

A SHAVE & A HAIR CUT, 2 BITS

By Richard Tornello © 2008

The traffic lights throughout the City suddenly turn amber, then red. All traffic comes to a halt. City wide the public address screens declare an important message from the City Managers Office and the Commissar of Public Safety. The City manager appears, his face dominating the screens city wide. A serene smile stretches across his face. His broad countenance is dominating even as the monitors pull back for a full body shot. He runs his hands through his thick head of hair as he introduces the Commissar.

“People of our Fair City. We, the Commissar and I, have wonderful news for all of you. Our Fair City will be a beacon to all the others when the news of our achievements is proclaimed.”

“But I will let the good Commissar inform you, in his own words, of the greater pride you may all take in being part of this, his, our, no your great and daunting achievement.”

He steps aside so the commissar can take center stage. The Commissar is to his right. And Artie, the aid-de-camp to the commissar is behind both of them. The Commissar does not smile. He is not serene. The Commissar has never been known to smile in public. The Commissar is a man known only for frugality, conservative, outward moral turpitude with absolutely no sense of humor. For him, it’s business only; in all aspects of his life. He has never been married. It is whispered that he has a secret life. There is speculation that Artie plays a role in that secret life. However, nothing substantial has ever been discovered. Both men are above reproach.

His opponents respect and fear him. Otherwise, he is an open if not a dull book. All the citizens stop their activity and conversations out of deference and face the screens with real or feigned interest.

The children get ‘that look’ by their parents and are hushed.

The commissar to himself, *I have been working on my presentation for our news special. It’s been years in the making.* He begins:

“Good Citizens.”

We are proud to announce that for all intents and purposes illegal drug use has been wiped out in our fair city. Our example is being copied in other cities throughout the systems. Our POLS are touting our successes as the first complete eradication of the

plague that has affected our society. Controlling illegal drug use has been a social good and goal for generations.

Yes we understand that most animals crave release in one form or another. The need can be psychological and or physiological. To the end we, as a thoughtful and caring leadership, have allocated certain substances for the general use. Examples are Trimethalzanthine, Cocaine, and Cannabis, all at controlled levels. We will include Tobacco for the most severely depressed and Juice”, he actually attempts a smile here, “as it is commonly known, ethyl alcohol.”

With added emphasis, looking straight into the eyes of every citizen, he concludes, “These are the only accepted and controlled substances that are legal and available for public consumption.”

He finishes, “Thank you and have a productive day.”

The screens go blank for a second and returns to the normal visual displays and information.

The Commissar thinks to himself, never once ever stating what he really feels regarding the little people that are his charges, except of course to Artie, who has the unnatural ability to not be able to recall things said to him.

In written notes to himself, he keeps records of all his thoughts for referral and posterity, the Commissar begins:

Today’s drug war success message should be well received by the general public, which as we here know and will never publicly admit, are as sheep, even the religious actually use that term without anyone blinking an eye! The public are accustomed to our predigested 10 second bit-news.

We control most if not all the mass media.

We can form the mind of the young and maintain the continuity of our fair government as we choose. The writers don’t ever have to be censored since they understand that which is acceptable. A ‘Bad’ story will be frowned upon and continued such work will be deleted from publication and conversely so will their elevated positions as protectors of Freedom of Speech, and 2nd Amendment guardians.

No matter, the Chomsky PM is the mode within which we work, rather successfully, he thinks as he heads for the make-up room. He always looks his best, all the time. “I must be ready to meet with anyone and therefore my appearance is of utmost importance. The first impression is the only impression.”

“Please, a trim and some color,” he instructs the artist. “They are always here for me. They should be rewarded. An unscheduled holiday would be a good idea. There! Who says I’m all business?” A smirk escapes and spreads across his face. I’ll tell Artie to announce it to them.”

“Artie, my number two. What would I do without him? He’s my extra right hand.”

Later that day The Commissar meets with his subordinates and the representatives from the mayor’s Office. He begins his statement, “This is off the record. Do You all understand that? I want a nondisclosure agreement signed now.” He passes the NDA and waits patiently until all have signed it. Their act is recorded. Refusal to obey is reason for immediate dismissal and worse, unemployed, blacklisted, ruination. Artie collects the documents and locks them in a briefcase with a loud snap.

He begins, “Okay, However, as we all know in this business, the history of drug control is fraught with minor setbacks. We have been getting reports of people being observed as best described, as strange. There have been no arrests. We have noticed through our crime based biometric sensors coupled with visual observation stations, a non-regular state of being in many of our citizenry. The old expression of being stoned comes to mind, yet there have been no associated crimes, accidents or truly aberrant behavior from the established and required norm.

Banging the table for emphasis he continues, “We are not amused. No report of this ‘problem’ has gone beyond this department yet. The current research indicates there is no central point, geographically, from which we can vector our forces to detect and destroy this vermin. The behavior appears to be citywide. As part of the control and discovery systems, we implanted sensors in the sewer systems of the residential enclaves. It is constantly monitored for drug uses as well as other contraband. We can trace down to the house if need be. As of yet no substance has been detected out of the ordinary.”

I have spoken to officials in other locales off-the-record of course and they too have noticed similar behavior within their control. The trend appears to be spreading. To reiterate no reports of crimes other than facial and bodily characteristics are indicated. It’s disconcerting to our people that we can’t locate the source of this illegal substance. This is an unacceptable illustration of our loss of control, and....

I’m interrupted. I can see it’s a call from the PR division. “Yes, I know. I will be at the studio early for makeup, hair trim and redeye.” I am aware that appearances are sometime more important than the substance delivered. Yes I will be there. Can you do me a favor and make sure that Hugo is there? He’s the best at this. Thanks see you in a while”

MONTHS LATER:

To Artie, “We have been putting people undercover, on the street in order to discover the origin, the nature of and the attraction/addiction of this new habit forming drug. But to no avail!

Talk in the bureau is that the administration is beginning to worry. Our infallibility, the idea of which we have carefully cultivated, no, inculcated, is subject to question if this gets out leading to who knows what.

We have nothing, nothing at all. We have no informer looking for money, no disgruntled drug dealer seeking revenge or protection in exchange. Decent usable data? Zip, nada, nothing. The only data is a statistical analysis that has come to me. There is a disproportionate ratio/number of women to men appearing in this euphoric state. Go figure.

Artie, says nothing. He’s just there to listen. Artie knows when to make suggestions and now is not one of them.

I’ve been requested to appear at a special unprogrammed news conference tomorrow. Our studio make up people are away at a conference. I do need a haircut and some work on my hair. Usually this is done in house. The make up artists are on that vacation I gave them.”

“Hey Artie, where do you go for an outside cut and dye?”

Artie gave the Commissar a strange look. He was on the phone. He got off and said, “My wife goes to this Vietnamese place. She said it’s great, and her hairdresser is one of the best on the coast, has shops and is known worldwide. He’s great with color. She keeps trying to get me to go. Me, pay that much for a hair cut? Screw That! You have an appearance tomorrow. I bet he would fit you in, another feather in his cap. And, it’s on the house, not out of your pocket. I’ll call it in.”

“Thanks,” says the Commissar. I can always count on Artie. He’s right there and ... his thoughts drift to the meeting and the idea of going out of the studio in public for this necessary obligation to appear the best he can.

Later Artie appears in the Commissar’s office door, “Here you go, an appointment and the address. It’s just down the street from the Government Center. Apparently he has a lot of important clients. Who knew, go figure?”

As The Commissar gazes up at the LOGO on the front of the hair care establishment, Salon For The Mind And Body, he thinks out loud to himself, “The world seems better place. Who would have thought a haircut and a re-dye could change ones outlook. I should recommend this to the office. I will tell Artie to try it out. Oh well back to work on this epidemic drug issue. You know what; first I think I will stop for a bite by the park. It’s beautiful today.

His driver asks in a furtive manner, “Sir? Did you say something?”

He unbuttons the front of his suit jacket and dismisses the driver and the limo with a wave off. The leaves are turning in the park just up the street. He heads that way. His hair is blowing in the light breeze.

THE END