

A High-Spin $[\text{Fe}^{\text{I}}_3]$ Cluster Capable of Pnictogen Atom Capture

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ABSTRACT: Using a new hexanucleating anildophosphine ligand $^{\text{tBu}}\text{LH}_3$ ($1,3,5\text{-C}_6\text{H}_3\text{-NHC}_6\text{H}_3\text{-5-F-2-P(tBu)}_2\text{)}_3$), the all-monovalent $[\text{Fe}^{\text{I}}_3]$ compound $(^{\text{tBu}}\text{L})\text{Fe}_3$ (**1**) was isolated and characterized by X-ray diffraction analysis, SQUID magnetometry, ^{57}Fe Mössbauer spectroscopy, and cyclic voltammetry (CV). The molecular structure of **1** reveals very close Fe–Fe distances of $2.3825(7)$ Å, $2.4146(8)$ Å, and $2.3913(8)$ Å which results in significant Fe–Fe interactions and a maximum high-spin $S = 9/2$ spin state as determined by SQUID magnetometry and further supported by quantum chemical calculations. Compound **1** mediates the multi-electron, oxidative atom transfer from inorganic azide ($[\text{Bu}_4\text{N}][\text{N}_3]$), cyanate ($\text{Na}[\text{NCO}]$), and phosphonate ($\text{Na}(\text{dioxane})_{2.5}[\text{PCO}]$) to afford the $[\text{Fe}_3]\text{-}\mu^3\text{-nitrido}$ (N^{3-}) and $[\text{Fe}_3]\text{-}\mu^3\text{-phosphido}$ (P^{3-}) pnictides, $(^{\text{tBu}}\text{L})\text{Fe}_3(\mu^3\text{-N})$ (**2**) and $(^{\text{tBu}}\text{L})\text{Fe}_3(\mu^3\text{-P})(\text{CO})$ (**3**), respectively. Compounds **1**–**3** exhibit rich electrochemical behavior with three (for **1**), four (for **2**) and five (for **3**) distinct redox events being observed in the cyclic voltammograms of these compounds. Finally, the all mono-valent **1** and the formally $\text{Fe}^{\text{II}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{II}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{I}}$ compound **3**, were investigated by alternating current (ac) SQUID magnetometry, revealing slow magnetic relaxation in both compounds, with **3** being found to be a unique example of a $[\text{Fe}_3]\text{-phosphido}$ single-molecule magnet (SMM) having an energy barrier of relaxation reversal of $U = 30.7(6)$ cm⁻¹ in the absence of an external magnetic field. The study herein demonstrates the utility of an all low-valent polynuclear cluster to perform multi-electron redox chemistry and exemplifies the redox flexibility and unique physical properties that are present in the corresponding mid-valent oxidation products.

1. INTRODUCTION

The design of molecular systems that can catalyze the reduction of small molecule substrates into their more desirable constituents have important implications in areas such as N_2 fixation^{1–3} and CO/CO_2 reduction.^{4–6} Full reductive conversion of each of the substrates mentioned constitutes a multi-electron process. In nature, multi-electron reduction chemistry is often performed at multi-nuclear cluster cofactors which have been preloaded with reducing equivalents prior to substrate uptake.^{7–9} Likewise, many industrial processes use heterogeneous catalysts composed of electron rich, nominally zero-valent, transition metal sites to achieve multi-electron reduction of substrates.¹⁰ Inspired by both biological and industrial processes, chemists have sought to perform multi-electron reductive chemistry using compounds featuring highly reducing/electron rich low-valent transition metals such as $\text{Fe}^{\text{I}/0}$ and $\text{Co}^{\text{I}/0}$.^{11–28} Indeed, low-valent transition metal compounds have shown to mediate multi-electron reductive transformations of environmentally/biologically relevant small molecules such as N_2 ,^{1–3,11–16} CO_2 ,^{29–31} and CO .^{32–34} To this end, the development of molecular systems that can perform multi-electron reductive transformations at efficiencies rivaling heterogeneous/biological processes is an ongoing challenge.

Previously reported low-valent molecular systems typically propose an intermolecular redox mechanism

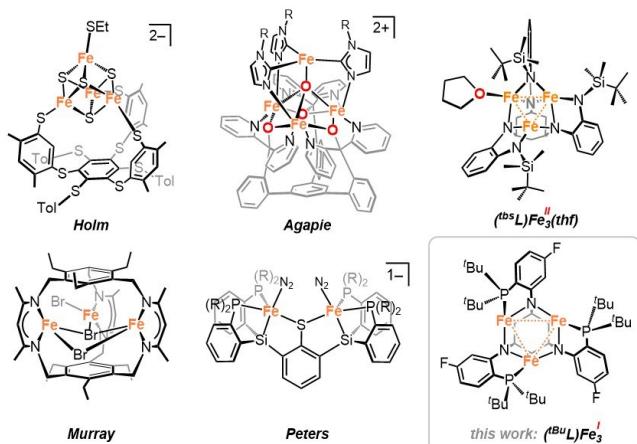
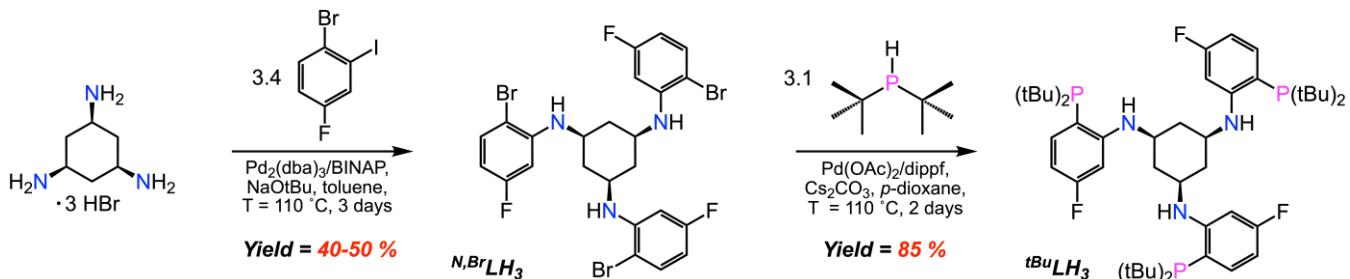


Figure 1. Selected examples of well-defined ligand templated Fe clusters^{13,40,41,44,45} and the trinuclear $[\text{Fe}^{\text{I}}_3]$ cluster presented in this work.

between two or more clusters to achieve the complete reduction of substrate. For example, Walter¹² and Holland¹⁶ have shown that reduction of $[(\text{L})\text{Fe}^{\text{II}}(\text{X})_2]$ ($\text{L} = \text{cyclopentadienide or } \beta\text{-diketiminate}$) halide dimers in the presence of N_2 results in the formation of polymetallic bis-nitrido products of the type, $\{(\text{L})\text{Fe}_{3-4}(\text{N}^{3-})_2\}$, indicating that three or more $[(\text{L})\text{Fe}^{\text{I}}]$ fragments are involved in the full reduction of dinitrogen. This precedent contrasts the proposed mechanism of many industrial and biological small molecule reduction processes,^{8–10} where electron transfer to substrate is proposed to occur at a single polynuclear active site stationed within a protein or



Scheme 1. Synthesis of the trinucleating anildophosphine proligand $t\text{BuLH}_3$.

heterogeneous catalyst surface, respectively. In this light, low-valent molecular clusters that can perform concerted multi-electron reductions on a cooperatively bound substrate could lead to reduction chemistry more akin to biological/industrial processes.

We and others have used polynucleating ligand scaffolds to proximally coordinate multiple transition metals within a single molecule for the purpose of achieving cooperative substrate uptake capable of mediating multi-electron redox chemistry (Fig. 1).³⁵⁻⁴⁴ This strategy has resulted in molecular clusters having expanded redox capacities for a single molecule and structurally dynamic metal cores that can stabilize the highly reactive intermediates involved in multi-electron transformations. The vast majority of reported templating ligands for polynuclear transition metal clusters are designed to stabilize mid- to high-valent metals, where the average formal oxidation state of the cooperating metal ions is +2 or higher. Ligand-templated clusters containing only low-valent transition metal centers have been largely underexplored. Two notable exceptions are a binucleating phosphinothiolate-based scaffold reported by Peters which stabilizes two Fe^1 ions⁴¹ and a trinucleating β -diketiminato-based scaffold reported by Murray which supports a putative $[\text{Fe}^1]_3$ cluster in route to N_2 reduction to form the all-ferric poly-imido species, $(\text{L})\text{Fe}_3(\text{NH})_3$.¹³ For the later, substrate reduction is proposed to proceed through an intermolecular mechanism despite a proposed polynuclear Fe^1 core. This assertion is made based on the Fe:N ratio of the higher valent Fe-imido reaction products along with the co-crystallization of a dimeric $\{(\text{L})\text{Fe}_3-\text{N}_x\}_2$ species akin to reaction products obtained from the mononuclear analogues.

Our group has previously shown that the *tris*-*o*-phenylenedianilide ligand scaffold $[\text{tbsL}]^{6-}$ can be used to isolate the all-ferrous cluster $(\text{tbsL})\text{Fe}_3(\text{thf})$ which features three strongly interacting Fe^{2+} centers resulting in a maximally high-spin ($S = 6$) $[\text{Fe}^{II}]_3$ core.⁴⁵ The strongly correlated polynuclear core of $(\text{tbsL})\text{Fe}_3(\text{thf})$ facilitates multi-electron oxidative group transfer chemistry of nitrogenous-based reagents such as inorganic/organic azides and

hydrazines to form the corresponding bridging Fe_3 -imido or Fe_3 -nitrido species.⁴⁶ Though the $[\text{tbsL}]^{6-}$ scaffold allows access to a breadth oxidative chemistry at the $[\text{Fe}^{II}]_3$ core of $(\text{tbsL})\text{Fe}_3(\text{thf})$, the hexa-anionic ligand scaffold has thus far not been found suitable for isolating all-low valent $[\text{Fe}^{+n}]_3$ ($n < +2$) systems, likely due to the very low reduction potentials and/or charge accumulation such a system would incur. To gain access to all low-valent $[\text{Fe}^1]_3$ clusters, we sought to modify the hexa-anilide ligand platform through replacement of the three peripheral anilides with tertiary phosphines. The increased sigma donating (and potentially π -accepting (for $-\text{P}(\text{Ar})_3$ or $\text{P}(\text{OAr})_3$)⁴⁷ capabilities of tertiary phosphines along with tri-anionic nature of the proposed *tris*-anildophosphine ligand ($[\text{tBuL}]^{3-}$) could potentially stabilize all-mono-valent clusters of the type $(\text{L})\text{Fe}^1_3$ as a neutral species.

Herein, we report the synthesis of a new polynucleating *tris*-anildophosphine ligand ($[\text{tBuL}]^{3-}$) and its use in isolating an all Fe^1 cluster $(\text{tBuL})\text{Fe}_3$ (**1**) which features a maximally high spin $S = 9/2$ $[\text{Fe}^1]_3$ core. Compound **1** facilitates intramolecular multi-electron reduction of inorganic/organic azides, cyanates, and phosphonates to give the corresponding $[\text{Fe}_3]$ -pnictides $(\text{tBuL})\text{Fe}_3(\mu^3-\text{N})$ (**2**) and $[(\text{tBuL})\text{Fe}_3(\mu^3-\text{P})(\text{CO})]^-$ (**3**), respectively, where mixed-valent **3** represents a rare example of a paramagnetic transition metal complex featuring a bridging phosphido ligand. The nitrido and phosphido adducts **2** and **3**, respectively, exhibit rich electrochemistry with at least four redox events being observed for each compound. Furthermore, investigation of the low-valent compounds **1** and **3** by SQUID magnetometry suggests that slow magnetic relaxation is apparent in both compounds, with compound **3** exhibiting single-molecule magnetic behavior in the absence of an external magnetic field. This study illustrates a unique example of intramolecular, multi-electron, redox chemistry by an all low-valent triiron complex and showcases the rich redox chemistry latent in the mid-valent oxidation products.

2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

2.1 Synthesis of $^{t\text{Bu}}\text{LH}_3$. To aid the characterization of potentially paramagnetic low-valent clusters, we sought to incorporate fluorine into the ligand backbone of the targeted $[\text{t}^{\text{Bu}}\text{L}]^{3-}$ scaffold to be used for *in situ* reaction monitoring by ^{19}F NMR. The fluorinated, *tris*-anilidophosphine ligand $^{t\text{Bu}}\text{LH}_3$ can be synthesized in two steps using consecutive Pd-catalyzed reactions as shown in Scheme 1. Trifold arylation of 1,3,5-triaminocyclohexane hydrobromic acid with three equivalents of 1,2,4-bromo-iodo-fluorobenzene ($\text{Pd}_2(\text{dba})_3/\text{BINAP}$, toluene, $120\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ for 3 days) affords the tribromo-triaryl precursor, $^{N,\text{Br}}\text{LH}_3$, in 40-50 % isolated yields on a multi-gram scale. Subsequent derivatization of

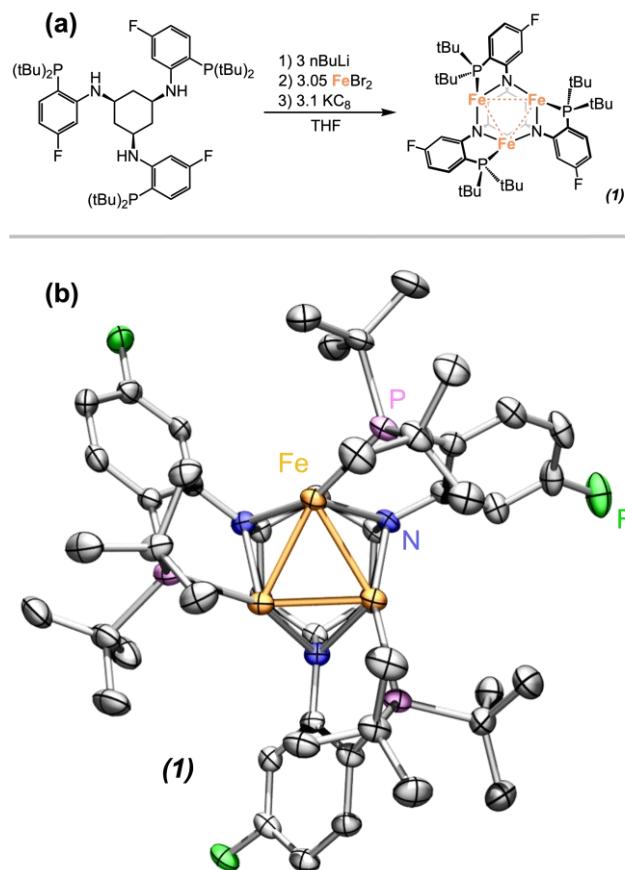


Figure 2. (a) Synthesis of the putative $(^{t\text{Bu}}\text{L})\text{Fe}_3\text{Br}_3$ and subsequent reduction to generate $(^{t\text{Bu}}\text{L})\text{Fe}_3$ (**1**). (b) Molecular structure of **1**. Atom colors represent Fe (orange), N (blue), P (pink), F (green), C (grey). H atoms omitted for clarity. Structure presented with ellipsoids at 50 % probability.

2.2 Synthesis and Characterization of $(^{t\text{Bu}}\text{L})\text{Fe}_3$ Transamination of $^{t\text{Bu}}\text{LH}_3$ with previously prepared Fe^{I} synthons $(\text{L})\text{Fe}(\text{N}(\text{SiMe}_3)_2)_2^{48}$ or the anionic bis-amido analogue, $[\text{Fe}(\text{N}(\text{SiMe}_3)_2)_2]^{49}$ was unsuccessful. Thus, we targeted the all- Fe^{I} containing cluster by initial metalation of $[\text{t}^{\text{Bu}}\text{L}]^{3-}$ with three equivalents of a suitable ferrous salt followed by a trifold chemical reduction (Fig. 2a). The putative all ferrous precursor (e.g. $(^{t\text{Bu}}\text{L})\text{Fe}_3\text{Br}_3$) was synthesized by deprotonation of $(^{t\text{Bu}}\text{L})\text{H}_3$ with three equivalents of n

$(^{N,\text{Br}}\text{LH}_3)$ is achieved through a subsequent cross-coupling reaction of $^{N,\text{Br}}\text{LH}_3$ with 3.1 equivalents of tBu_2PH ($\text{Pd}(\text{OAc})_2/1,1'$ -diisopropylferrocene (dippf), *p*-dioxane, $110\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ for 2 days) to afford the desired anilidophosphine pro-ligand $^{t\text{Bu}}\text{LH}_3$ in 85 % yield after filtration of the reaction mixture through a silica plug and evaporation of the filtrate volatiles. The composition of $^{t\text{Bu}}\text{LH}_3$ was confirmed by high-resolution mass-spectroscopy ($[\text{M}+\text{H}^+]\text{ }m/\text{z} = 844.5200$) and multi-nuclear NMR spectroscopy where a single resonance was observed in the ^{19}F NMR (-109.72 ppm) and ^{31}P (-0.54 ppm) NMR spectra, thus confirming the C_3 symmetry of $^{t\text{Bu}}\text{LH}_3$ in solution.

butyllithium and the subsequent addition of 3.05 equivalents of FeBr_2 at room temperature. The resulting dark red solution was stirred at room temperature for 1.5 hours and was then heated for an additional 1.5 hours to ensure three-fold metalation as monitored by ^{19}F NMR. Three broad resonances of -36 , -39 , and -55 ppm in the ^{19}F NMR spectrum suggests a non- C_3 symmetric Fe^{II} -metallated product in THF solution (Fig. S10).

Chemical reduction of the putative $(^{t\text{Bu}}\text{L})\text{Fe}_3\text{Br}_3$ was accessed by the addition of 3.1 equivalents of KC_8 to a thawing solution of the metallated ligand. Upon KC_8 addition, the three ^{19}F NMR resonances of the kinetic metallation product coalesce into a single, up-field shifted, resonance (-68 ppm), indicative of C_3 symmetry of the *tris*-anilidophosphine ligand scaffold (Fig. S12). Indeed, the formation of the all- Fe^{I} cluster $(^{t\text{Bu}}\text{L})\text{Fe}_3$ (**1**) was confirmed via high-resolution mass spectrometry ($[\text{M}+\text{H}^+]\text{ }m/\text{z} = 1009.3028$) and can be isolated as a pure black solid (Yield = 48 %) following extraction from the solid reaction mixture with hexanes and removal of the volatiles.

Crystals of **1** suitable for analysis by single-crystal X-ray diffraction (SCXRD) were afforded by recrystallization out of concentrated hexanes/benzene ($\sim 20:1$) solutions at $-35\text{ }^\circ\text{C}$ for 1-2 days. The molecular structure of **1** features a trinuclear $[\text{Fe}_3]$ core supported by a nearly ideal C_3 symmetric $[\text{t}^{\text{Bu}}\text{L}]^{3-}$ ligand framework ($\text{Fe-P}(\text{\AA}): 2.2976(12)$, $2.3136(11)$, $2.2895(11)$; $\text{Fe-N}(\text{\AA}): 2.037(3)$, $2.087(3)$, $2.050(3)$, $2.093(3)$, $2.036(3)$, $2.088(3)$; $\text{Fe-Fe}(\text{\AA}): 2.3825(7)$, $2.4146(8)$, $2.3913(8)$) (Fig. 2b). Neglecting Fe-Fe interactions, each Fe site adopts a distorted T-shaped geometry consisting of two bridging anilido ligands and a periphery di-*tert*-butyl phosphine ligand. Despite the slight deviation from ideal C_3 symmetry that is observed in the solid-state structure of **1**, the solid state ^{57}Fe Mössbauer spectrum of **1** exhibits a single resolved quadrupole doublet (δ , $|\Delta E_Q|(\text{mm/s})$: 0.62 , 2.38), indicating only very small differences in the electric-field gradient around the individual Fe sites (Fig S46.). The Fe-Fe distances of **1** of $2.3825(7)\text{ \AA}$, $2.4146(8)\text{ \AA}$, and $2.3913(8)\text{ \AA}$ are well within the range of the sum of the covalent radii of two Fe atoms (3.04 \AA^{50}) and indicate non-negligible Fe-Fe bonding interactions within the $[\text{Fe}_3]$ core of **1**. Notably, the average Fe-Fe distance of **1** ($2.3961[4]\text{ \AA}$) is shorter than the corresponding average distance of $(^{t\text{bs}}\text{L})\text{Fe}_3(\text{thf})$ ($2.5769[2]\text{ \AA}$)⁴⁵ and the singly reduced, $[(^{t\text{bs}}\text{L})\text{Fe}_3]^-$ ($2.4459[8]\text{ \AA}^{51}$) but is slightly longer than the average Fe-Fe distance of the all ferrous cluster $(^{\text{H}}\text{L})\text{Fe}_3(\text{PMe}_3)_3$ ($2.299[19]\text{ \AA}$) which is templated by a related hexanionic polyanilide ligand and three exogenous trimethylphosphine ligands.⁴³

Table 1. Comparison of Fe–Fe distances and spin-state of compounds of selected [Fe₃] compounds.

Compound	Avg. Fe–Fe Distance (Å)	Formal Fe ⁿ⁺ /Fe ⁿ⁺ /Fe ⁿ⁺ Ox. State	{Fe ₃ } 3d ⁿ Count	S
(^{tbs} L)Fe ₃ (thf)	2.5769[2]	2+/2+/2+	3d ¹⁸	6
[(^{tbs} L)Fe ₃] ⁻	2.4459[8]	1+/2+/2+	3d ¹⁹	¹¹ / ₂
(^H L)Fe ₃ (PMe ₃) ₃	2.299[19]	2+/2+/2+	3d ¹⁸	1
(^{tBu} L)Fe ₃ (1)	2.3961[8]	1+/1+/1+	3d ²¹	⁹ / ₂

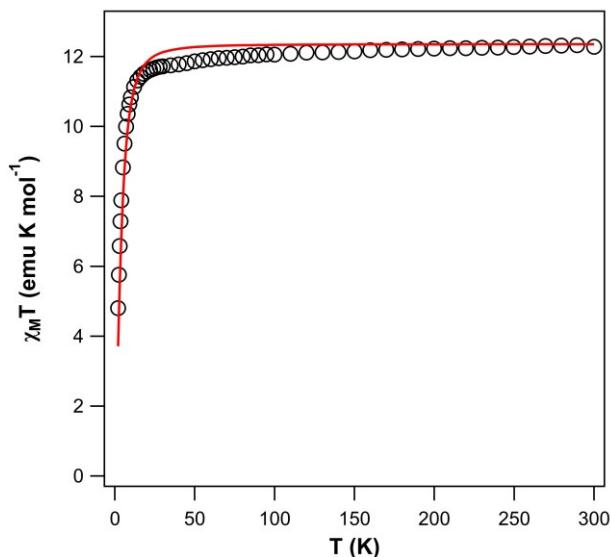


Figure 3. Temperature dependence of the molar magnetic susceptibility temperature product ($\chi_M T$) of **1** ($T = 300 - 2$ K; $H = 1$ T). Line represents fit to experimental data (open circles). ($S = 9/2$, $g = 2.00$, $D = -2.2$ cm⁻¹, and $E = 0.70$ cm⁻¹ ($|E/D| = 0.32$)).

We have previously shown that for (^{tbs}L)Fe₃(thf) and [(^{tbs}L)Fe₃]⁻ the close Fe–Fe contacts in combination with the weak ligand field results in a maximum spin state for high spin 3d¹⁸ ($S = 6$) and 3d¹⁹ ($S = 11/2$) [Fe₃] cores, respectively. In contrast, the trimethylphosphine bound cluster (^HL)Fe₃(PMe₃)₃ which has the shortest Fe–Fe distances of the series (2.299[19] Å), adopts an $S = 1$ ground configuration that is expected for a low spin 3d¹⁸ [Fe₃] core.⁴³ Given the intermediate Fe–Fe distance of **1** and the mixture of strong and weak field ligand donor atoms of the supporting [^{tBu}L]³⁻ scaffold, we were interested in exploring the electronic structure of **1** via SQUID magnetometry. The static magnetic properties of **1** were investigated by measuring the direct current (dc) magnetic susceptibility under a 1 T external magnetic field and cooling from $T = 300 - 2$ K (Fig. 3). The $\chi_M T$ (300 K) value of 12.28 emu·K mol⁻¹ for **1** is very close to the expected value of 12.375 emu·K mol⁻¹ for a system with an $S = 9/2$ ground state and is consistent with a maximally high-spin [Fe₃] trinuclear core. Upon cooling, the $\chi_M T$ value remains nearly constant until 16 K, where a steep decline is observed to a minimum value of 4.80 emu·K mol⁻¹ at 2 K. Such low temperature declines in the $\chi_M T$ vs T plots are often attributed non-negligible zero-field splitting (ZFS) or population of a lower spin electronic ground state. To further investigate the spin-ground state of **1**, variable temperature magnetization data

was collected for compound **1** between 2 – 8 K (Fig. S33). At 2 K, the magnetization reaches a maximum value of 6.90 μ_B at the 7 T instrument field limit. The experimentally observed magnetic saturation value is lower than the expected value of 9 μ_B for an ideal $S = 9/2$ ($g = 2$) spin system. This observation indicates the non-negligible zero-field splitting and is further confirmed by the non-superposition of the reduced magnetization (M v. H/T) curves (Fig. S34). The susceptibility and magnetization data for **1** were simultaneously fit using a giant spin Hamiltonian:⁵²

$$\hat{H} = D\hat{S}_z^2 + E(\hat{S}_x^2 - \hat{S}_y^2) + g_{iso}\mu_B S \cdot H \quad (\mathbf{1})$$

Assuming a $S = 9/2$ ground state, reasonable fits were obtained giving best fit parameters of $g = 2.00$, $D = -2.2$ cm⁻¹, and $E = 0.70$ cm⁻¹ ($|E/D| = 0.32$).

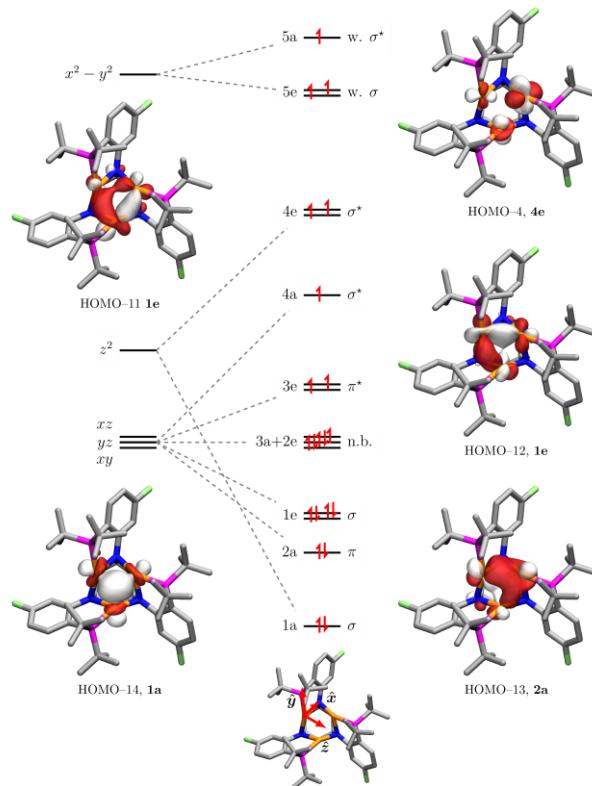


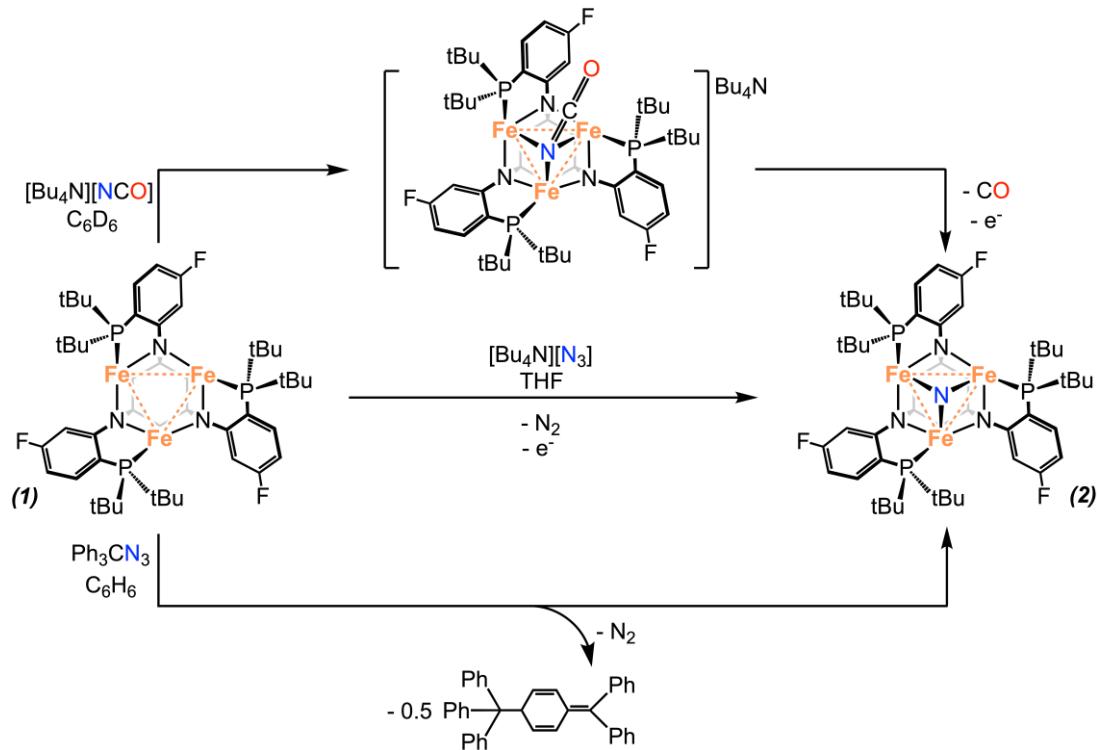
Figure 4. Qualitative MO diagram and selected quasi-restricted orbital output of **1**.

2.3 Computational Analysis of **1.** We next sought to describe the electronic structure of **1** and a qualitative molecular orbital diagram for **1** was constructed from first-principles ligand field theory (Fig. 4). As described above, each iron center sits in a distorted T-shaped geometry with a phosphine and bridging anilido donor at the arm of the T and the second bridging anilido at the stem. These ligand donors define the x and y axes, positioning the z axis towards the centroid above [Fe₃] core. The initial d_{xz} and d_{yz} orbitals arising from this choice of coordinates were allowed to mix such that the new d_{xz} and d_{yz} orbitals are oriented parallel and orthogonal to the [Fe₃] core, respectively. The primary Fe–Fe σ bonding interaction are derived

from the d_{z^2} and d_{xz} orbitals, and the d_{yz} orbitals provide π bonding across the trinuclear core (see the supporting information for the full bonding scheme).

DFT calculations were performed using the ORCA 5.0.4⁵³ package to corroborate our bonding model. A full

description of the calculation methods employed can be found in the supporting information. First, geometry optimization calculations were performed starting from the solid-state structure of (^tBuL)Fe₃ using a variety of



Scheme 2. Synthesis of **2** via multiple routes.

functionals and calculation procedures. All calculated structures reproduced the pseudo- C_3 symmetry of the [Fe₃] core, but the optimized structure **1**^{opt} that was obtained using the TPSSh⁵⁴⁻⁵⁵ functional with the zeroth-order regular approximation (ZORA) and Ahlrichs def2 basis set (Fe: ZORA-def2-TZVP, rest: ZORA-def2-SVP)⁵⁶⁻⁵⁷ best replicated the Fe-Fe bonding within the core of **1**. Additionally, a rigorously C_3 symmetric cluster, **1'**, with the inter-Fe distance set to the average Fe-Fe distance of **1** (2.397 Å) was generated using a simple Python script and **1'** was also used for single point calculations. Both **1**^{opt} and **1'** very closely capture all the bond metrics in the solid-state structure of **1**.

Single point calculations were performed on **1**^{opt} and **1'** using the same procedure as the geometry optimization of **1**^{opt} except the Ahlrichs basis set of triple-zeta valence quality was used for all atoms. The canonical orbitals exhibited considerable delocalization and mixing among the Fe d-orbitals that were minimized in the quasi-restricted orbitals (QRO) in which we could identify 15 isolated metal-based orbitals. The QRO outputs from **1**^{opt} and **1'** were qualitatively identical, but less mixing was observed with the rigorously C_3 symmetric structure. Overall, the calculated electronic structure supports our proposed molecular orbital diagram. The lowest energy metal-based orbital is the d_{z^2} all in-phase combination (approximate a symmetry) which is followed by all in-phase combination of d_{yz}

and the doubly degenerate set of d_{xz} (of approximate e symmetry). The HOMO and next two lowest energy molecular orbitals are clear $d_{x^2-y^2}$ orbitals. Doubly degenerate antibonding orbitals arising from the d_{z^2} are also found in the QRO output as well as two of the non-bonding d_{xy} orbitals. The remaining five orbitals exhibit considerable mixing that makes assignment of their parentage difficult.

Finally, a spin state analysis was performed on **1**^{opt} in which single-point calculations were carried out at spin states ranging from high ($S = 9/2$) to low spin ($S = 1/2$). The $S = 9/2$ state was calculated to be lowest in energy, and it is stabilized by 12.5 kcal/mol relative to the next lowest energy spin state ($S = 7/2$) which corroborates the experimentally observed ground state of **1** suggested by SQUID magnetometry.

2.4 Redox Chemistry of Compound 1: Pnictogen Atom Transfer We were interested in the capacity of **1** to effect inner-sphere redox transformation concomitant with small molecule activation processes. Addition of a THF solution of tetrabutylammonium azide (1 equivalent) to a frozen slurry of **1** resulted in a color change of the reaction solution from black to dark red upon warming from frozen THF solution to room temperature. After 20 minutes, complete conversion of **1** to a new C_3 symmetric product was observed as suggested by a single, up-field ¹⁹F NMR resonance at -109 ppm (Fig. S15). Correspondingly, the ¹H

NMR spectrum shows a set of 8 new resonances close to the diamagnetic region between 13 to -4 ppm (Fig. S14).

The apparent diamagnetism of the new C_3 symmetric product was further supported by the observation of a sharp ^{31}P NMR resonance at -24 ppm (Fig. S17) which is notably shifted up-field from the -0.54 ppm ^{31}P resonance of free ligand $^{t\text{Bu}}\text{LH}_3$. Crystallization of the crude reaction mixture out of cold pentane resulted in black single crystals which were determined to be the neutral Fe_3 -nitrido species $(^{t\text{Bu}}\text{L})\text{Fe}_3(\mu^3\text{-N})$ (**2**) by SCXRD (Fig. 5).

Compound **2** has a formal $\text{Fe}^{\text{II}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{II}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{II}}$ core and suggests a three-electron oxidation of **1** upon azide addition. One possible mechanism for the formation of all ferrous **2** is the disproportionation of an $\text{Fe}^{\text{II}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{II}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{I}}$ $[(^{t\text{Bu}}\text{L})\text{Fe}_3(\mu^3\text{-N})]$ -intermediate into neutral **2** and other reduced species. Although the reduction product(s) have not been identified crystallographically, this mechanism is supported by the ^{57}Fe Mössbauer spectrum of the crude reaction mixture after the addition of $[\text{Bu}_4\text{N}][\text{N}_3]$ to **1** which shows two quadrupole doublets corresponding to **2** (81 %) and an Fe-based impurity (19 %) (Fig. S48). An alternative explanation is that the nitrido unit of the anionic, $[(^{t\text{Bu}}\text{L})\text{Fe}_3(\mu^3\text{-N})]$ -intermediate is highly basic and deprotonates or H-atom extracts from the solvent or another available H-source to form the neutral imido species $(^{t\text{Bu}}\text{L})\text{Fe}_3(\mu^3\text{-NH})$. Given the observed diamagnetism of **2**, the assignment of **2** as the parent imido is unlikely as such assignment would require an odd-electron $\text{Fe}^{\text{II}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{II}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{I}}$ composition. Furthermore, no N-H stretch is observed in the IR spectrum (Fig. S18) for **2** and the difference map of the SCXRD data (see below) does not show any appreciable e^- density above the nitrido ligand.

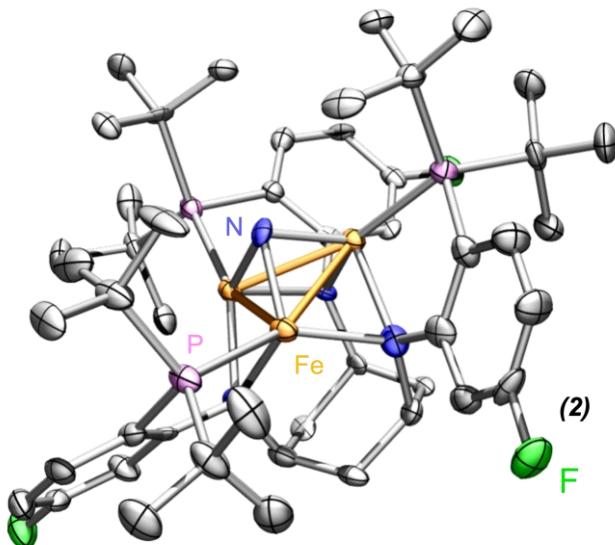


Figure 5. Molecular structure of **2**. Atom colors represent Fe (orange), N (blue), P (pink), F (green), C (grey). H atoms

omitted for clarity. Structure presented with ellipsoids at 50 % probability.

The molecular structure of **2** features three Fe ions bridged by a μ^3 -nitrido ligand that resides 1.160(7) Å above the $[\text{Fe}_3]$ plane centroid. Each Fe center adopts a distorted *cis*-divacant octahedral geometry formed by two bridging anilido ligands, a terminally bound *di-tert*-butylphosphine ligand, and the central μ^3 -nitrido. Notably, no counterions or protonation of the ligand is apparent, suggesting a net three electron oxidative N-atom transfer reaction has occurred to **1**. Upon N^{3-} atom transfer, expansion of the $[\text{Fe}_3]$ core is observed as measured by the increase in average Fe-Fe distances from 2.3961[4] Å for **1** to 2.4862[10] Å in **2**. The average Fe-Fe distance of compound **2** is slightly higher than the average Fe-Fe distances of the higher valent nitrido cluster $[(^{t\text{bs}}\text{L})\text{Fe}_3(\mu^3\text{-N})]$ (2.4798[7] Å).⁴¹ The zero-field ^{57}Fe Mössbauer of **2** shows a single major quadrupole doublet ($\delta, |\Delta E_Q| (\text{mm/s})$: 0.57, 2.32), and corresponds with the approximate C_3 symmetry observed in the solid-state structure and ^{19}F NMR (Fig. S47). Interestingly, the Mössbauer parameters of **2** only deviate slightly from the parameters of the all-monovalent parent **1** despite a formal threefold oxidation of **1** to **2** and a change in local coordination geometry for each Fe site.

Given the apparent three-electron oxidation of compound **1** to form **2** upon the addition of inorganic azide, we wished to further probe the N-atom extrusion reactivity of **1** with other known N-atom transfer reagents (Scheme 2). The reaction of **1** with tritylazide (Ph_3CN_3) in C_6D_6 results in the immediate formation of **2** and Gomberg's dimer ($\text{Ph}_3\text{C}(\text{C}_6\text{H}_5)\text{CPh}_2$) as determined by ^{19}F and ^1H NMR spectroscopy (Fig. S19). The formation of Gomberg's dimer and **2** as opposed to the formally $\text{Fe}^{\text{II}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{II}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{I}}$ trityl imido species, $(^{t\text{Bu}}\text{L})\text{Fe}_3(\text{N}(\text{CPh}_3))$ suggest tritylazide acts a formal three electron oxidant via nitride delivery and $^{\bullet}\text{CPh}_3$ generation, lending further support to the assignment of **2** as an all-ferrous nitrido.

Reactions of **1** with tetrabutylammonium cyanate were also probed. Monitoring the reaction of **1** and $[\text{Bu}_4\text{N}][\text{NCO}]$ in C_6D_6 by ^{19}F NMR (Fig. S22) showed a new resonance at -66 ppm along with **1** and a low intensity resonance corresponding to **2**. Stirring the reaction for 6 hours resulted in an increase concentration of both **2** and the species at -66 ppm (^{19}F NMR) with a corresponding decrease in concentration of **1**. After stirring for 24 hours, complete conversion of **1** to **2** was observed. The intermediate resonance observed at -66 ppm (^{19}F NMR) is consistent with the formation of the $[(^{t\text{Bu}}\text{L})\text{Fe}_3(\text{NCO})]$ -adduct prior to release of CO and the delivery of N^{3-} to the $[\text{Fe}_3]$ core. The formation of a $[(^{t\text{Bu}}\text{L})\text{Fe}_3(\text{NCO})]$ -adduct is further supported by reaction monitoring by IR spectroscopy (Fig. S24) which shows an intense stretch at 2199 cm^{-1} . This is notably blueshifted 66 cm^{-1} relative to $[\text{Bu}_4\text{N}][\text{NCO}]$ which has been previously observed for transition metal cyanate adducts.⁵⁸

Given the ability of **1** to mediate oxidative N^{3-} group transfer chemistry, we were interested in exploring its analogous reactivity with the heavier pnictogens. In particular, discrete late transition metal phosphide complexes have been relatively less explored relative to their lighter nitrido analogues. Addition of a chilled THF solution of the

phosphaethynolate reagent⁵⁹ $\text{Na}[\text{PCO}](\text{dioxane})_{2.5}/15\text{-crown-5}$ to a just-thawed THF solution of **1** resulted in a color change from black to dark red upon warming to room temperature. After 30 minutes of stirring, the ^{19}F NMR spectrum of the crude reaction mixture showed three up-field shifted resonances at -89, -

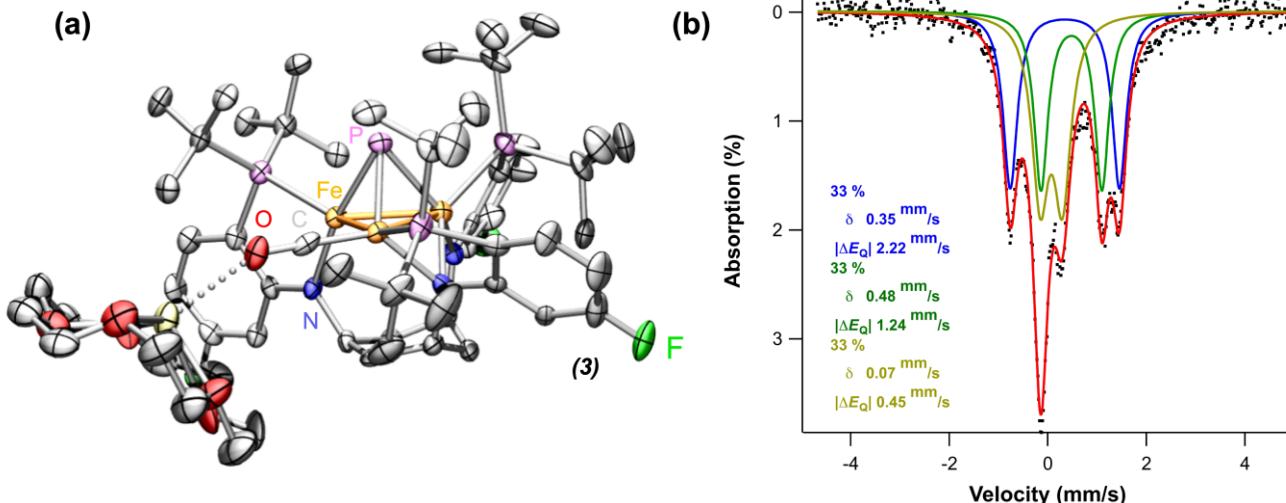
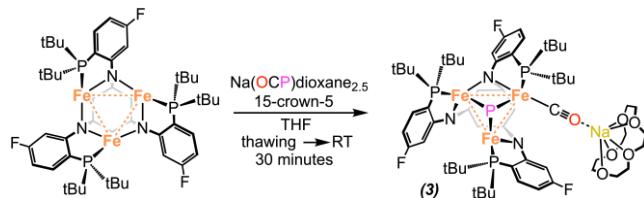


Figure 6. (a) Molecular structure of **3**. (b) ^{57}Fe Mössbauer spectrum of **3** ($T = 90\text{ K}$; $H = 0\text{ T}$).

90, and -147 ppm (Fig. S27) which correspond to complete conversion of **1** to a new asymmetric product. The wide ^1H NMR spectral width of the worked-up product suggest the new asymmetric product is paramagnetic, with >20 broad NMR resonances observable between 40 and -160 ppm (Fig. S26). Recrystallization of the crude reaction mixture out of concentrated THF/Et₂O mixtures resulted in black single crystals which were measured by SCXRD and determined to be the Fe_3 -phosphido complex, $[(\text{tBuL})\text{Fe}_3(\mu^3-\text{P})(\text{CO})]^-$ (**3**) (Scheme 3).



Scheme 3. Synthesis of **3**.

The molecular structure of **3** (Fig. 6a) features three distinct Fe centers that are supported by an asymmetrically bound $[\text{tBuL}]^{3-}$ ligand scaffold, a $(\mu^3-\text{P}^3-)$ ligand, and a terminally bound carbonyl ligand on one of the Fe sites. The overall monoanionic complex, $[(\text{tBuL})\text{Fe}_3(\mu^3-\text{P})(\text{CO})]^-$, is charge balanced by a $[\text{Na}(15\text{-c-5})]^+$ cation which is associated with the inner-sphere complex through bonding with the oxygen atom of the carbonyl ligand. Neglecting Fe-Fe bonding interactions, **3** features two, four-coordinate Fe sites (**Fe1** and **Fe2**), and a single, three-coordinate Fe site (**Fe3**). For each of the two four-coordinate Fe sites, the local geometry is best described as distorted tetrahedral. Both **Fe1** and **Fe2** sites feature three common ligand donor atoms: a terminally bound alkyl phosphine (from $[\text{tBuL}]^{3-}$), a bridging anilido donor (from

$[\text{tBuL}]^{3-}$), and the $\mu^3-\text{P}^3-$ capping ligand. The fourth ligand donor, which differentiates the coordination sphere of the **Fe1** and **Fe2** sites, is the terminal carbonyl ligand (for **Fe1**) and a non-bridging anilido donor (from $[\text{tBuL}]^{3-}$) (for **Fe2**). For the three coordinate **Fe3** site, the coordination geometry is closest to distorted T-shaped and consists of non-bridging anilido and alkyl phosphine donors (from $[\text{tBuL}]^{3-}$) and $\mu^3-\text{P}^3-$ ligand.

The asymmetry of the bound $[\text{tBuL}]^{3-}$ ligand of **3** results in significant deviation in the three Fe-Fe distances of 2.3464(10) Å (**Fe1-Fe3**), 2.4492(11) Å (**Fe1-Fe2**), and 2.5052(11) Å (**Fe2-Fe3**). The resulting asymmetry of the $[\text{Fe}_3]$ core is further reflected in the zero-field ^{57}Fe Mössbauer spectrum at 90 K where three equally intense features can be resolved ($(\delta, |\Delta E_Q|)$ (mm/s): Component 1 (33 %) 0.35, 2.22; Component 2 (33 %) 0.48, 1.24; Component 3 (33 %) 0.07, 0.45) (Fig. 6b)). The P^3- Fe₃(centroid) distance is 1.7434(14) Å and is over 0.6 Å longer than the corresponding N^{3-} -Fe₃(centroid) distance for **2** of 1.160(7) Å. Correspondingly, the P^3- capping ligand is significantly more pyramidalized ($\sum(\angle \text{Fe-P}_\text{phosphido-Fe}^\circ) = 197.43[9]^\circ$ relative the N^{3-} capping ligand of **2** ($\sum(\angle \text{Fe-P}_\text{nitro-Fe}^\circ) = 254[12]^\circ$).

The monoanionic nature of **3** is indicative of a mixed-valent $[\text{Fe}_3]$ cluster having a formal core oxidation state of $\text{Fe}^{\text{II}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{II}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{I}}$, which is seemingly unstable when the capping pnictides is N^{3-} . The ability to isolate the mixed-valent state for **3** versus **2** could be a combination of the softer $\mu^3-\text{P}^3-$ bridgehead and the presence of the terminally bound carbonyl ligand which can stabilize the cluster via π -backbonding interactions. The IR spectrum of **3** (Fig. S28) suggests a significantly reduced CO ligand with an intense

C–O stretch being observed at $\nu = 1743 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ and an elongated C–O bond length of $1.194 \text{ \AA}(7)$ versus 1.13 \AA for free CO).

The $\chi_M T$ (300 K) value for compound **3** under a 1 T applied magnetic field was found to be $4.20 \text{ emu}\cdot\text{K mol}^{-1}$ which is closest to the value expected for a $S = 5/2$ system ($4.375 \text{ emu K mol}^{-1}$) (Fig. S38). Upon cooling, the $\chi_M T$ value decreases only very slightly until $\sim 30 \text{ K}$ where a steep decline is observed to a minimal $2.005 \text{ emu}\cdot\text{K mol}^{-1}$ at 2 K . The low temperature decline could be due to ZFS and/or antiferromagnetic coupling interactions between two–three of the Fe ions within the $[\text{Fe}_3]$ core of **3**. Like compound **1**, non-superposition of the M vs. H/T curves of **3** suggest some degree of magnetic anisotropy is present within the $[\text{Fe}_3]$ core (Fig. S40). The susceptibility and magnetization data were simultaneously fit using Eq. 1 (see Section 2.2.) assuming a maximum spin $S = 5/2$ ground state. Though reasonable fits were obtained by assuming a giant, single-spin system ($g = 1.954$, $D = -8.848 \text{ cm}^{-1}$, and $E = -2.802 \text{ cm}^{-1}$ ($|E/D| = 0.3167$)), it is likely that this as-

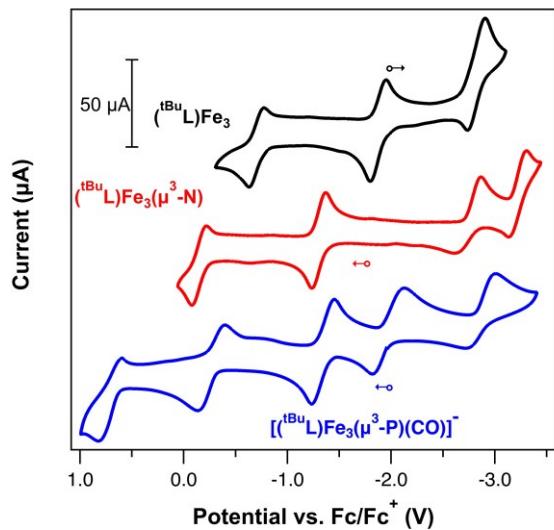
oxidized near -0.1 V vs Fc/Fc^+ . For **2**, reversible and quasi-reversible oxidations are observed at -1.25 and -0.2 V , respectively. Reductive of the OCP, we first observe a non-reversible reduction event at -2.75 V followed by a quasi-reversible reduction at -3.2 V . The appearance of the first reduction event (relative to $[(\text{t}^{\text{Bu}}\text{L})\text{Fe}_3(\mu^3\text{-N})]^0$) at -2.75 V likely indicates that the putative $[(\text{t}^{\text{Bu}}\text{L})\text{Fe}(\mu^3\text{-N})]^-$ intermediate to **2** is highly reducing in THF and thus the inability to isolate this species upon azide (or cyanate) addition is not surprising. For compound **3**, five redox states are observed between 1 V and -3.5 V . Scanning anodically from the OCP, a quasi-reversible oxidation event is observed at -1.95 V followed by a reversible event (-1.3 V) and two more quasi-reversible events at -0.25 V and $+0.75 \text{ V}$. Cathodic of the OCP, a non-reversible reduction event is observed at -2.75 V . The isolation of the oxidation and reduction product(s) of **1–3** using appropriate chemical oxidants/reductants are currently underway.

2.6 Single-Molecule Magnetic Behavior of **1 and **3**** Low-valent Fe species in fine-tuned molecular geometries have been shown to exhibit large unquench orbital angular momentum leading to slow magnetic relaxation in the absence of an external magnetic field.⁶⁰ Such single-molecule magnets (SMMs) have garnered interest in areas of quantum computing, data-storage, and spintronics applications.^{61–66} In the realm of transition metal molecular magnetism, high-spin molecular clusters are often targeted for SMMs having ultra-high magnetic moments for single molecules.^{67–70}

Though molecular clusters and low-valent mononuclear Fe compounds have been thoroughly studied in the area of molecular magnetism, molecular clusters featuring one or more low-valent Fe^{l} ion have been much less studied in this regard. Of the reported transition metal-based SMMs formally containing one or more low valent Fe^{l} ion(s), our group previously reported the $\text{Fe}^{\text{II}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{II}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{l}}$ compound, $[(\text{t}^{\text{bs}}\text{L})\text{Fe}_3]^-$,⁵¹ which represents a rare example of a low valent Fe-cluster SMM having an energy barrier to spin reorientation of $U = 22.6(2) \text{ cm}^{-1}$.

With the low-valent compounds **1** and **3** in hand, we wished to explore their SMM properties using alternating current (ac) SQUID magnetometry in the absence of an applied magnetic field. At 1.8 K , the out-of-phase component (χ_M'') of the ac magnetic susceptibility versus frequency plot for the all mono-valent **1** shows a tail of a χ_M'' signal that increases in magnitude outside of the 1000 Hz frequency limit (Fig. S36). The appearance of a χ_M'' signal in the absence of an external magnetic field suggest the presence of slow magnetic relaxation. However, the lack of a discernable signal maximum within the $1 \text{ Hz} – 1000 \text{ Hz}$ frequency range suggest magnetic relaxation times less than $\sim 0.16 \text{ ms}$ and precludes further analysis of the magnetization dynamics to be made.

For the formally $[\text{Fe}^{\text{II}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{II}}/\text{Fe}^{\text{l}}]$ cluster **3**, a χ_M'' signal with a well-defined maximum $\sim 100 \text{ Hz}$ at 1.8 K ($H = 0 \text{ T}$) is observed (Fig. 8a). Increasing the temperature from 1.8 K , the χ_M'' signal decreases in magnitude but remains at stationary frequency until $T = 2.6 \text{ K}$ where the signal maximum moves quickly to higher frequencies and outside of the upper limit frequency range at 4.0 K . Using the ac sus-



sumption is inaccurate given the asymmetry of the $[\text{Fe}_3]$ core of **3** and the three different coordination sites of the individual Fe-ions. Therefore, a more detailed analysis is needed to concretely describe the electronic structure of **3**.

Figure 7. Cyclic voltamograms of **1** (black), **2** (red), and **3** (blue) in THF at 100 mV/s ($0.25 \text{ M} [\text{Bu}_4\text{N}][\text{PF}_6]$).

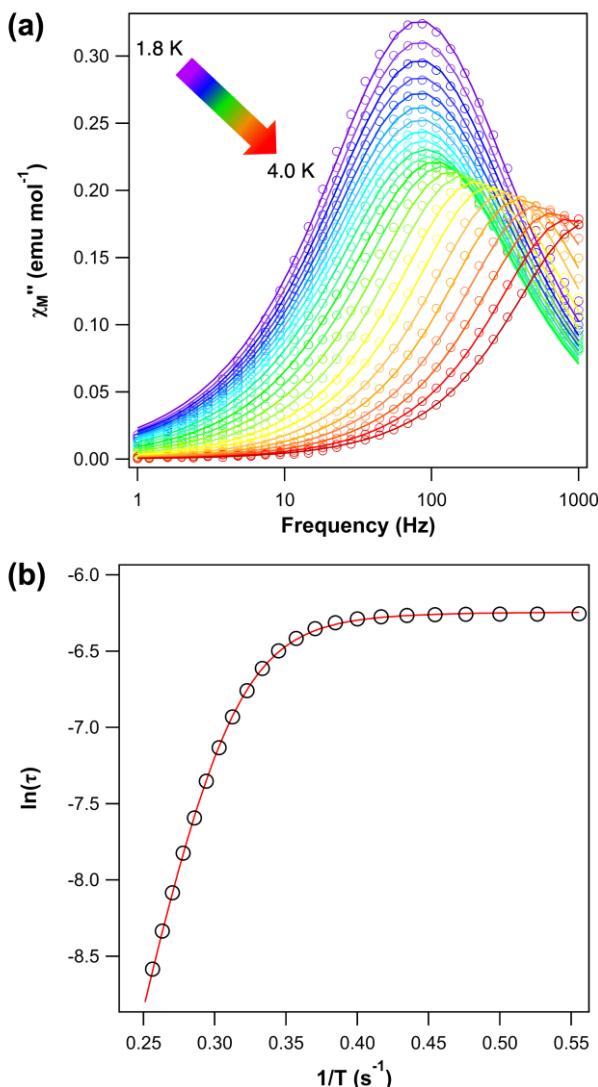
2.5 Electrochemistry of **1–3** The redox capacity of **1–3** were explored using cyclic voltammetry (Fig. 7). Compounds **1–3** exhibit rich electrochemistry, with reversible or quasi-reversible redox events being observed at potentials both anodic and cathodic of the open-circuit potential for each compound. For **1**, scanning cathodically and then anodically from the from the open-circuit potential (OCP: -1.98 V) gives three quasi-reversible redox events at -2.91 V , -1.95 V , and -0.6 V (vs Fc/Fc^+). The -2.91 V event is tentatively assigned to a formal one-electron reduction of **1** to the monoanionic $[(\text{t}^{\text{Bu}}\text{L})\text{Fe}_3]^-$. The quasi-reversible one electron events at -1.9 V and -0.6 V are assigned to the $[(\text{t}^{\text{Bu}}\text{L})\text{Fe}_3]^{0/1+}$ and $[(\text{t}^{\text{Bu}}\text{L})\text{Fe}_3]^{1+/2+}$ couples, respectively. Scanning oxidatively from the $[(\text{t}^{\text{Bu}}\text{L})\text{Fe}_3]^{1+/2+}$ couple, it appears the presumed dication $[(\text{t}^{\text{Bu}}\text{L})\text{Fe}_3]^{2+}$ is irreversibly

ceptibility data, Cole-cole plots (χ_M'' vs. χ_M') (Fig. S44) were constructed and fit with the generalized Debye Equation (Eq. S1). This procedure allowed the extraction of the magnetic relaxation times at each temperature which were subsequently used to construct an Arrhenius plot ($\ln(\tau)$ vs. $1/T$) (Fig. 8b). In the high temperature regime ($T = 3.6 - 4$ K), the linearity of $\ln(\tau)$ versus inverse temperature suggests an exponential temperature dependence of τ and indicates the spin relaxation in this temperature range is likely dominated by an Orbach mechanism.⁷¹ At intermediate temperatures ($T = 3.6 - 2.5$ K), the deviation from linearity of the $\ln(\tau)$ vs. $1/T$ plot suggests an increased contribution of spin relaxation by other mechanisms such as spin-lattice mediated Raman and/or temperature independent quantum tunneling processes. Notably, the relaxation times within the lowest temperature regime ($T = 2.5 - 1.8$ K) are nearly temperature independent and indicate quantum tunneling magnetization is likely the dominate spin relaxation mechanism at these temperatures.

The Arrhenius plot was fit using Eq. 2 which includes the spin relaxation through Orbach, Raman, and quantum tunneling processes:

$$\tau^{-1} = \tau_{QTM}^{-1} + CT^n + \tau_0^{-1} \exp\left(\frac{-U}{k_b T}\right) \quad (2)$$

This fitting procedure resulted in values for the Arrhenius parameters of $\tau_{QTM}^{-1} = 514(4)$ s⁻¹, $C = 0.014(3)$, $n = 8$, $\tau_0 = 2.9(5) \times 10^{-9}$ s, and $U = 30.7(6)$ cm⁻¹. Though modest, the value of the energy barrier to spin relaxation reversal of $U = 30.7(6)$ cm⁻¹ for **3** is notably higher than the energy bar-



rier for the previously reported Fe^{II}/Fe^{II}/Fe^I species, $[(^{tbs}L)Fe_3]^-$ ($U = 22.6(2)$ cm⁻¹). For $[(^{tbs}L)Fe_3]^-$, the origin of

Figure 8. (a) The temperature dependence of the molar out-of-phase component (χ_M'') of the alternating current (ac) magnetic susceptibility of **3** ($T = 1.8 - 4$ K; $H = 0$ T). (b) Arrhenius plot of **3**. The line represents the fit to the spin relaxation times (open circles) of **3** using Eq. 2.

the magnetic anisotropy is predicted to originate from strong direct and double exchange interactions which gives rise to an overall $S = 11/2$ high spin ground state for $[(^{tbs}L)Fe_3]^-$. For **3**, the maximum $\chi_M T$ value at any temperature falls well short from the expected value of 17.875 emu mol⁻¹ for a ferromagnetically coupled high-spin Fe^{II}/Fe^{II}/Fe^I core. Thus, it is likely that the mechanism of spin relaxation for **3** differs significantly from that of $[(^{tbs}L)Fe_3]^-$. This hypothesis is further supported by analysis of the in-phase component of the ac magnetic susceptibility of **3** which shows that the asymptotic decline of the χ_M' signal fails to approach 0 emu mol⁻¹ at any temperature measured (Fig. S43) suggesting that a significant portion of the magnetic moment of **3** does not undergo slow magnetic relaxation. One explanation for this observation is that only moderate to weak magnetic communication between the individual Fe sites of **3** is apparent and not all the Fe sites exhibit slow magnetic relaxation. To this end, further spectroscopic and computational studies will be needed to fully explain to the origin of the SMM behavior in **3**.

3. CONCLUSION

This study describes a new trianionic anilidophosphine ligand platform $[(^{tBu}L)]^{3-}$ that is used to stabilize the all-Fe^I trinuclear cluster $(^{tBu}L)Fe_3$ (**1**). Compound **1** features very close Fe-Fe distances between formally Fe^I ions which results in an overall $S = 9/2$ spin ground state being observed. The polynuclear nature of **1** facilitates multi-electron reduction of azides and cyanates to give the neutral all ferrous Fe-nitrido species $(^{tBu}L)Fe_3(\mu^3-N)$ (**2**). The oxidative atom transfer chemistry of **1** was expanded to the heavier pnictides and includes the two electron reduction of $[OCP]^-$ to give the unique mixed-valent Fe^{II}/Fe^{II}/Fe^I phosphido complex $[(^{tBu}L)Fe_3(\mu^3-P)(CO)]^-$. The formally low-valent **1** and **3** exhibit slow spin relaxation dynamics in the absence of an external magnetic field. While a magnetization energy barrier could not be obtained for **1**, a value of $U = 30.7(6)$ cm⁻¹ was obtained for **3**. The faster spin relaxation dynamics of **1** relative to **3** is not surprising given the smaller value of $D = -2.2$ cm⁻¹ for **1** (vs. $D = -8.848$ cm⁻¹ for **3**), which indicates small energy splitting between the magnetic sublevels. The foregoing study showcases a polynuclear Fe^I system that mediates intramolecular redox chemistry between multiple Fe^I ions and exemplifies the redox flexibility latent in the mid-valent oxidation products. While the chemistry reported herein draw strong inspiration from early polycarbonyl cluster chemistry to support pnictide cluster formation^{17,21,23-28}, templated clusters offer the distinct advantage of crafting the metal primary coordination sphere to facilitate cooperative substrate activation without compromising the cluster core integrity. Studies involving the reactivity of compound **1** with environmentally relevant small molecules such as N₂, CO, and CO₂ are currently underway.

ASSOCIATED CONTENT

Supporting Information

The Supporting Information is available free of charge on the ACS Publications website.

Materials and methods, synthetic procedures, multinuclear NMR spectra, IR spectra, ^{57}Fe Mössbauer spectra, magnetometry data, and XRD refine details/solid state structures. (PDF)

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Notes

The authors declare no competing financial interest.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

T.P.L. acknowledges the generous support of National Institutes of Health through a Ruth L. Kirschstein Postdoctoral Fellowship (1F32GM145088-01A1). T.A.B. acknowledges the generous support of the NIH (GM145752), and NSF (CHE-2247817). We acknowledge support from the Major Research Instrumentation (MRI) Program of the National Science Foundation under NSF award no. 2216066 for the X-ray facility.

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SYNOPSIS TOC

