

The Trouble with History

Vice Chancellor Lambret heard the familiar chime of a news alert, and with a swipe of his hand, activated the holographic interface. The image of Fiona Medu, a celebrity interplanetary news anchor filled the space directly in front of him. The sea green spikes rippling around her head, cerulean blue paint circling her eyes, and a Saturn ring of purple floating around her shoulders, had the Vice Chancellor moving quickly backwards in his chair to put some distance between him and the grossly colorful entity. However, once she began speaking, he immediately leaned forward, and enhanced the volume.

“—mysterious illness gripping the galaxy over the last seven months has finally been traced to a mining camp on the Flux comet. A host of microscopic bacterial artificial chromosomes (BAC)—first created over three hundred years ago on twentieth century Earth—are currently being analyzed by top scientists around the universe.

“The discovery was made by a Flux miner who uncovered a rusted, metal box. We now know it had been a payload stowaway aboard a failed shuttle to one of the earliest known space stations. Not understanding the historical significance of his find, he opened it, and shared the contents with several others, who all became ill in a matter of days.”

Fiona unfurled a sixteen-inch tongue and caught a large pink insect buzzing around the newsroom. It was something her viewers never got tired of seeing. Vice Chancellor Lambret winced at the audible crunch before she swallowed the gossamer-winged monstrosity, but was impressed that her action never interrupted her delivery.

“The Keepers of History scoured the minimal data available on BAC, and it revealed they were initially created to assist in the study of genetic diseases such as Alzheimer’s, which we all know was eradicated more than a century ago.”

Leaning forward, she beckoned with a finger sporting a nine-inch claw, for her audience to do the same. In a dramatically whispered voice, she said, “Another, perhaps more sinister construction was the cloning of infectious viruses.”

Resuming a professional posture, Fiona wrapped up her broadcast. “The mandatory testing of all citizens of Charon for the virus has not been completed, but the data we received just moments ago indicates the virus is more prevalent in those with Centurian DNA. In the few instances of it being found in other species, it was determined, in all cases, the individuals had at least a trace of Centurian DNA. No one has expired from the virus—yet—, but we should all remain cautious until more facts are known.”

Tilting her head to one side, and then snapping it back upright, Fiona executed her signature sign off making her spikes lay flat and smooth against her head. They began to ripple and slowly rise as she said, “Stay linked to GNN for all your breaking —.”

Swiping angrily to dissolve the image, Vice Chancellor Lambret sat back in his chair. How did a news agency get access to data only his office should be in possession of? He turned his chair to stare out the window at his city. Charon, the largest in the Pan-Star galaxy, was a thriving, bustling metropolis of twenty million inhabitants. Its government had embraced a diverse, multi-planet citizenry long before he had taken office, but now he wondered if there hadn’t been too much embracing. Too much diversity.

Resting his steepled forefingers under his chin, Lambret contemplated the fallout of the newscast. Besides all the unknowns about the virus, and everyone now hearing it was possible that anyone could get it, there would be outbreaks of panicked citizens going after Centurians. He would have to notify security to ramp up patrols. He would follow procedure, but he would also tell them to give the citizens some leeway. It would be his passive contribution to the cause, so to speak.

For the last six years, the only thing standing in his way of being Chancellor was the current one, who happened to be Centurian born. Zantuk had been the first non-human elected, and Lambret meant to see that he was the last. Maybe the virus would find its way to him.

“Vice Chancellor, please forgive the intrusion, but I think you’ll want to see and hear this.” High Commander Mengle moved with purpose to stand at attention in front of Lambret’s desk. He carried a large bag on his shoulder.

Annoyed at having his wistful moment interrupted, Lambret glared at his military commander.

“Sir, if I may sit. I’m just back from a very long trip to the ancient ruins of Earth.”

Lambret sighed, and waved a hand, gesturing toward the chair.

“Sir,” Mengle said again, “After seeing to the troop reallocations on the archeological research project, I was privileged to witness a crucial discovery of ancient texts in a sealed chamber.”

He pulled two clear boxes from a shoulder bag and placed them on the Vice Chancellor’s desk. One contained a single book that looked so fragile it would become powder at the lightest touch. The other held an assortment of yellowed and crumbling papers looking as delicate and brittle as the book.

“I spent the return shuttle trip using the language translator scanner on some of the ancient texts, and felt like a fresh cadet just starting academy discovering military-grade instruction manuals. It was invigorating trying to work out the logistics of adapting some of their methods to our own.” Mengle beamed at the Vice Chancellor, all traces of shuttle fatigue now erased.

“I was thinking it may be a good exercise to set aside technology and consider some of the paths of the ancients “For instance,” Mengle said leaning forward in his chair, “They had a somewhat similar issue as our virus problem when the population of a certain people got out of control and threatened the integrity of strength and continuity.”

Vice Chancellor Lambret felt a shiver, and then a tingling sensation. He stared at Mengle for a long time, wondering how the man could possibly know his thoughts of just seconds prior. “Go on,” he said, and got up to get them both some refreshments.

More relaxed now, Mengle pointed to the loose papers. “They relied on some truly barbaric methods for handling large societal issues, but their reasoning was sound. We must remember their world was vulnerable to many diseases and illnesses that haven’t been around for centuries now. The cost of providing long term care for the children, sometimes for life, could put a great strain on any government.

“They used a method called euthanasia for the sick and disabled where physicians would help them onto mobile units called buses and give them baskets of food to share with each other outside; it was something few of them had ever experienced, and were happy, full of smiles. At some part of the trip, the exhaust from the bus was piped into the compartment where the children sat, and they simply went to sleep, forever.”

He paused, slightly embarrassed at becoming so emotional, then cleared his throat and continued, “Forgive me, but I can’t think of a more compassionate act in a time when it was most needed. The documents state tens of thousands received this kindness.”

Snapping out of his reverie, he stood. “My apologies Vice Chancellor. I didn’t mean to take so much of your time. I am excited to look at tactics and strategies in a new way. The ancients had some interesting ideas that I want to continue exploring.”

High Commander Mengle gave a quick salute and reached into the bag again. He brought out a handful of discs and laid them on the desk. “These are the translations of the book, and the documents. I hope you find them as interesting as I have.”

Lambret watched the man leave. Picking up the discs, he chose one and placed it in his holographic interface. The words *Mein Kampf* were projected in large bold letters. Below them, it read, “*My Struggle.*”

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The following months were busy for the Vice Chancellor, overseeing that everyone in his city was tested for the virus. There would be no exceptions, and went to great lengths to take his test publicly, showing those who were frightened of such an archaic practice, that it was perfectly safe and easy. When his test revealed he was negative, people cheered, and got in line. He kept track of those who tested positive while adding other names to a list he kept secret. For his master plan to work, he needed to know the name of everyone who had even a trace of Centurian blood.

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“Vice Chancellor, you wanted to see me?” High Commander Mengle stepped into the office and closed the door.

“I need an update on the launch time for the all-expenses paid trip to Centuria for our good citizens to see their home planet. For some, I understand it will be their first time. I almost feel sad they won’t live to see it.” Lambret smiled, pleased with himself on his failsafe plan to be rid of Chancellor Zantuk as well as two thousand more Centurians. He almost laughed when the Chancellor volunteered to go, congratulating Lambret on having such a brilliant idea.

“Yes sir, it’s scheduled to leave within the half hour.” Grinning, he added, “There’s no time left for anyone to change their mind, so no one is getting off the shuttle.”

“Perfect. It’s always good news when a shuttle is operating on time.” Looking down at the buzzing com link on his desk, he said, “Excuse me, I have a call from my wife.”

Vice Chancellor Erwin Lambret listened as his wife’s voice rambled on, still gleeful he and Mengle had pulled off their first mission. After the message was over, he sat down, hard, and stared off into space. In a voice he barely recognized, he said, “Call it off.”

“What? Why?” Mengle was confused.

“Just call it off; I’m begging you.”

Mengle contacted the shuttle. He said, solemnly, “Sir, it’s too late. They had an early window to lift off.

Lambret did not respond.

“Sir? Vice Chancellor, what’s wrong? Is your wife okay? Your son?” The High Commander’s attempts to communicate went unnoticed. He tried once more, this time touching the Vice Chancellor’s arm. “Sir, what’s happened?”

Lambret looked down at his com link and pressed a button. Sachi Lambret’s voice filled the room.

“Hi Erwin, I’m sorry I missed you. You must be busy saving the city.” Sachi laughed and continued. “I just wanted to let you know Ian and I have joined the group going to Centuria. I finally received our test results, and we do not have the virus. But it was exciting to learn that I have Centurian ancestors. Both Ian and I have the DNA markers. We decided to go on the trip so I can find out more about that side of the family.

“It was a spur of the moment decision and assumed you wouldn’t mind. Chancellor Zantuk has even offered to be our guide. And don’t worry! We promise to be the best ambassadors for you and for Charon.”

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“This is Fiona Medu of GNN with a special bulletin.” Her voice quivered and pink tears ran from her eyes. The normally bright purple Saturn ring that floated around her shoulders was now black. “It is with great sorrow that I report the Centuria bound shuttle exploded last night while still in route. The loss of so many families, friends and colleagues is a tragedy of profound magnitude. The cause of the explosion is unknown, and will take months, maybe years, to discover. For now, we must set aside our differences and come together as one to grieve our losses.”

Chancellor Lambret, having been quietly sworn into office just minutes before, turned off the holographic interface of the news anchor, and for the tenth time that morning, pressed the button on his com link to hear, “Hi Erwin, I’m sorry I missed you. You must be busy saving the city.”