain I have made you understand our position even if it wasn't delivered as delicately as it could have been."

Bernard Coulomb approached the Tours (FR) personnel gate dragging a utility wagon on which were stacked four cases of wine and three bushels of *gamiot*, a vegetable not unlike a parsnip but which was indigenous to Farside. He showed his Farside passport and

transited into France after explaining that he was going to visit his cousins and was bringing them presents.

"Not for sale?" the gatekeeper asked. Bernard shook his head. He would have been permitted to transit even if he had answered 'yes'; the question was merely one of curiosity. Barbara had only *asked* those French Farsiders to embargo their produce; it wasn't a command. Apart from that, Bernard Coulomb would never have *dreamed* of violating the embargo all his neighbors were suffering through, but gifts to one's family were something else. He also had no doubt a few of those bottles would become Christmas presents for his cousins' neighbors in due time.

If nothing else, the French take very seriously the matters of good food and good wine, and those matters resulted, the following June, in France getting a new government and a new President, this one campaigning on a promise to mend the fences between Nearside and Farside.

Within two weeks of his taking office, a top-to-bottom shakeup at *DCPJ* saw thirty-one resignations and seven indictments related to the raid on a suspected terrorist bomb factory in Crécy-la-Chapelle.

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ADVISORY TO GATEKEEPERS:

EFFECTIVE IMMEDIATELY FRENCH (RDF)
PASSPORTS ARE VALID FOR ENTRY TO
FAR SIDE

L GORDON GGHQ

13 – Emancipation

The mapping drone cruised at 8,000 feet, high enough to give it about a 120-mile view to the horizon. It didn't, of course, pay any attention to anything not almost directly beneath it. A few moments ago it was somewhere else, looking down at the landscape, and photographing Nearside and Farside simultaneously. In a few more moments it would be above some other place where it would again take side-by-side images of the African ground surface. Much of that surface was practically featureless in Farside, but there would occasionally be a river or a rocky outcropping that would allow the cartographers to identify the location with precise longitude and latitude numbers.

Very rarely would animals be found in the pictured area of Nearside, and even more rarely, people. In the Farside image people would never be seen because Africa-in-Farside was effectively uninhabited save for the handful of colonial outposts and the workers pushing the Cairo-Jo'berg rail line forward.

Because living things were so rare in these images, the drone operators had been given permission to pause the survey and descend for close up photos of anything that seemed worth investigating.

"I'm going down for a closer look," the pilot informed her navigator. The navigator mumbled an acknowledgement.

The surface seemed to rush upward as the drone plunged toward the ground.

"I don't see what you're finding interesting," the navigator offered while looking at the Farside monitor.

The pilot glanced over quickly. "It's on the Nearside monitor," she told him.

The navigator frowned. *We know what's in Nearside*, he thought. *What could be 'interesting' there?* but his question was soon answered as the detail on the monitor became clearer. "Get pictures of this," he told his pilot, but her finger was already working the shutter button.

In the images, two burly men were beating another man with clubs while several dozen others kept busy at what they were doing, digging and hoeing a field. The victim was, by this time, motionless, prone, and bleeding profusely. The navigator stood and shouted: "Supervisor, station eleven!" Seconds later, a supervisor joined them and peered intently at the monitor with the drone crew. The pilot

orbited the site with the camera capturing all the action on the Nearside ground.

"We just watched two people apparently beating another to death or damned close to it," the navigator explained. "We think this ought to be reported up-line."

"Do we have a solid location?" the supervisor asked.

"I think so," the navigator opined. "We came across some very identifiable formations just a few minutes ago. We should be able to pinpoint this spot by its offset from those."

"Okay," the supervisor agreed, "dump the last 20 minutes worth of imagery — including this — and route it over to me." The supervisor left to make his report to the Rand-McNally site manager for African cartography.

Gideon Matowa was properly disgusted by what he had seen in the R-M incident report. Using the location information provided him by R-M, he was able to contact the authorities in the local prefecture to whom he reported the apparent murder of one man by two others. The police constable listened carefully, took down all the detail Gideon gave him, and assured Gideon the matter would be handled appropriately.

'Appropriately', it turned out, meant something entirely different to the police than the meaning Gideon typically assigned it. Over the next several weeks, Gideon waited expectantly for word via the regular news outlets regarding a murder investigation in the Gindobu area. When he finally gave up hope, he asked his R-M contact to task a drone back to the vicinity of the incident.

"Is this urgent?" the cartography chief asked. "We've got a lot of work ahead of us and you're asking us to re-survey territory we've already done."

"It's not a re-survey I'm asking for. I'd like to find out what's happening at that spot."

"Not for mapping..."

"No, not for mapping. I'm curious to know why several dozen bystanders watched and did nothing to stop a deadly attack on someone only a few meters away."

"I can venture a guess," the cartography chief offered. Gideon cocked his head as if in invitation to speak. "They're slaves," he continued. "They've got nowhere to go if they were to try to escape, and that's what they'd have to do if they were to rebel against an overseer. They would be the next ones beaten to death as an object lesson. It's probably happened before or they're just unwilling to take the risk. When someone else's number comes up, they put their heads down and mind their own business."

Gideon's face wore a shocked expression and he just nodded silently. "I'd like to confirm whether it's still happening, if you don't mind. I'll clear it with your management."

"Okay. Would you like us to call you when we're on site so you can see for yourself?"

"Yes, definitely."

Gideon's next call was to Barbara, but he waited until later in the day in order to avoid waking her unnecessarily.

"Some weeks back we witnessed a murder in a rural area in Nearside," Gideon began. "I reported the incident to the proper authorities expecting I would soon read about an arrest and a trial. That hasn't happened and I'm losing confidence it will happen."

"This is a matter for Nearside authorities, isn't it, Gideon? What is your connection with this?"

"Well, we witnessed a murder..."

"In Nearside," Barbara interrupted. "Our involvement is that we report what we have seen. Are you suggesting something else?"

"One of the Rand-McNally managers suggested this was a murder carried out by overseers upon a slave laborer. I feel uncomfortable brushing this off as 'somebody else's problem'."

There was a long silence from the other end of the line before Barbara spoke again. "Let's push this to the Privy Council. Send me all the details and copy the Council."

The Privy Council met early the following morning at Ernie's request. Each had had the opportunity to digest Gideon's report and the disturbing photographs accompanying it.

"Farside's policy as regards Nearside has always been strictly 'hands off'," Barbara began. "The most we've ever done to move policy makers in a different, desired direction is the embargo and border crossing procedures. Gideon is here suggesting we get very much more 'hands on' as regards the Gindobu incident that's detailed in your meeting notes. I want to hear your opinions. Who's first?"

"We have no diplomatic relationship with the nation that contains Gindobu," Ivan offered. "There's nothing — short of going to war — that we can do to affect their policies. If they are tolerating human chattel slavery, that's horrible, but as a sovereign nation it's their prerogative."

"I never disagree with the Prime Minister," Steve Okambo chimed in, "but today we have found an issue that breaks that precedent. Slavery is an abomination. We have a moral duty to oppose it wherever we find it. We should do everything we can to

peacefully urge slavers everywhere to free their prisoners. If we can't convince them peacefully, we should convince them violently."

They all could hear the air whistling through Linda Rossi-Larson's clenched teeth as she gasped at this. "We... going to war is exactly the kind of thing we tried to avoid when Farside was born. We teach our future leaders at FIPS" — she was looking directly at Ivan — "all the ways we can think of to avoid going to war." Ivan nodded silently. "What message do we send to those future leaders if we declare war on a nation that has never done us harm simply because we disagree with the way they run their country?"

"I agree with Steve that slavery is an abomination, and we should discourage it as strongly as we can — short of going to war. Steve takes that one step further: he says we should mobilize an army and force a neighboring nation — they're just on the other side of a gate — to do what we demand. As much as I hate the idea of fellow humans being enslaved and treated like draft animals, like property, I can't support that.

"I heard a remark by someone, I can't recall who, that he loved liberty so much the only thing he wouldn't do was force it on another. That's been our policy since Farside started. I see no reason to change it now."

The room got very quiet. Ernie finally broke the silence. "Maybe our policy is wrong." They all turned toward him. "I mean... here's a case where people don't have the luxury of accepting or rejecting liberty. That remark, by the way, was made by a journalist named Mencken in the 1930s, but I think he was talking about people choosing between ideologies like communism or democracy. I'm sure... I'm absolutely sure he didn't mean it to apply to slaves who have no real choice.

"Still, I can see Linda's point. The First Law of Farside is The Golden Rule: do unto others... We don't want people making war on us, therefore we do not make war on others... unprovoked. That's a good policy because it derives directly from the rule we have all sworn to follow. I'm going to ask you to turn that around for a moment. What if you have been enslaved? What would you want Farside's policy toward you to be? Would you be satisfied with Farside's traditional hands-off policy or would you hope Farside would intervene to free you?"

"I see some of you are having problems with what you see as a paradox: our law requires us to intervene while at the same time forbidding us to intervene. Let me give you an 'out'.

"These people didn't answer an ad in the Gindobu Morning Herald: 'immediate openings for field slaves; apply in person at...'. These unfortunates were kidnapped in all probability, stolen away from

their families, the ones who weren't acquired in package deals that included whole families. They were shackled and transported away from their homes to a place from which escape was improbable if not impossible. They didn't volunteer for this duty. In fact, all of us (except only Ivan) being Americans, we have Jefferson's Declaration of Independence as part of our heritage, and that means we all started at a philosophical origin that says we are born free and in such a state that we cannot become un-free while we live. We can't volunteer to be slaves; it isn't within our power, and no legal device can convert us from 'free' to 'un-free' without killing us.

"What that means for all of us who come from that tradition is that those slaves are not someone's property. They can't be because it's not possible to own another person. What does that make them, then? Simple; they're stolen property. What does our law require of us when we come across stolen property?"

"I would hope that Farside would restore that property to its rightful owner," Linda answered softly.

"That is," Ernie finished her thought, "to themselves."

Silence once again settled on the group.

"Any other thoughts?" Barbara prompted, but no one answered. "What do we do now?" she asked.

After a short pause to collect his thoughts, Ivan spoke: "We need to be very sure that the authorities in the Gindobu prefecture are aware of the situation and are deliberately ignoring it before we act. When we are sure that the local authorities will not correct the problem, we should correct it for them.

"Some time back, we rescued a group of kidnapped diplomats, and this seems to be an analogous, if not identical, situation. We could simply re-kidnap them into Farside, bring them home, and release them. That's the executive summary. The actual operation would be more complicated."

"Who wants to run it?" Barbara asked. Steve Okambo raised his hand. "It's your ball, Steve. Keep us in the loop."

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Gindobu's regional governor leaned forward to get closer to Gideon Matowa. "They're not breaking any law that I can see, Regent Matowa."

"They killed someone. We have photographic proof."

"Well, you have pictures of three people having a fight. We don't know that the injured man was killed. There's no corpse. We don't even know where the fight took place."

"We told you where the pictures were taken," Gideon objected.

"And you may be right, but can you prove it? Can you prove that someone was killed? We investigated the original report and found no evidence to support your claim. Can you identify the people you say did the killing? Our police investigated and were unable to locate anyone matching those photos. This incident happened weeks ago. Even if everything you said is true, the men you seek could have already moved to Mali or Sudan or anywhere else."

"So you're not going to press this investigation," Gideon proffered.

"There's nothing to investigate that we haven't already investigated... and found no evidence of criminal activity."

"Thank you for your time," Gideon told the regional governor as they both rose from their seats.

"My pleasure," the governor assured him. "Call on us any time."

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It had been decided at the Privy council level that R-M would not be asked to do tasks other than mapping. That meant Gideon had to have his own surveillance operation. As they had done once before for the Transgavan authorities, R-M's Farside Special Projects Division helped the Regent for Africa set up a drone surveillance unit, helped specify the needed equipment, helped install it, and helped train the employees who would run it. *Diamonds Farside* had agreed to fund it for its first two years after a whisper into the proper ear.

The first mission was tasked back to the site that had started the whole thing, but now, nine weeks after the original incident, there was no sign of people. There was a field in which orderly rows of something green were growing, but there were no people. The drone continued on its programmed route surveying the land nearby, but it found nothing that could have been termed 'suspicious'. Perhaps the original incident had really been one-of-a-kind.

At least, that was the thinking until R-M reported another sighting of a large group of field hands with a half-dozen onlookers, a scene that looked suspiciously like an earlier encounter. It was reported to the Regent's Office which dispatched a surveillance drone to investigate.

That drone arrived at the site just as darkness began to fall, and the drone's operators watched as 85 workers loaded onto trucks that rolled away in a convoy. The drone followed a line of headlights and taillights, its operator calling out course-and-speed while another used online maps of Nearside to estimate the convoy's route. When

the trucks came to a stop at last, the drone operators had a reasonable idea where the workers' dormitory was located.

"Feed them, get them into beds... eight, maybe nine hours before they roust them, feed them breakfast, put them into trucks, and bring them back out to the fields? We'll want a drone overhead not later than 0430 tomorrow to monitor activity in case tomorrow's work site is at a different place. Launch at 0215?"

"0215, roger."

A FLIR-equipped drone was fueled and prepped for an early morning launch. Its crew was already sleeping ahead of a too, too early wake-up call.

The drone circled the sky in Farside like a vulture looking for its next meal. Dawn had just started to render the infrared cameras redundant when seven trucks pulled up to the building that seemed to serve as the dormitory, and 85 workers streamed out of the building and onto the trucks. Within a half hour, the trucks stopped within sight of yesterday's pick up and 85 workers and their overseers began their workday.

Eight miles away in Nearside, a semi-trailer rolled into a rest area on what passed for a major highway through Gindobu. Inside the trailer, a gate opened and ramps were extended into Farside to accommodate a sturdy safari vehicle. With the vehicle safely in Farside, the ramps were retracted and the gate closed.

"Drone 6, how do you read?" the team leader asked via his radio.

The drone repeated the radio call back to its controller who answered: "Drone 6 reads you five-by-five. Stand by. We'll be overhead in four minutes." The drone abandoned its over-watch on the field workers and took up a course for the highway rest area and the ground team. As it moved toward the ground team, observers watching the surface noted features of the terrain that the truck would either want to use or to avoid on its way to the work site.

From high above, the controllers at DroneHQ gave the driver below directions for the easiest route to the approximate position in Farside of the Nearside field hands. In forty minutes, the ground team was in place with several viewers operating.

The congruence of the ground levels between Nearside and Farside could have been better. A gate popped open in front of one of the workers and the 'contact man' stepped through into Nearside. The eyes of the worker in front of him were as big as saucers. The contact man put his fingers to his lips. In Farside, three observers constantly

scanned in all directions to make sure no overseers were alerted to the intrusion.

"Are you okay?" the contact man asked the worker but he got no answer from the dumb-struck worker. "Is everything alright?" he persisted.

"Get out of here," the frightened worker hissed. "You'll get me in trouble."

"Do you want to escape?"

"No. They'll kill my family if I escape. Leave me alone."

"Are you a slave?"

The worker nodded his head vigorously.

A head popped through the gate. "Scram, there's a guard on his way over here." The contact man slipped back through the gate and it closed behind him.

In Nearside, the overseer poked the worker in the chest with a baton. "Who were you talking to?"

"Not talking to anybody, boss. Just trying to get my work done."

The overseer looked around, decided he must have been hearing things, and returned to his post.

"He said he was a slave, and he said if he tried to escape they would kill his family. I don't think this is a good place to recruit escapees. What if we take them out of the dormitory?"

The rest of the team considered this and slowly came to agreement.

"Drone 6, Ground 1. We want to scout the dormitory. Can you guide us?"

At DroneHQ, observers put their heads together to whip up a plan for rescuing the enslaved men and women from the dorm. They quickly reviewed the images of the route between the field and the dorm and sketched out a plausible route for their ground crew. Over the course of the next hour, the safari truck followed the drone's directions from its perch high overhead until, through their viewer panel, they could see the four Quonset huts where the workers spent their nights. They set up camp.

The trucks arrived in darkness and disgorged their human cargo who tramped into one of the huts that served as a mess hall. There they ate their evening meal that looked to the observers from Farside sturdy and nutritious. Dinner over, they were all escorted to the other buildings and their bunks. Two armed guards stood watch outside the dorms, changing every two hours through the night.

Inside one of the dorms, a gate opened and a Farsidenik stepped into Nearside. He placed his hand gently on the nearest shoulder.

"Anyone who wants to be rescued," he spoke in a near-whisper, "we can take away from here." There was no answer at first.

"Where will you take us?" a voice asked out of the darkness.

"We can take you home or any place else you want to go," the Farsidenik answered. Silence, then...

"Take me... Take me... Take me..." A chorus of hushed voices each begging for liberation.

"Come," the Farsidenik commanded, and a half dozen men and women slid off their bunks and padded to and through the gate into Farside. There, they found a campfire and a welcome.

By morning, another truck arrived at the rest area and unloaded into Farside a second safari truck loaded with a complete field kitchen and the makings of breakfast for the 22 escapees from three buildings.

Drone 4 guided it back to the campsite where the escapees waited for rescue. The second crew, aided by volunteers among the slaves, soon had everyone fed and ready to move. They loaded into the safari trucks and headed back to the Nearside highway rest area where they would find their rides home.

The overseers didn't believe a word they heard from those who remained behind — except that one of them claimed it was Farsiders who helped the missing 22 escape. That was believable. It was also a problem.

There was no one to whom one might complain that Farsiders had illegally entered a country and freed slaves. To admit such a thing was to admit to having enslaved people, and this was technically illegal in itself. It also meant that someone in Farside was watching them, and the traditional "you mind your business; I'll mind mine" attitude of Farsiders toward Nearside had been altered. If this continued or grew worse, it would raise their cost of doing business, heavily dependent on not having to pay wages.

Now, their work crews were 'short' and the work to be done by the remaining slaves would take longer. Capturing replacement workers was not a cost-free task. There were snatch-crews that had to be paid, and it took time to locate people who could be taken without too many repercussions.

Yes, this could get out of hand quickly.

The newly-freed slaves were cautioned by their rescuers that, if they reported their abductions to the police, their escape could not implicate Farside. "When they turned their backs, I just ran!" Twenty-two escapees all telling the same story on the same day would be simply too coincidental, but if that's the only story being told, it would have to be accepted on its face, and Farside could just put on its 'innocent' face: *who, me?*

Such police reports in such volume could not be ignored for too very long. Eventually it would be picked up by the regular media, and the police, even if they had been handsomely paid-off to look the other way, would, in time, be required to investigate. Only the most repressive regimes would be able to combat the mounting public pressure that was sure to follow, and repression itself risks blow-back of the most unwelcome sort. As the costs and risks of slave labor began to rise, slavers throughout the country, as well as some in other neighboring countries, freed their slaves, shut down their operations, and fled across the nearest border.

Brian Trehane rose and extended his hand as Ivan Deruschka entered the office accompanied by Gideon Matowa. "How was your trip?" he asked.

"The actual trip was uneventful," Ivan allowed. "Working for the government of Farside means I'm always traveling First Class." Gideon smiled. "Well, we're here. Are you going to tell us why there's so much secrecy about this meeting?"

Brian sighed. "The secrecy is because of the nature of what I am about to say. I think neither the Crown of Farside nor His Majesty would be pleased were the context of this meeting to become common knowledge..."

"His Majesty's government has received communications from more than one of our African correspondents hinting — or worse — of Farside incursions into their sovereign territories and have asked us, because of our known good relationship with the Crown of Farside, whether we might intervene on their behalf to contain any such future events."

Ivan looked over at Gideon and a smile crept across his face. "Did any of your correspondents go into detail regarding the nature of those incursions?" Ivan asked, turning toward Brian.

"Not to my knowledge," Brian admitted.

Ivan paused, thinking. "Gideon, how would you prefer we handle this request?"

Now it was Gideon's turn to ponder. "I think," he said at last, "that there is little His Majesty's government might offer by way of inducement to get Farside to abandon our commitment to The Golden

Rule.” A look of surprise appeared on Brian Trehane's face. “And I don't believe His Majesty's government would want us to — once they are apprised of the fine details surrounding the so-called incursions.” He smiled at Trehane.

Trehane leaned across his desk. “If you are suggesting these invasions, or whatever they are, are fully in keeping with The Golden Rule, I beg you to elaborate what you call 'the fine details' that no one else seems inclined to share with us.

“Ivan... Gideon... I began this meeting prepared to give you both the benefit of any doubt... to hold you innocent until proven guilty. What are you seeing that no one else is seeing?”

“The United Kingdom outlawed slavery in... 1833, I think,” Gideon began. Trehane nodded. “The United States did likewise in 1865. Most nations have done something similar in the years since. Nevertheless, human chattel slavery persists in many places, most notably Africa.

“Those incursions of which you speak were efforts to free and repatriate people who had been forced into slavery by various groups of kidnappers, and whose enslavement was tolerated — where it was not actively encouraged — by one government or another, sometimes merely a regional government. We presume the communications originate with those same governments because our activities have affected them negatively economically.

“In expectation that this issue might be raised, we have kept meticulous record of all those we have liberated, and will be pleased to present you with the contact information for the 722 we have freed so far.

“We will, naturally, update you when we free the next batch.”

Trehane's mouth was agape. “You intend to continue, then,” he offered when he finally regained his composure.

“You don't approve?” Ivan asked.

“I don't see how this isn't a violation of The Golden Rule,” he posited.

“Easily explained,” Ivan continued. “No one sane agrees to be enslaved. The ones we liberated certainly didn't. The Golden Rule requires that if you would not be a slave, you must not enslave anyone else, and since none of us can imagine anyone volunteering to be a slave — the words themselves don't even allow one to volunteer for a non-voluntary state — it follows that slavery is an unnatural condition. As one of our colleagues put it: a slave is stolen property and our obligation is to return that property to its rightful owner, the person himself.

“For Americans — and most of Farside's top echelon are Americans — their commitment to this principle goes even deeper.

Their founding document, their Declaration of Independence, asserts that a person's liberty is a grant from God, one which cannot be surrendered.

"Alternatively, we may assert that the act of kidnapping into slavery is the kidnapper's admission that kidnapping *out of* slavery is similarly proper behavior. The kidnapper then has no cause to complain should we, in turn, kidnap the kidnapped.

"In other words, we are not violating The Golden Rule, we are adhering to it.

"Unless you can, by a similar chain of logic, convince us that we have gotten something critically wrong, then I must conclude that Gideon is correct. There is little His Majesty's government might offer by way of inducement to get Farside to abandon The Golden Rule."

"You make a strong case, Ivan. I will pass this information along to the Foreign Office. Will you both join Mrs. Trehane and me for dinner tonight?"

"Delighted," Gideon replied.

Within the week, various ambassadors were summoned to the Foreign Office where they were presented with evidence that their governments' commitment to suppressing slavery seemed to be not as strong as they claimed. Without notable exception, those governments assured London that certain deficiencies and loopholes would be corrected forthwith.

Gideon Matowa's drone surveillance unit was deactivated and its staff resumed their normal duties.

14 – Missed Approach

“Pecos approach, Halo three, north seven-zero miles, thirty thousand, inbound.”

“Halo three, descend and maintain six thousand, one-five-zero knots. The Pecos altimeter is two niner niner eight”

“Descend to six thousand, one-fifty knots, Halo 3.” Penelope throttled back and pushed the yoke forward to put her T-38 into a moderate dive. The altimeter started spinning backward, counting off the thousands. At eight thousand feet, she eased the yoke back until the dial settled at 6,000 and the airspeed indicated ‘150’. “Four-eight miles north, six thousand, Halo 3.”

An alarm sounded in the cockpit and Penelope’s eyes went to the flashing light next to the fuel gauge. She silenced the noise and analyzed the situation. There should have been plenty of fuel for this trip from Boulder to Pecos, yet the gauge showed the fuel supply as dangerously low. “Pecos approach, Halo three, I have a fuel emergency.”

“Halo three, can you make the runway?”

“Unknown, Halo 3.” Her mind was racing, calculating fuel consumption and guessing how much fuel was left in a tank whose gauge now jiggled very close to zero. “I’m keeping the gear up until the last moment in order to stretch the glide.”

“Halo three, Pecos approach, you are cleared straight in on one-eight-right or one-eight-left, your option. You have traffic ahead, four thousand crossing.”

“Traffic in sight, Halo 3.”

“Marathon two-five, turn right immediate two-seven-zero. Maintain altitude.”

“Maintain six thousand on two-seven-zero, Marathon two-five.”

“Duster four, taxi right Baker immediate and hold.”

“Taxi Baker and hold, Duster four.”

“Runway in sight, Halo three.” The instant Penelope reported being in sight of the runway, both engines sputtered and went silent. “Flameout,” she reported, and dropped the landing gear.

The sleek jet now angled more steeply toward the runway as Penelope teased the yoke trying to stretch a little more distance from her speed and altitude. As the craft crossed the inner marker, the main landing gear snagged on the framework holding the landing lights and sheared off. The plane plunged to the ground and cartwheeled across the tarmac, settling at last in a pile of rubble. Fire engines shrieked their way to the scene as fast as they could travel.

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Deirdre roared into the clearing where Ernie and Barbara were sloshing water and silt down their sluice. The frantic honking of the horn on her ATV had already alerted her parents to her arrival.

"Come home now," she commanded. Tears were running down her cheeks and, from her general appearance, had been doing so for some time.

"What's the matter?" Barbara demanded.

"Come home NOW," Deirdre shrieked through the tears, then turned her ATV and sped off.

Barbara and Ernie clambered up the slope to the ATVs, cranked them, and departed at high speed in pursuit of their daughter.

Arriving at their driveway, they were surprised to see Ivan's Jeep, Eugene's Jeep, Tony Dinardo's pick-up, and Linda Rossi-Larson's Mustang all parked rather haphazardly. The two rushed into the house to meet what surely was a delegation.

"Sit down," Linda ordered, "both of you."

As Barbara eased herself into a chair, she asked "As Queen, shouldn't I be the one giving orders?" Deirdre gave a little sob.

Linda took a seat next to Barbara and took her hand. "Penny crashed her plane on approach to Pecos." A look of fright flashed across Barbara's face. "She's alive, but she's very badly hurt, and to be honest, it's going to be touch-and-go for the next few hours or days. We're pretty sure you're going to want to be there for Penny. Farside One is being fueled and will be ready to take you there in twenty minutes. Will you need help getting ready?"

"Yes," Ernie answered for Barbara who was, for the moment, unable to speak as the import of what Linda had told her swamped all other thoughts. "Leave Barbara here. Linda, can you give me a hand putting a traveling bag together?" The two headed for the master suite.

Barbara still hadn't spoken more than a few words when she and Ernie were ushered onto Farside One and seated. The Honda roared down runway 21, lifted, then turned south for Pecos, two and a half hours away.

Barbara was sleeping reclined in her seat as their plane settled onto Pecos' runway 18-R. Ernie gazed out the window at the twisted wreckage of Penny's T-38 still strewn across the grassy area between the runways and silently wondered how she had survived. A moment later Barbara stirred awake.

They were met at the Pecos personnel gate by three U.S. Secret Service agents the President had assigned to help them over any obstacles, ushered into waiting limousines, and rushed to the Reeves County Hospital. At the ICU, a surgeon in scrubs intercepted them and pulled them aside.

"Your daughter is in stable but serious condition," she explained. "We were forced to do some emergency surgery to stop the bleeding. Penelope has had a splenectomy and a hysterectomy and we had to remove a short section of her small intestine. She also appears to have suffered some spinal damage, but we have not assessed its extent. That will have to wait until she has done considerable recovery. It's going to be some time until she's awake.

"I should warn you that her left leg is badly damaged below the knee and may not be salvageable."

"Can we see her?" Ernie asked.

"It will be upsetting..."

"It will be more upsetting not seeing her."

"Follow me."

They were led into the hospital's very small ICU where Penny was recuperating post-surgery. She had tubes in her mouth and nose and there were others that were apparently connected somewhere under the covers. Machines and IV poles surrounded her bed on every side. Ernie hugged Barbara who seemed to still be in a daze, not fully understanding all that was happening.

They visited silently for a while before returning to the waiting room. There they met Manuel Acosta, the Mayor of Pecos-in-Farside, who offered the Walshes the full cooperation of the Farside community.

"I would be pleased were you to make my home your base of operations while you are in Pecos," he offered. Barbara bobbed her head silently.

"That's very kind of you," Ernie accepted. "Are you sure it won't be an inconvenience?"

"It's nothing we can't work around," Acosta assured him. "Would you like me to issue a status report on your behalf?"

"Yes. Please direct it to PM Deruschka. Ivan will take it from there, and thank you for your help."

To: Ivan Deruschka, PM, Okambo FCD

From: Manuel Acosta, Mayor, Pecos

At 11.37 this morning, Princess Alice crashed her jet aircraft at Pecos during landing after running out of fuel. She was transported to Reeves County (TX) Hospital with massive injuries where she underwent

extensive emergency surgery. She is currently stabilized in serious condition in the Reeves County Hospital ICU. We will keep you apprised of changes as they occur.

NTSB has detailed a crew to examine the wreckage and determine, if possible, the cause of the crash. The FDR and CVR have been recovered. Representatives of Northrop-Grumman are also on site to assist.

Ivan gathered the Walsh children in the living room of their house.

"You've always wondered what it would be like to run Farside," he began. "For the duration, while your mother is in Texas, I'm going to assume that you three are 'it'. Eugene, as the eldest, I expect you to take charge. Deirdre and Mark, Eugene is going to need your 100% cooperation to be successful. You are his staff officers. Your primary job is to provide backup and advice when your brother needs it, and maybe even when he doesn't know he needs it.

"What do you want me to do, my prince?"

"Do we need to issue a statement about Penny's condition?" Eugene asked.

"Yes, I think that should be near the top of the to-do list," Ivan agreed. "Who should do that?"

"I'll take care of that," Mark offered.

To The People of Farside

This morning, Princess Alice was critically injured in an airplane crash at Pecos-in-Farside and underwent surgery for injuries sustained. She is reported in stable-but-serious condition at a nearby hospital in Texas. Her Majesty is in attendance. For the duration, Prince Eugene is standing in for our mother. Please give him your utmost cooperation and allegiance during this most trying time.

Floreat Farside

*Mark Prince Dennis
for Deirdre Princess Elaine*

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Deirdre's phone warbled with an incoming call. She glanced at the screen to see who was calling, and answered it. "Olaf, how are you doing?"

Olaf Tonnessen was Penny's most regular boyfriend to the virtual exclusion of other suitors, and everyone assumed it would be only a matter of moments before he proposed marriage, but they had been assuming that for a few years now.

"I'm holding up, Dee, but I really think I should be in Pecos with Penny. Should I go?"

"Penny's still heavily sedated, Olaf. They've told us it could be days before she opens her eyes, and there's no telling how long it'll be before she can travel. Why don't you let the docs get her back together before you scramble your schedule?"

"Dee, I kind of think of Penny as 'my schedule', but I can't even get anyone to tell me how bad she is. Do you have any detail?"

"Where are you?" she asked.

"I'm on my way back from East Platteville. I'll be at the dock in ten or fifteen."

"Come to the palace. We'll buy you a drink." *You're going to need it*, she thought as the call disconnected.

It was nearly an hour before Olaf's car swung into the parking area for the Walsh's home. Mark met him at the door, shook his hand, and ushered him into the lounge area, couches and recliners in a ring to facilitate Privy Council meetings. Deirdre rose and pulled him into a hug as he entered.

"Thanks for coming over, Olaf," Eugene greeted him. "My siblings and I have spent the last half-hour considering how deeply you ought to be briefed on Penny's situation." Olaf's expression darkened.

"Since Penny seems ready to bring you into the family circle, we've decided that you need to be briefed like family but, Olaf, what is discussed here is strictly 'family business' and we expect you to treat it as such. Do you understand what I just said?"

Olaf paused briefly. "I do, Your Highness," he answered finally.

Eugene nodded and Deirdre took over from Eugene: "Olaf, this was a very bad crash Penny experienced. Both you and our sister may be rethinking your future plans before too very long... if she survives." Olaf's face went white as the blood drained away. Mark handed him a glass filled with ice and Jack Daniel's.

Deirdre continued: "Penny took a lot of damage when her plane hit the ground. They had to remove her spleen." Olaf gulped. "They had to take a piece of intestine out. They had to remove her uterus." Tears began to leak from Olaf's eyes. "They're telling us her

left leg may have to be amputated. She doesn't know any of this yet; she's still sedated and unconscious."

"I should be there when she wakes."

"Are you sure, Olaf?" Mark asked. "Understand that without her uterus, Penny will never have children..."

"And for that I should stop loving her?" Olaf snapped back.

Deirdre put her arm around Olaf's shoulders, leaned in, and kissed him on the cheek. "Go to Pecos, Olaf. You need to be there when she wakes."

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Bong-bing-bong the overhead speakers chimed to attract attention for an announcement: "Station stop Pecos in seven minutes. All passengers for Pecos, please gather your belongings. Station stop Pecos in seven minutes."

The train slid to a smooth stop at the Pecos platform, the doors slid open, and passengers exited dragging their luggage behind them. In the terminal, Olaf was surprised to see a young woman holding a sign: '*Tonnessen*'. He changed course directly toward her. "I'm Olaf Tonnessen," he informed her.

"Welcome to Pecos, Mr. Tonnessen. Her Majesty is waiting for you. Please follow me." She took the handle of his suitcase and headed for the personnel gate. The two were whisked through Customs and Immigration and were met at curbside by a modest sedan with Farside flags mounted on its fenders and a motorcycle escort. In fifteen minutes, Olaf was delivered to the hospital's main entrance whence he was led toward Penny's private room.

Barbara and Ernie turned as an aide entered with Olaf in tow. Olaf directed a small bow toward Barbara who, just this once, did not object. "It's good to see you again, Olie," Barbara greeted him. "How was the trip?"

"Smooth, uneventful, too slow. I should have been here yesterday. How is she?"

"I think you're just in time," Ernie informed him. "She's been stirring and I think she's about to come around."

As if to prove her father right, Penny's eyes fluttered and she directed a sleepy gaze at the three figures around her bed, then closed her eyes and seemed to go back to sleep. Olaf bent over the bed and planted his gentlest kiss on Penny's forehead. The three took seats near the bed to wait for Penny to become more active.

"I'm surprised she doesn't have tubes in her nose and mouth," Olaf remarked.

"Oh, well you should have gotten here three hours earlier," Ernie told him with a smile. "They just pulled them a few hours ago."

"So she's breathing on her own?" Barbara nodded.

"Olie?" Penny called sleepily.

Olaf was at her bedside before the word had started to fade.

"I'm here, honey."

"I think I wrecked the plane, Olie."

"Yes, honey, you did."

"Mom's gonna have a fit. Can they fix it?"

"No, babe, it's totalled."

There was a long pause. "Am I okay?"

Olaf stifled a sob but managed to say: "Yeah, you're going to be okay."

"I feel really groggy," she admitted.

"They have you on a lot of painkillers. Feeling groggy is good right about now. Don't fight it."

Barbara and Ernie appeared at the bedside. When Penny recognized them, she smiled. "Your Majesty," she began, "I regret to inform you that I crashed my airplane... and it wasn't insured."

Barbara turned to Ernie. "I think she's going to be alright," she told him. "She seems to be returning to normal."

It was more than a full week before the hospital's chief of surgery was willing to discuss releasing Penny to a Farside rehabilitation and recuperation facility. That was after her left leg was amputated below the knee because it couldn't be saved. Barbara's private rail car had been sent to Pecos for her use when the family headed back to Okambo, and on the day of her release from the hospital, Barbara, Ernie, Penelope, Olaf, and a small medical team transited the Pecos personnel gate. Barbara thanked her Secret Service detail and released them.

Passengers for Okambo on the normal Pecos-to-Okambo Limited originally scheduled to depart thirty-five minutes after Barbara's departure were re-booked onto her Pecos-Okambo Special — in a separate car from Barbara's — that would travel the route non-stop, bypassing the two regularly scheduled stops for the L.A./Ensenada connector and the St.-Louis connector. For the price of having to hurry a little at Pecos, they would arrive at their destination almost two hours ahead of schedule.

NTSB completed their investigation of the wreckage at the Farside Pecos airport and forwarded a preliminary copy to Ivan as PM,

to Linda Rossi-Larson as Chancellor, and to Tony Dinardo as Minister for Security.

In preparation for the flight, the airport ground crew had been instructed to bring the craft's fuel supply to 2300 pounds, up from the estimated 1850 pounds already in its tanks. For reasons that were not immediately evident, that refueling operation hadn't happened and Penny had taken off with too little fuel to make it all the way to Pecos.

The report also faulted Penny for putting the landing gear down too early — or at all. The drag provided by the protruding wheels probably, they surmised, deepened the glide ratio enough to preclude a safe landing. Indeed, Penny had missed putting her wheels on the runway by only a few hundred feet and had missed clearing the inner marker lighting rack by fewer than six feet. It was suggested that a wheels-up landing in the largely-uninhabited terrain around the airport would have been the safest option.

Now with only one foot to operate the rudder pedals, it appeared Penny's flying days were over.

The four-hour trip from Pecos to Okambo provided Olaf with the perfect opportunity for something he had finally resolved to do barely more than a week prior. As the monorail car softly hissed along the guide on its way north, Olaf waited for the normal flow of conversation to abate before stepping forward to Penny's recliner. With Barbara and Ernie no longer occupying her with chatter, he went down on one knee and presented an open ring box.

"Penelope Alice Walsh, will you make me the happiest man in Farside and be my wife?"

Penny's mouth formed a wide 'O' as she realized what was happening. She bobbed her head several times. "Yes!" she told Olaf gleefully. "I thought you were never going to ask!"

"I'm going to have a little problem walking down the aisle, though," she added pointing to the bandaged stump of her left leg.

It was fully seven weeks before Penny's therapist considered her stump ready to be fitted for a prosthesis, and eight hard months of therapy learning to walk again, but Penny was determined that she would be able to ambulate without the crutches and canes that had been her constant companions since being released from the hospital.

Her 'coming out party' she had planned for the Spring Grand Moot.

"Olie, will you be disappointed if I give up my crown?" she asked her fiancé.

"Not in the least," Olie assured her. "I'm only surprised you hadn't done it already. Are you planning to make it formal?"

"Yes," Penny replied. "I thought I would surrender it to the Moot in the Spring. That's the morning event. In the afternoon we can become 'Mr. and Mrs.', if that's okay."

"Not soon enough for me, but I'll take what I can get," Olie agreed.

On the morning of the Spring Grand Moot, Deirdre helped her sister dress in the prettiest formal gown Penelope owned. "What's going on?" Deirdre asked suspiciously. Deirdre and Penelope usually did not dress formally for the Moots, although their mother, the Queen, always did, and Deirdre today wore her favorite cashmere sweater over her blouse, boots, and a Black Watch plaid wool skirt. While the girls regularly wore their coronets to the Moots, the boys rarely did.

"That damned crash has changed me irreparably, Dee," Penny admitted. "The time I've spent in therapy has given me a new and shocking vocabulary that probably represents the real Princess Alice, and I've decided I can't inflict her on an unsuspecting Farside." She lifted her coronet, indistinguishable save for its inscription from the one her mother wore, out of its rosewood case and placed it carefully on her head. She handed the box to Deirdre. "Give this to Linda Rossi-Larson ahead of the Moot convening, will you?"

"You're abdicating?"

Penny nodded. "Olie, by the way, is perfectly okay with that, and I, myself, will not shed a tear. I expect you not to blow my cover, dear sister."

Deirdre crinkled her mouth. "I take it that means Mom doesn't know."

"At this point, Dee, only three people know: you, me, and Olie. Let's keep it that way for the next hour or so, okay? The decision has been made. *Alea jacta est*, as Julius Caesar once opined, and unlike him, I'm not looking for an argument."

"Mom's gonna flip out."

Deirdre left with the presentation box and headed direct to the Moot Hall. Olaf drove Penelope and arrived just a few minutes ahead of the Moot convening. Penny got a round of applause from the several people still gathered outside the hall as she deftly hoisted herself clear of the car and stood and walked crutch-less and cane-less into the building.

At about the same moment, Deirdre intercepted Linda Rossi-Larson and handed her the box. "Hang onto this for a bit, can you?" she blurted before turning and dashing off. Linda gave her retreating figure a surprised look but hadn't formulated the obvious question

before Deirdre disappeared around a corner. Linda climbed the five steps to the platform and took her seat.

"Two minutes," Ivan whispered into Barbara's ear. She nodded and turned toward the steps, climbed them, and strode toward the microphone. The people rose and began to sing:

*Our home is a land full of beauty,
Free as the birds in the air,
Our futures are bright as the morning,
Our hearts full of joy where'er we fare.
To she who returned us to Eden
We pledge her our faith and our might.
We walk at her side,
Our hearts bursting with pride,
Ever onward to day from night.*

"Are there matters to come before the Moot?" Barbara asked, formally convening the meeting.

Penelope walked steadily toward the stairs for the platform, picked up the front of her gown exposing the metallic extension of her left leg, and mounted the stairs confidently without relying on the handrails. She knew she could do it; she had practiced the movement dozens of times during the past week. The audience exploded in applause. She moved to the microphone as Barbara backed away.

"Thank you," she began. "It has been a long ten months and that time has shown me many facts about myself that I had been unaware — or only vaguely aware — of. Some of those facts have been uplifting and have helped me arrive at this point, moving under my own steam and beginning to adjust to my 'new normal'. Many of you have expressed warm thoughts for which I thank you from the bottom of my heart. Your messages of support have cheered me and helped me along my way, often lifting me up at times when I was discovering unpleasant things about myself.

"You may have heard that the accident that put me here today was serious enough that it took several of my internal organs including my womb. That calamity may have played into all those unpleasant facts about myself bubbling to the surface.

"I have lost confidence in my ability to serve the Crown and the people of Farside as I should, and since I am unable to provide a familial line of succession should the Moot choose such a path, I have determined to retire, and my decision is irrevocable.

"Thank you for allowing me to serve you as your Princess, but my time has passed."

She turned away from the microphone and walked directly toward Linda Rossi-Larson while lifting the coronet from her honey-blond locks. Linda stared directly at Penny's eyes in surprise, but managed to lift the lid of the box in time to let Penny deposit her coronet gently into the depression that exactly fit the gold ring, before letting the lid close and latch with an audible *click*. Then Penny turned toward her mother and — unable yet to curtsy — bowed before taking a seat with her brothers and sister. Barbara's mouth remained agape in a soundless *'Oh'*.

"NO!" a voice shouted from the audience, and another rose and called in a loud voice: "The Moot declines your offer to abdicate!" There was a smattering of applause, but it was clear the bulk of the audience was stunned to silence.

Barbara looked at Penny questioningly, but Penny merely shook her head in response.

There followed a long pause in the proceedings with much murmuring from the audience before Barbara rose and again took her place at the lectern.

"This is as much a surprise to me as it is to you," she began, "and I'm certain this will be discussed at length, but offline as you might expect for 'family business'. In the meantime, perhaps we can get any other business out of the way to clear the agenda ahead of Prin... — ahead of Olaf's and Penelope's nuptials this afternoon.

"Gospodin Deruschka..." and she surrendered the microphone to Ivan.

The remainder of the Moot was devoted to ordinary and normal business during which several matters were raised and debated, culminating in decisions by the attendees, each affirmed by Barbara and entered into the permanent minutes becoming, along with Penelope's abdication, part of the history of Farside.

"Are there other matters to come before the Moot?" Barbara asked after all the agenda items had been handled.

Gregory Tolland rose from a group off to one side and raised his hand for recognition. Barbara nodded in his direction.

"May it please the Crown," he began in a loud voice. "The people of Farside, in consultation, wish to express their distress at Princess Alice's announcement today. We grieve with her at the emotional and physical pain she is undoubtedly experiencing, and we stand ready to support her in whatever way she feels will enable her to continue as our beloved Princess.

"We ask Her Highness whether she is ready to deprive her people of all the experience she has developed since taking the coronet. We, her loving people, do not consider 'ability to bear natural

children' to be a job requirement, and we are sure we would keenly feel the loss of her prodigious negotiating skills should she stand by her decision and abandon her ministry.

"Dear Princess Alice, come back." He sat down to muffled applause from the group surrounding him.

Tolland's voice had been loud enough — that was the reason he was picked as the group's spokesman — that Penelope and her siblings, seated on the raised platform, could hear it clearly even without the aid of a microphone. Eugene, Deirdre, and Mark were all smiling. Penelope had not taken her eyes off Olaf's face from the moment Gregory Tolland had started speaking, nor had Olaf averted his gaze from Penelope's face. Clearly, Penelope was silently asking a question, and Olaf knew what it was. He nodded to Penelope. *Your decision*, the gesture said. *I will support whatever you decide.*

Mark whispered something into Penny's ear and Deirdre bobbed her head in affirmation. Eugene chuckled. Penelope stood and approached Linda Rossi-Larson. Linda instinctively knew what was about to happen. She unlatched the lid of the box and raised it so that Penelope could lift the coronet and replace it on her head. The entire hall stood, whistling, cheering and clapping.

Penelope looked at Barbara who gestured toward the lectern. Penny moved to the microphone and the hall quieted.

"Are there *other* matters to come before the Moot?" she asked, and the applause resumed. After a few minutes, quiet returned, and Penny announced: "The Moot is ended. Thank you for this lovely gift, and thank you for your presence." She moved back from the lectern and the hall rose to its feet —

*Peaceful the life of our people.
Freedom the air that we breathe.
Justice the goal of our fellows.
Mercy the legacy we leave.
With strength we defend our conviction.
With hope we disperse all our fears.
With joy in our heart,
We link arms at the start
For our journey will last all our years.*

—==+++==—

"Olaf Karl Tonnessen, do you accept this woman, Penelope Alice Walsh, as your lawful wedded wife, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death?"

"I do."

"Penelope Alice Walsh, do you accept this man, Olaf Karl Tonnessen, as your lawful wedded husband, to have and to hold from this day forward, for better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, to love and to cherish till death?"

"I do."

Taking the ring from his best man, Olaf slipped it onto Penny's finger. Then Penny took the second ring from her Maid of Honor and installed it onto Olaf's finger.

"By the power vested in me by the Crown and the people of Farside, I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may kiss the bride."

Olaf kissed his new wife, the audience applauded, and somewhere off in the distance, the Wedding March from *'Midsummer Night's Dream'* began playing. Taking the hint, Olaf and Penny, arm in arm, led the congregation from the chapel to the reception in the Moot Hall.

When the activity finally started to wane, Barbara and Ernie came and sat with Mr. and Mrs. Olaf Tonnessen.

"So, Olaf, what do you think of your bride re-qualifying for her pilot's license?" Ernie asked.

"Penny loves to fly, Dad. I couldn't bring myself to deny her the joy she gets from being aloft. She's even talked me into taking lessons."

"So, you're going to need a new flying machine, then?" Penny nodded.

"Do you think you'll ever want another Talon?" Barbara asked, referring to Penny's crashed T-38.

Penny paused, thinking. "I'd love another T-38, but I can't bring myself to plunk down another six million dollars to replace it. I wish it had been insured."

"It turns out," Barbara admitted, "that your parents aren't as short-sighted as you might think. Your father insisted that the Crown carry a policy on it, so it was insured... just not for its full value.

"If you want a new one, that can be our wedding present to you. We'll make up the difference.

"Oh, by the way, Lloyd's declines to insure the replacement, so you'll have to be extra extra careful with that one. Olie, you're going to have to get your jet and instrument ratings.

"Now, tell me, what did Mark whisper into your ear up on the stage?"

"He said: 'These coronets leave a permanent mark, dear sister. Your life is no longer your own to do with as you choose' and

Dee added: 'You'll never be anything but Princess Alice to them'. I merely bowed to the inevitable because they were incontrovertibly right."