

HAWKBILLS IN SPACE

By
John P. Seiler

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The Empire Cruiser “Dark Star” had dropped out of hyperspace to make repairs on its ring drive. Commanding the ship was Captain Helmut Kram. Captain Kram was on the bridge of the Dark Star. Lt. Kordson, the ships navigator, examined the navigation equipment. “Best I can tell, we are between the star system Alpha Centuri and Vesta.”

“Ok, now that we know where we are, I want you to scan the local space for a distance of 0.5 light years and let me know if there are any objects that may be a threat to us when we conduct the repairs to our ring drive.”

Lt. Kordson changed consol and examined the particulate scanners. The device, much like Old Earth Radar, scanned the local area using multiple frequencies searching for masses of any appreciable sizes. The computer then calculated the orbits of the masses ensuring that none would intersect with the Dark Star which could cause problems if there was a collision. Although the Dark Star could maneuver in local space, it could not enter hyper space and “jump” between star systems until the ring drive was repaired.

“Everything seems to be OK” Lt. Kordson replied “Wait a minute. There seems to be one mass about 500 kilometers away that is not in a normal orbit. Its orbit seems to be artificial. There does not seem to be any major power being radiated from it, however, there is some power being consumed, in the milliwats range.”

“Set an intersecting course towards the object. Let’s go investigate.”

The Dark Star approached the object slowly. Hyperwave signals were sent to attempt communications. On the visiscreen the shape of an ancient one man starship began to take form.

“It looks like a starship from late in the First Age of Old Earth. There is no sign of life, or power. It is just floating in free space” commented Captain Kram.

“The monitors indicate very little power being consumed. The power system for the ship must be atomic. The propulsion system is of very early starship design. It appears to be nuclear. It would take years and years for it to get anywhere. The scanner indicates low level life onboard. Note the ‘USA’ on the side, which stands for United States of America, a political subdivision from Old Earth.” Lt. Kordson pointed out “Look at the plate on the bow, in is marked ‘USS Donkeynut’.”

“Set up a boarding party. I want to see what is on that old hulk. Send a hyperwave message to the station in orbit around Vesta V that we are going to board. Following that, we should be able to repair the ring drive and continue our trip.”

The Dark Star came along side the derelict. A boarding party left the ship and approached the hulk and entered through the airlock. Once on board, they found a man inside a Stainless Chromalloy cylinder. The cylinder sat upon a box-like unit with many tubes and wires connecting the two. They could see a man inside the capsule through the small view window, It appeared that the man was in a state of suspended animation. Next to the cylinder were two large crates. One was marked “hawkbills” and the other “Tobacco”.

Captain Kram ordered the Donkeynut to be towed using a tractor beam. The boarding party returned to the Dark Star. Meanwhile, he dispatched a repair party to start repairing the Dark Star’s ring drive.

Several hours later the repairs were completed. The Dark Star, towing the Donkeynut, left local space, entered hyper space and proceeded to Vesta V. A message detailing the finding of the derelict ship was sent to the space station in orbit around Vesta V.

When Captain Kram’s message was received, Commander McClelland, the space station’s chief officer, dispatched a message to Castle Pesaro notifying them of the finding of the derelict. He also contacted the Empire Medical Service with a request for them to send a physician. He requested one that had experience in waking people from suspended animation be dispatched to his station. Commander McClelland puffed nervously on his Cavicchi Poker smoking a neer-latakia blend waiting for a response to his report and his request.

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Varten von Eckman, Emperor Leopaldo’s security chief and weapons master, was sitting in his quarters at Castle Pesaro smoking his Jim Cooke straight sandblasted black billiard pipe when his communicator beeped. He answered. His communications officer told him about the message from Vesta V. He asked the communications officer to read the message. He told the communication officer to e-fax a copy to him and the Emperor. He rang the Emperor and told his secretary, Ms. Moneynickle, that the e-fax was on its way and that he would need a short meeting with Leopaldo. Ms. Moneynickle said that he would be free in approximately ten minutes and that he should come to the Emperor’s day office.

Varten arrived right on time, pipe in hand. The ever lovely and efficient Ms. Moneynickle informed Leopaldo that he had arrived, and then admitted him into the day office.

“Hi Varten” Leo greeted his security chief. “Quite an interesting message we have received from our friend Jim McClelland on Vesta V.”

“Yes, it seems that he and the cruiser Dark Star have hooked on to something. Something to my mind that is pipe-related. There has to be one heck of a story in this one.” Varten replied.

“Yes there does seem to be the promise of quite a tale . An unidentified man, in a state of suspended animation, on an Old Earth primitive starship dated to late in the First Age of Man is found floating among the stars. Also on board the ship are two crates, one stamped ‘hawkbills’, the other ‘tobaccos’. I hope you have told Jim that we are pleased that he is looking out for us and that he should impound the contents of the ship.”

“Yes I have already sent the message to Commander McClelland. I haven’t seen Jim McClelland since the meeting we attended of the Hayden Pipe Club several years ago when he was here on leave. At that time, Jim was looking forward to his new assignment on Vesta V. He was also pleased at obtaining his promotion and that Cavicchi poker pipe you gave him from that cache of Old Earth Pipes. Vesta V is an airless world chock full of ores and minerals. It is important to the economy of the sector. The space station is rather large, modern, with the latest technology. All of the mining on Vesta V is directed from the space station. We keep Empire forces attached to the space station. It is also a major docking center in that sector for the space naval forces.” Varten related.

As you well know, a hawkbill is a specific shape of a pipe. A donkeynut is a subset of the hawkbill shape. Specifically it is a Castello Shape #84. All donkeynuts are hawkbills, but not all hawkbills are donkeynuts. As an Old Earth pipe collector once said “That pipe looks like a donkey’s knut.” Hence the reference to the ship’s name ‘donkeynut’ and the crate stamped ‘hawkbills’.” Leo explained.

“Yes, I know, and I am also aware of the famous treaties on donkeynuts written by McCain and Davis, two eminent collectors of the Castello #84 shape from Old Earth.” Varten responded.

“Who are you going to send to Vesta V to take charge of the situation?” Leo enquired.

“I am sending Nick Reardon to take overall charge and Dr. Sohei Witz, an eminent physician and surgeon in the Empire Medical Service, to take charge of the medical aspect. Dr. Witz has a pretty good record performing these suspended animation revivals. He was the doctor that brought back that Old Earth tyrant, Adolph Hitler from suspended animation. He was in worse shape than the fellow on this ship. Hitler thought he was going to set up a Fourth Reich here, but in reality he was just an old foggy out of place, out of time. Too bad he had forgotten that his one tooth still contained cyanide when he ate the corn on the cob.”

“I have full confidence in both of your selections. Yes, too bad about that Hitler fellow. He was such a bad boy back on Old Earth in the First Age. I am sure they would have

chuckled at his end if they only knew. Instruct Nick to keep us fully informed of the activities on Vesta V.”

“I will.” Varten replied “By the way, this new Jim Cooke pipe you ordered me to take is quite a good smoker. The taste of these near-Virginia tobaccos is most excellent.”

The conversation between the two friends degenerated to pipe and tobacco related matters.

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Three men met in a plush wood grained meeting room on the space station orbiting Vesta V. Commander McClelland was a large man with a towering presence and a full red beard. He welcomed Nick Reardon and Dr. Witz to the station.

“Please sit down and make yourselves comfortable. There is a tin of tobacco on the table for your enjoyment. It is from Old Earth and is called “Virginia Legends.” It is an extremely rare find, one of a limited number tinned for the Conclave of Richmond Pipe Smokers, otherwise known as ‘CORPS’. I believe it was their 20th Anniversary Blend from the year 2004, First Age. Emperor Leopaldo presented it to me when last I visited him at Castle Pesaro several years ago before I received this assignment.” Commander McClelland said to his visitors as he opened the tin and started to fill his Cavicchi Poker.

“Thanks” Nick Reardon said “I most certainly will try this one. This is a blend I have never had the good fortune to smoke.” He began filling his Dunhill San Antonio RTDA 2000 shell briar pipe.

“I also thank you, Commander” Responded the tall, thin Dr. Witz as he began to fill an old pipe.

Commander McClelland continued “I don’t know if you have any knowledge of CORPS. Its history is quite interesting. CORPS was a club centered in the Richmond, Virginia area of the political subdivision known as the United States in North America on Old Earth. It was one of the first clubs in the United States that started an annual pipe show. Each year the show had a different theme. The tobacco you are sampling was designed by G.L Pease, a noted Old Earth Tobacconist, and was tinned by Cornell & Diehl, Inc., a famous Old Earth Tobacco Manufacturer.”

“Excellent” both men said simultaneously as rings of smoke engulfed them.

“Now, let’s get down to matters at hand.” Commander McClelland said “The two crates are over in the corner, and we can open them in a while. The man in suspended animation is still in the capsule at the Station’s medical facilities. How do you think we should proceed?”

Nick responded “Dr. Witz, tell us about the process for reviving the gentleman in suspended animation. What are the risks? What are the chances for success?”

“Although difficult, my experience has been that the inhabitant can be brought back to life from the state of suspended animation with his memory intact and full use of his faculties. The older the case or the more time in suspended animation, the more difficult and the lower the chance of success. Since the suspended animation process from Old Earth was so antiquated and primitive, I would estimate a 10% chance of success. Don’t forget that this gentleman has been in suspended animation for over 50,000 years. However, all of the indications are favorable. It will be difficult, and I don’t want to make any promises, but I do think it can be accomplished.” Dr. Witz explained.

“How long will the process take?” Nick asked.

“It should take between one and two days, once we start.” Dr Witz replied.

“I think we should proceed with the revival. Send a message to the medical facility to start the necessary preparations” Nick said “But first, let’s go examine these crates”

They opened the crate stamped ‘hawkbills’ and found a large display case containing approximately 100 hawkbill pipes.

“Look at these wonderful pipes” Nick said “Look, they are all hawkbills and the manufacturers and carvers; Castello, Ser Jacopo, Mickles, Weiner, Ascorti, Bonaquisti, Eels, Radici, Parks, Learned, Kiess, etc. There must be at least one from every manufacturer or carver from Old Earth here in this collection.”

“I am no pipe collector, but this is fantastic” commented Commander McClelland.

“Just think of the historical value of this crate” said Dr. Witz.

They also found an unaddressed sealed envelope enclosed with the pipes.

“I think we should save this for the patient” commented Commander McClelland to which they agreed.

“I wonder what is in the other crate? Let’s open it.” said Nick.

They opened the other crate and found shrink wrapped tubes of tobacco. Each sealed tube contained 10 individual tins of tobacco. There were tubes of tobaccos with names like ‘Early Morning Pipe’, ‘Best Brown’, ‘Deep Hollow’, ‘Old Dog’, ‘Frog Morton’, and many, many more. In all there was close to 400 tins of tobacco.

“Phenomenal!” Nick stated “I have seen some Old Earth tobacco in my time, but never such a variety, and in such quantities in one place!”

They all agreed that this was a most unique find. "I will send a report to Castle Pesaro on the contents of the crates and will notify them that we will soon start the revival process." Commander McClelland said "I will also have an inventory of the contents of the crates conducted and place them under armed guard."

The Commander instructed his staff to assemble an inventory which was taken in their presence. The three of them signed the paperwork certifying to the accuracy of the inventory. They then proceeded to the medical facilities on the space station.

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Commander McClelland, Nick Reardon, and Dr Witz walked into the anteroom of the special medical suite. They were in a sterile, chromalloy room. The far wall contained a window that looked down into a small surgical room. In the center of the room was the capsule. The capsule sat upon a box-like platform. Tubes were interconnected between the capsule and the platform. A man was visible through the single window pane in the capsule. The man in the capsule was very still as if he were sleeping. A bed was placed on one side of the capsule. On it's right side was a table with monitoring equipment sitting on the tabletop.

Two nurse/technicians entered the room. They nodded to Dr. Witz and the observers.

"First, the capsule will be opened by the technicians. The lung connection will be moved from the capsule control box to the facility control. This will be followed by the blood circuit and finally the nervous system control. Once body control is moved from the capsule to the facility controls, the body will be removed from the capsule to the table. Sensors will be connected to the body to monitor all functions. Supersaturated oxygen will be supplied via the mask attached to his head. Very slowly, a fresh supply of blood will start flowing into his body to replace the suspended animation fluid. A supersucker will remove the suspended animation fluid in the lung and the breathing machine will slowly take over. Once he is on machine breathing and blood circulation, his heart will be started using electrical pulsation technology. He will remain connected to these machines until everything stabilizes. At the end of that time, we will inject a stimulant to start the heart/breathing function so that his body takes control. All the while, we will be using a cortico-stimulator to help the lower part of the brain take control over the automatic body functioning. This will activate the renal functions and other bodily functions and we will check for their proper operation. This should take approximately another four hours. At the end of this period, his body should be functioning; however he will still lack consciousness." Dr. Witz informed McClelland and Reardon.

He continued "Tomorrow we will use a device that is derived from the mind probe to actuate the cells in the higher levels of the brain to bring back the voluntary functioning including memory. That procedure will take about three hours. At the end of that time period, a judgment will be made to proceed to the final stage, where a high dose of a drug combination will be given to him to jolt his system back to life. This is the most critical stage. If all goes well, he will come back with full recollection of his memories and will

be fully functional. If things do not go well, he could be in a vegetative state until he dies.”

“Dr Witz, please indicate to the staff to proceed”, Nick informed the doctor.

Dr Witz instructed the staff to proceed and they started the process. At the end of two hours, the patient was off the capsule control and connected to the facility control. Several hours later he was successfully functioning on the breathing and heart circulation machines. His heart was successfully started and functioning. At this juncture Nick and Commander McClelland left for the night.

They returned to the medical facility early the next morning. Dr Witz reported that all had been going well. There were some minor setbacks encountered with which they had to deal in terms of some failures of the circulatory system, and some minor organ damage. However, they had taken appropriate action and all appeared to be going well.

They looked down on a man on the table that was obviously breathing, but appeared to be sleeping.

“The brain probe procedure went well. According to our metrics, all of his systems are functioning within allowable limits.” Dr Witz continued.

“You will note that the patient has been secured to the table. It is not uncommon that upon revival the patient may be a little unstable waking up in an unfamiliar environment.” Dr Witz informed the observers “We will soon be giving him his stimulant drug cocktail injection. I want you to try something for me. Please light up your pipes. I believe that the patient was a pipe smoker and collector. We will open the connecting window. As you know, the sense of smell is a very powerful. I think that if he sees that we are like him, smoking pipes, and he smells the aroma, then it will make his awakening a little less traumatic.”

They lit their pipes and started smoking. The connection window was lowered and the pipe smoke entered the patient’s room.

Dr Witz instructed the nurse/technicians to continue with the cocktail drug injection. They started the pump which would introduce the drug into the patient’s circulatory system.

At first, nothing happened. Very faintly they noticed some movement of the eyelids muscles and the fingers. The motions became stronger. Suddenly, the body convulsed and the eyes fully opened. A strange noise came from the patient’s throat. He blinked and slowly looked around and stared up at the three men.

From his mouth, in a weak but steady voice they heard him say “Hi, I’m Ike McCane and that tobacco smells great! By the way, where in seven hells am I?”

The three men had retired to the meeting room and had their pipes alight with the Commander's Virginia Legends.

"Dr. Witz, I would like to congratulate you upon another successful revival." Nick said "I am sure the Emperor will be pleased."

"I too offer my congratulations." Commander McClelland added.

"Thank you gentlemen, your congratulations are appreciated. We have Mr. McCane lightly sedated for the night. He will waken tomorrow and have many questions."

"I think that I can answer some of them" Nick replied "Perhaps we can have breakfast with him and help him on his way. It is probably quite traumatic waking up in a new world, in a new time."

"I think that is doable" Dr Witz replied "I think that after breakfast you should join him in a pipe. It may tend to ground him, if you get my meaning. It usually helps if he can connect to something familiar, in his case the feel and smell of a pipe."

"Well, he does have plenty of pipes. I seem to remember one that seemed to be well smoked. It was an old sea rock Castello donkeynut. Can you get me that pipe, Commander? I think I shall also open one of his tins of Early Morning Pipe." Nick responded.

"Sure I can Nick. You are in charge of this operation. Do you wish for us to be present?" the Commander asked.

"No, I think I will meet with him alone. However, you two should be observing on a visiscreen in the next room. Doctor, I assume you and your staff will be monitoring his bodily functions in a non-invasive manner and can take prompt action if it is needed. It will be interesting to see how a man copes 50,000 years in his future."

"Yes" Dr. Witz replied "We will be monitoring both the bodily function and a psychologist will be examining his mental state at all times. If action is warranted, we will be ready and able."

"Gentlemen, what do you think of the Virginia Legends tobacco? I taste a hint of latakia in an otherwise good Virginia blend." the Commander stated.

"I like it" Nick said "Almost as good as some of Emperor Leopaldo's McClelland 5100 from Old Earth."

"I also like it" Dr. Witz replied "I am not such a great connoisseur of pipes and tobacco as you guys, but I do know what I like, and I like this tobacco."

The conversation continued well into the night on pipes and tobacco while they enjoyed the Commander's liquor selection.

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He slowly awoke. It was very quiet. It was dark. Through his closed eyes he could detect a slight brightness outside his eyes. He did not know if it were real or a dream. He recalled having a lot of dreams lately, nothing he could remember, just a lot of dreams. His ears detected the sound of breathing. Was it his or was it someone else? He did not know. He heard the puffing of a pipe. Now that was something to which he could relate. He was not smoking, so it had to be someone else. Did he want to open his eyes? He did not know. But why not? Slowly he opened his eyes.

As he slowly opened his eyes, he saw a tremendous brightness. He quickly re-closed them.

"Ah, I see you have awakened. It will go much easier if you open your eyes a little at a time, very, very slowly." the voice told him.

He could not recognize the heavy accent of the voice. It was not American he thought. He infinitely slowly opened his eyes. His eyes very slowly became use to the low level light that appeared very bright to him. As he opened his eyes he noticed a man sitting opposite of him in an unusual chair. He was in a very unusual room. The man was sitting and smoking a pipe. "If I did not know any better, I would say you are smoking a Dunhill shell briar pipe, however, I cannot identify the tobacco you are smoking."

"You are correct on the pipe, Mr. McCane. I would expect the tobacco to be new to you. My name is Nick Reardon, please call me Nick."

"Nice to meet you Nick, at least I hope it will be nice." Ike replied.

"Oh, I am sure it will be, after all, I am quite a nice fellow. Let me tell you that you are in a hospital. You have had a unique experience. How do you feel? Would you like some breakfast?"

"I feel, ah, I feel remarkably fit. Yes, I would like some breakfast, but more importantly, I could go for a pipe."

"I think we can manage both" Nick replied "What do you remember and what is the date?"

"I remember last being with an old friend, Jake Robinson and my wife, June. We were having drinks at Jake's estate. It is the fourth of July, 2008. After that, I recall nothing, nothing until today." he said.

“Well let me tell you what I can, however some of it may be a shock to you. We found you in a state of suspended animation inside a space ship. Our good Doctor Witz, who you will soon meet, has brought you from the land of nothingness back to the land of the living. Do you understand this?” Nick asked.

“Yes, I think I do. If I understand you, I have been unconscious for a long period of time. I guess a couple of years.”

“Try 50,000 years.”

“50,000 years, surely you are kidding” Ike asserted.

“No, I am not joking. It seems that you and your pipes and tobacco have been in interstellar space for that amount of time. You are in a medical facility on a space station orbiting the planet Vesta V.”

“I wonder how I have gotten into this predicament.” He said “I guess that everyone I know is long gone. Ashes as it were.”

“Yes, that would be a good assumption. You could say that you have been given a second chance on life. Someone was good to you in that manner of speaking. It is a chance you should make every effort to make the best of. I see your breakfast has arrived. We have tried to make it appealing to someone from your time period. You are not the first person to have been revived, nor the last. May I join you for breakfast?” Nick asked.

“Sure. Grapefruit, ham, eggs, and hash browns with coffee is always a good breakfast. Please do join me.”

They ate in silence. There were many thoughts going through Ike’s head. Finally when they were done, Nick said “Ike, we are going to make this as easy for you as we can. Some of the information you are going to receive over the next few days will be difficult for you to understand. Dr. Witz and I will answer any questions you may have as truthfully as we know it. If we don’t have an answer we will tell you so. Before we start I have three things for you. Do you recognize this?” Nick reached into his pocket and took out a pipe and a tin of tobacco and gave it to Ike.

“It is my favorite Castello donkeynut and a tin of Dunhill Early Morning Pipe. Thank you. Will you join me in a pipe?”

“Sure Ike. I would love to.” Nick took out his pipe.

“Oh, he exclaimed, the Dunhill shell briar. That is a very nice pipe you have.”

Ike popped the lid on the tin and heard the swish of air. “I see the seal in the tin is intact. Here fill up you pipe.” Ike and Nick filled their pipes. Nick lit his and passed the wooden matches to Ike who lit his and began to puff on his pipe.

“Ike, we found this letter in the crate with your pipes. I do not know the contents, but I will say that whatever is in the letter happened a long time ago, so take the contents to heart with that in mind” He gave Ike the letter. Ike opened the letter and began reading aloud.

Dear Ike,

Let me begin by saying that if you are reading this letter then my plan has worked. I am long gone and you are finding yourself in a new world full of new wonders. You were always the adventurous one and now you are embarking on a new adventure.

I think that you know in your heart that you placed your pipes, especially your prized hawkbill collection ahead of me. I must admit that I was very jealous of your priorities and did not enjoy second place. I have found another person to take your place as my lover. I tried to find a fair solution to the dilemma. Actually it was quite simple. I have gone off and began a new life. You have simply disappeared and are presumed to have been lost at sea. I have gone off with Jake Robinson. But then again, if things have worked out as planned, Jake and I have died a long time ago.

Jake has used his immense influence and riches to have you placed in a state of suspended animation, and launched into space. You will travel the roads of space until eventually found, and I sincerely hope brought back to life. Not knowing how things will go in the future, I have packed your prize collection of hawkbill pipes and tobaccos with you as a goodwill gesture.

I could have been done with you in a more direct fashion, but at one time I did love you. Therefore I chose this course, and I hope you will find it in your heart to forgive me for doing this to you.

Good luck to you in the future from one who loved you in the past.

*Yours,
June*

He put the letter down, relit his pipe and pondered the letter.

“She was a good woman at heart, Nick. I guess that at times I, and my pipe collecting activities did get under her skin. In the end, I guess she did do me a favor by allowing me to live.” Ike said.

“Yes she did, Ike. Now it is up to you to make the most of it.

The door opened and a thin man walked in dressed in a long white labcoat also smoking a pipe.

“Ike, this is the man who revived you, Dr. Witz.”

“Hello, Dr. Witz.. Thanks for the great job bringing me back. I guess I am in your care for a while. What is in store for me in the near future?” He asked.

“Well Ike, we plan to monitor you for a few days to be sure that all has been successful and that there are no medical complications. You will need some physical therapy. You will be tired after this morning activities. When you rest, we will use some new sleep-learning techniques to bring you up-to-date regarding the history and the environment in which you now find yourself. As Nick told you, we will try to answer any questions you may have.”

“I just have one question. Does everyone in this age smoke pipes?” Ike asked incredulously.

Nick chuckled “No, not everyone. You will find that there is a totally different view on things like smoking in this time period. There are nonsmokers, pipe smokers, cigarette smokers, and cigar smokers. My good friend Leo is a noted pipe collector and smoker. There are many others like him. One big difference, between your time period and this time period, is that the positive aspects of pipes smoking have been re-learned by humanity. Stress relief has been found to be a very important life factor. One of the big factors about pipes and tobacco is the ability to reduce stress and medical advances have reduced some of the wrongly thought disadvantages of smoking to insignificance. Many of us thoroughly enjoy the finer aspects of pipe collecting and pipe smoking.”

“I concur with Nick’s comments. As you can see, we still have pipe smoking doctors that make house calls. You have a lot to learn, so let us begin. I hope that we do not give you too much of a headache with all the information we will be pumping into you!” Dr. Witz exclaimed.

“Nick, I think that you have given Ike a lot to think about. As his doctor, I think that it is time for him to reflect on all that has happened and it is time for his re-education to begin.” Dr. Witz observed.

“Ike, I wish you well and quite agree that it is time for you to start the educational process. By the way, your crate of pipes and crate of tobacco are here for you. I enjoyed the sample of the Early Morning Pipe tobacco and am sure we will have a chance to discuss things over pipes again.”

“Thanks Nick and thank you Doctor Witz for all your efforts. I agree it is time for me to start learning. I hope to see you soon.”

It was late in the evening at Castle Pesaro. Leo and Varten had been enjoying bowls of Ashton 'Old Dog'; Leo in his Castello 4k shape #65 full bent with an old sea rock finish, Varten in his trusty Jim Cooke pipe. They had been discussing the late dispatches from all over the empire when the report came in from Nick Reardon on Vesta V. Nick had reported the successful revival of Ike McCane. His report was very detailed and complete.

"I am sure you realize Varten that Nick Reardon is one of our best agents. His attention to detail is phenomenal. He was a good choice for this mission." Leo said between puffs.

"Yes, he does a very good job. He also gets along well with people. You do well to have your complete confidence in him. Did you read the inventory in pipes and tobacco that Ike McCane brought on the Donkeynut?" Leo asked Varten.

"Yes, I most certainly did go over it, Leo. The inventory contained a little over 100 pipes and 400 tins of Old Earth tobacco. Most of the pipes were hawkbills and donkeynuts, however, there were a few additional pipes from United States pipe carvers. Little does he realize how wealthy he is? I suppose you will let Nick inform him of his new found wealth."

"I doubt if he realizes it. I am going to make an offer for one of his von Erck pipes and a couple of tins of tobacco which will hold him financially for a while. I think I will talk to my friend, Dean Korson, at PittPenn University. I am going to get Ike an appointment to the arts faculty. I am also going to see about an appointment here at the Castle."

"You know Leo; we should take advantage of this intact collection before it gets broken up. What would you say to a pipe exhibition here at the castle? We could invite Ike McCane to exhibit his 20th Century First Age Old Earth pipe collection in the Great Hall. It would give him the chance to meet some of the foremost collectors in this sector. We could invite some of the top collectors and have it co-sponsored by the Empire Pipe Collectors Magazine. Chuck Stynon could do a feature article on Ike's story and collection to go along with the exhibition."

"I like the idea, Varten. I have some old tobacco in a bonded warehouse. It is a near-Virginia. We could have 300 tins made up as a special tinning for the exhibition of hawkbills. Why don't we call it 'Old Donkeynut'?"

"That is a really great idea, Leo. I think we could get Gorag Paese to blend the tobacco and the Mortonfrog Tobacco Company to tin the tobacco. Jesper Reed, the noted artist, can make up the label with the name of the tobacco, and include a little about Ike and the exhibition on the back of the tin. Who knows, maybe 50,000 years from now these tins could be collectors' items." Varten exclaimed.

“Yes, that would be a bit funny. A tobacco we produce today being worth good money years from now. Just think how much money you could make if you developed a time machine, tinned tobacco today and transported it to the future and sold it. I wonder if it would be validly considered as an antique in the future.”

“Ok, I will send a hyperwave message to Nick outlining our plans. He can figure a way to present the idea to Ike McCane and get his cooperation. I hope that he may find the appointment at PittPenn University to his liking.”

“You know Varten, there are ways to make him an offer he can’t possibly refuse. You of all people should know that I have my ways and means.” Leo said with a wink.

“That I do. I am sure you will be able to convince him.” He said with a chuckle.

They finished their pipes and called it a night.

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Dr. Witz and Nick Reardon entered Ike’s room early in the morning just as breakfast was being cleared away. “Would you gentlemen like to join me in a pipe and some coffee?” Ike asked.

“Sure we would.” Nick replied. They sat down at the table, poured the coffee, and began to fill their pipes with the proffered Dunhill Early Morning Pipe.

“After yesterday’s physical therapy, the complete examination, and the sleep-learning treatment, I already feel like my brain is overfull. By the way Nick, you were a little untruthful yesterday.”

“What do you mean Ike?” Nick asked in an obviously offended tone.

“Well you forgot one little detail. You failed to mention that your noted pipe collecting friend, Leo, was the EMPEROR of the known universe!” Ike exclaimed.

“Ha, ha, ha Ike. Yes he is the Emperor, and if I may say, my friend and I hope he will be yours also. I guess you now understand the value of your pipes since they are from Old Earth. I also guess you now realize that there is no true tobacco in this time period since Old Earth was destroyed at the end of the First Age of Man, long ago. All we have is neer-tobacco which is a naturally grown product very similar to Old Earth tobacco and pseudo-tobacco which is entirely synthetic. Although you could probably tell no difference, to the true pipe collector genuine Old Earth tobacco is very valuable.” Nick explained.

“Yes, I now understand all that. I, we are smoking some very expensive pipes and the tobacco we are smoking is extremely valuable in and of itself.”

“Yes” Nick replied “I am no expert and Leo could give you a better estimate, but I would think your pipe, the Old Earth Castello #84 donkeynut, is worth several thousand solaris and the tobacco is equally valuable. In today’s economy, a person with a yearly income of 100 solaris would be considered well off.”

“So, with all my pipes and tobacco I am, ah, wealthy, Nick?”

“Yes, Ike, you are very wealthy. Even selling them off very slowly, I would think you would have more than enough funds. However, I don’t think you will have to worry about a job. Emperor Leopaldo has authorized me to offer you a position. He has secured a position for you as a professor at PittPenn University on the faculty in the Arts Department. You could teach students all you know about First Age history and also about pipe collecting and pipe smoking. You don’t have to answer me today on this proposition; however, you will need to have an answer when you meet the Emperor.”

“Meet the Emperor? Me? When?” Ike asked incredulously.

“Well, that gets me to the second part of the proposition to which I will need an answer. Dr. Witz, what is the status of Ike’s health and when can he travel?” Nick asked.

Dr Witz replied between puffs of his pipe “Ike is in excellent shape. I would say another week here with the physical therapy and he will be able to travel.”

“That is about what I thought.” Nick said “Ike, part 2 is that you have been invited, maybe I should say by royal command, to a pipe show being held at Castle Pesaro, the Emperor’s home. The Emperor would like to see your fantastic collection of hawkbills and Old Earth tobacco. He would also enjoy showing you his collection. You will also have to make a presentation regarding collecting hawkbill pipes. Additionally, he will invite some of the premier pipe collectors in the universe and anyone else with interests in pipes and tobacco in the planet Hayden sector. There will also be media coverage of the event. Let me say, on my own, that this is quite an honor. I do not know of any pipe showing ever held at the Emperor’s home.”

Ike looked dazed “Of course I accept. How could I refuse, both the university appointment and the showing of my pipes. Please communicate my acceptance to the Emperor. I have to show some sort of appreciation and thanks for all that you have done for me. I realize that you could have just stolen my pipes and tobacco, and put me out of my misery. Instead you brought me back to life, as a wealthy person letting me keep my treasures. Please thank him for me also. Nick, Dr. Witz, I hope the two of you will honor me by attending the pipe showing.” Ike replied.

“I will attend, if my duties and Emperor permit.” Dr. Witz said.

“I also will try to get an invitation.” Nick replied “I will pass on your acceptance and gratitude to Emperor Leopaldo in my next report. As you no doubt have concluded, I am employed by Emperor Leopaldo.”

“Yes I did deduce the connection Nick. But that is OK, you all have treated me wonderfully.”

“You will find, Ike, that the Emperor and most of his associates are honorable men and women. The Emperor treasures honesty and character in people. He tends to bring out the noblest aspects of their character. We all feel a great sense of loyalty to Emperor Leopaldo and to his causes. If I may say, he also rewards faithful and efficient service. I think you will enjoy meeting both the Emperor and my boss, Varten von Eckman”

“What will I do? How will I act? You will all have to help me beyond just education” Ike asked.

“That we shall” Nick responded “I will tell the Emperor to schedule your visit to Castle Pesaro for two months from today. That will give the castle staff time to make preparations for the showing. You will arrive at the castle a few days earlier to oversee the event and to meet the Emperor. Prior to that, we will be providing you all the education you will need, both through the sleep-learning process and up close and personal. I think I will arrange a tour of PittPenn University for you prior to our traveling to Castle Pesaro.”

“And I, Ike, will tag along to monitor your health, although I am sure that there will be no complications and assist you in your acclimatization to this time period.” Dr. Witz said.

There was a knock on the door, and Commander Jim McClelland introduced himself to Ike.

“I guess I have to confess, Ike, that I am also a pipe smoker, and have been a party to all of these plans. I also am going to ask for an invite to this pipe affair. It is time for a little R&R for me and I have not seen my friend Emperor Leopaldo for several years. Oh, I have brought you something.”

He reached into a pocket and brought out a package which was given to Ike. “Ike, this is about a pound of some wexel-Virginia neer-tobacco. At the prices of Old Earth tobacco, you can’t be smoking it all the time. It is about time you try some of our local supply.” He said with a wink.

“Thanks, Commander I will give it a try over the next few weeks. It is hard to imagine smoking bowls of Old Earth tobacco when it is so valuable!” Ike replied.

“When I send my next report, I will put in a request that we all attend Castle Pesaro’s pipe event of the year.” Nick said “I am sure that the Emperor will accept my recommendation with respect to attending Ike’s debut to the pipe collecting fraternity.”

They all sat around for the next hour smoking pipes and educating Ike in a gentler manner than the sleep-learning process so that his headache would subside.

It was early in the morning of the day before the Castle Pesaro Pipe Showing. The hyper-drive ship containing Nick Reardon, Dr. Sohei Witz, Jim McClelland and Ike McCane had landed at the Samlis space port on planet Hayden an hour earlier. It would take them approximately two hours to clear customs, retrieve their baggage, and travel the 50 miles to Castle Pesaro. Varten von Eckman had been notified of their arrival. He had just joined Emperor Leopaldo in the sunroom for their customary breakfast.

“What’s happening in the Empire today, Varten?” Leo asked.

“All is quiet, sire.” He replied “Our visitors have landed and should be joining us after breakfast.”

“I am looking forward to meeting Ike McCane. From Nick’s reports, he appears to be quite a character. He seems to be adapting well to his new environment. Did our mystery guest arrive?” Leo asked.

“Yes, she is here. She got in late last night. She is probably still asleep. All that training and the trip here has tired her out.” Varten replied.

“Ok, we won’t mention her to Nick when we meet with them. Here have some breakfast and coffee.” Leo commanded.

They ate their breakfast and discussed the small matters that make up running a huge empire. The breakfast dishes were cleared. Urns of coffee were set out. A table containing Danishes was set up.

“I am anticipating that our guests will be a little hungry when they arrive. I have arranged for these sitting room chairs so that they will be comfortable.” Varten said.

“You always know how to create the setting and mood for meetings” Varten, “What tobacco have you chosen for us to sample from my stock?”

“I have chosen a tin of Esoterica Sweet Cavendish. It is a nice little tobacco from Old Earth, sort of as a dessert. I think everyone will enjoy it.” Varten replied “We will have to see how Ike rates it.”

The manservants entered and announced that the visitors had just reached the castle and were on their way to join them. Leo and Varten moved to the sitting chairs with their coffee.

The door opened and Nick Reardon, Jim McClelland, Dr. Witz, and Ike McCane entered the sunroom. Leo and Varten stood up to greet their guests.

“Emperor Leopaldo”, Nick said as he bowed.

“Commander!” Jim McClelland said as he stood at attention and saluted.

“My Emperor!” Dr Witz said as he bowed.

“Emperor Leopalso” Ike McCane said as he held out his hand to shake hands.

Leo grasped his hand and shook it. “I have heard many interesting things about you. Welcome to our and your new world. I would like you to meet my good friend Varten von Eckman. Varten is my security chief, weapons master, and fellow pipe smoker. I would like to dispense with formalities, please address me as Leo during our chat. Save the Emperor stuff for formal situations and public. Please have some coffee or the snacks setout over on the table. Then, come over and take a seat.”

They went over to the table, poured some coffee, ate a little, and joined Varten and Leo in the sitting area.

“Jim, Sohei, I just wanted to express my thanks for a job well-done. I think Ike would agree with me. Nick, likewise, you performed in your customary exemplary fashion. Ike, I am glad that you accepted my invitation to display your pipes here at Castle Pesaro. My staff has made all the arrangements. We expect several hundred people to come and meet you, view your collection, and listen to your lecture. My good friend Dean Samuel Korson at PittPenn University informed me that you have accepted the offer for an appointment to the faculty. He also said that the lecture you presented on “Pipe Collecting in the 20th Century on Old Earth” was one of the most well attended and favorably commented guest lectures that has been given. Oh, before I forget, Varten has provided us with a tin of Esoterica Sweet Cavendish. Please open it and pass it around. Gentlemen, you may smoke.” He said as he took out his Castello GG #84 hawkbill.”

“Hmm”Ike said “That looks like one hawkbill that got away from me! Yes, Leo, I want to thank you and all these gentlemen for helping me acclimatize to this time period and my new life. I want to thank you again for finding me, providing for my revival, and permitting me to keep my pipes and tobacco. I also want to thank you for securing my new position. I hope I can live up to all of your expectations.”

“I do not doubt that you will” Leo replied “Oh, one additional item. Varten, you brought the document with you? Please give it to Mr. McCane so he can read it to us all.”

Varten removed a large envelop from his valise and gave it to Ike. Ike began to read:

To whom this entire message comes, greetings.

Let it be known that I, Emperor Leopaldo XVI do hereby appoint Ike McCane to be the official curator of my Pipe and Tobacco Collection. He is charged by me to:

- 1. Annually come to Castle Pesaro to inventory the collection;*
- 2. Annually perform any conservatory activities to the pipes and tobacco in my collection;*
- 3. To act as my agent on assignment to obtain additional antique pipes and tobaccos; and*
- 4. To advise the library on the arrangement and obtaining literature on the topics of pipes and tobacco.*

For these tasks, he is to have access to the castle and to my person. Funding for acquisitions are to be made through normal channels, and he is granted an annual salary of two-hundred solaris from the household accounts.

This appointment is signed under my signature and sealed.

“What does this all mean, in simple language please” Ike asked.

“It means” Varten replied “that you are now bound to the Emperor. You are his man in the areas of pipes and tobacco. You can act as his agent, and you have some assigned tasks here at the castle.”

“It is a singular honor” Nick replied.

“It means that Leo has hired a new pipe cleaner” Jim McClelland rejoined. “You get it, a new pipe cleaner....”

They all laughed.

“Well let me just warn you sir. I am a better pipe smoker than pipe cleaner, but I guess I will be adequate to the task. I think that this Sweet Cavendish has indeed improved with age. It is much smoother than I remember.” Ike said.

They all agreed that the tobacco was very good.

“Varten, please tell the group what is in store for them two days hence.”

“I hope you find the arrangements satisfactory, Ike. First, Leo would like to show you his personal pipe and tobacco collection. With respect to the pipe show, we have set the display for the great ballroom. A quarter of the ballroom has been arranged with a podium and chairs. A quarter has been set aside for the display of your collection. Your collection will be placed into replicas of Old Earth display cases inside what can only be described as a mockup of an old tobacco shop, circa 1920. The display cases are all set with alarms due to the value of your pipes. The remaining half of the ballroom will be

arranged for approximately 150 tables which collectors have been given to display, trade, and sell pipes, just like an Old Earth pipe show.”

“The arrangements sound fantastic. I hope I am not putting you out.” He said.

“No, you are not” Leo exclaimed. “An event of this magnitude has not been held here in many years.”

“Ike, we anticipate a large crowd. Since it was announced, most of the rooms that are available in the small town at the end of the valley and in Samliss have all been taken. A number of prominent collectors have been invited including Martin Davis a collector of hawkbills; John Lowlar, a collector of Old Earth Castello full bents; Dave Woblar, a collector of Old Earth calabash pipes; and Chuck Stinyon, the editor of the Empire Pipe Collectors Magazine. In terms of pipe carvers, Mark Tinsk, Bryan Rathenberg, Lee Kerk, Larry Rauch, Sam Learning, and other notables have promised to bring some of their latest works. Sim Gorwaith will be here from the Gorwaith Tobacco Company, representatives from the Mortonfrog Tobacco Company and Gorag Paese, one of the leading tobacconists from this time period are attending. Ike, you will find that you are quite a celebrity. You will be meeting Chuck Stinyon later today who will be interviewing you, Jim McClelland and Dr. Witz regarding your revival and pipe collection. Please, during your interviews, do not mention Nick Reardon, for reasons that must be obvious to you all. Chuck is going to do a feature article on you, your collection, and the Castle Pesaro pipe showing for the next issue of the Empire Pipe Collectors Magazine.”

“Well, I have been back for two months now, and this all still amazes me. I guess I will be busy for a while, starting this afternoon.” Ike said

“Yes you will” Leo replied “I also have one more surprise for you, but that will have to wait until the pipe show. Don’t worry, you will find it most interesting.”

The continued their little get-together for another hour, relighting their pipes and discussing many different pipe-related topics.

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Later that evening, a small group met in the Emperor’s private study. Leo, Varten, and Nick Reardon sat down lighting up their pipes with a nice blend of near-Virginia Tobaccos. Leo was smoking a pre-transition Barling Fossil with a stacked billiard bowl, Varten had one of his favorite Cookes, and Nick was smoking his Dunhill shell briar. They were chatting about the events of the day.

“Did you see Chuck Stinyon after his interview with Ike? I don’t think he knew what hit him. I doubt if he has ever interviewed anyone quite like Ike. I about died when he told Chuck to smoke a real man’s pipe, not one of those Danish spleens.” Varten exclaimed.

“Yes, that was quite good” Nick rejoined “but he did not quite understand Ike when he said that the tobacco he smoked must have been gunk left over from an automobile oil change. Chuck knows what a 20th century automobile is, but I don’t think he realized that Ike was basically saying that his aromatic tobacco stunk.”

“Did you hear Ike’s response when Chuck asked him if Mike McCain, one of the authors of the hawkbill treatise, was related? He told him that Mike McCain was from the orthodox side of the family since he only collected donkeynuts, and that his side of the family had changed the spelling of the name since Ike’s side was the black sheep side of the family. He seemed to imply that the donkeynut collection was more specialized than the hawkbill collection.” Varten said.

“The best part”, Leo said “was when we took Chuck into the hall with Ike’s 100 hawkbills displayed. I thought Chuck’s eyes were going to fall out and he might trip over his tongue and the drool. He also commented that he had not seen so much Old Earth tobacco together in one place, at one time.”

“From the pictures we saw, I think he is going to assemble quite a nice article on Ike and his pipes. The interviews he conducted of Jim and Sohei were nice touches to Ike’s story.” Varten added “Ike, Dr. Witz and Chuck went to Hayden for dinner, drinks, and some smoking with Chuck’s friends. You want to bet they have headaches in the morning?”

“That they will” Leo said as there was a knock on the door. The door opened, and a beautiful young lady entered. “May I join you gents” she asked?

Leo turned to Nick and said “Surprise! Look who has come to Castle Pesaro and grace us with her presence. It is the almost newest graduate of the Empire Intelligence Service Academy, cadet Lu Jo!”

She pulled up a chair and joined the three men. She took out a small Dunhill group 2 pipe and began to fill it. “Are you surprised Nick? So am I, but you know how it goes. When the Emperor commands your presence, you obey, so here I am. I am just glad that I am able to attend the Castle Pesaro pipe show. Oh, by the way, I just want you to know that I learned a lot from that ‘Secret Agent Girl’ book you send me. Unfortunately, in my opinion, she had too many attributes from plastic surgery, and too many ‘Hi-Tech’ devices to really be an effective agent.”

They all laughed.

“By all the accounts that I have heard, your record at the Academy has been most impressive. I must congratulate you. I understand that you only have to complete your solo assignment and then will graduate as a full fledged agent.” Nick said.

“Yup, I just have to finish my solo. I must congratulate you too, Nick. The work on Vesta V seems to have gone very well.”

“Ok you all, enough of this mutual admiration society. I have something here that I want you all to try” Leo took out a tin of tobacco from a drawer. “This is a tin of Old Donkeynut. It is the specially tinned tobacco for the Castle Pesaro show.” He opened the tin and passed it around. This tin is for us to try. The rest is for the show on Saturday.”

They all looked at the tin. The tin was numbered 300 out of 300. The label illustration was of an old, tired donkey puffing on a hawkbill pipe. They all agreed that it had a very nice tin aroma. They filled their pipes and lit them up.

“It sort of reminds me of McClelland 5100 from Old Earth”, Varten said relighting his pipe.

“Yes, very nice” Leo replied “Gorag Paese and the Mortonfrog tobacco Company did a nice job in the tinning. Jesper Reed designed us a fine label. There are 299 tins remaining. I definitely think it will be a sellout at the show. This is the surprise I did not mention to Ike this morning. We will save this one for the show. We will all meet for breakfast on Saturday before the pipe show. I plan go let him try a tin after breakfast.”

“I think it is a nice gesture, Leo” Lu Jo said as she blew a smoke ring “It is also a very fine tobacco for the first Castle Pesaro Pipe Show. It will be a sellout.”

They spent the rest of the evening talking pipes. About eleven P.M. Lu Jo and Nick left. Varten and Leo continued smoking and talking. If they had been followed, they would have been seen walking to Nick’s rooms. As the door was closed, a “Do Not Disturb” sign was placed on the door knob.

-11-

Let the record show that on Friday morning, Ike and Dr. Witz had huge headaches due to the number of pipes and quantities of liquor consumed with Chuck Stinyon the night before.

People were arriving from all over the sector. Many of the invited guests had also arrived. Most were staying at hotels away from the castle. A quarter of the ballroom had been made accessible to the many people who were either showing their pipe collections or had pipes and tobacco products to show. Varten and his staff were busy making sure that people kept to their business and did not wander off into any unauthorized parts of the castle. The tables and displays could be set up on Friday, and there would be security provided overnight. Vendors and collectors having tables would be readmitted at 7:00 A.M. on Saturday morning to finish their displays. The show would open to the public at 9:00 A.M.

At 7:00 P.M. on Friday night, a small group assembled in one of the castle's private dining rooms. Leo had invited the select group consisting of Varten, Martin Davis, John Lowlar, and Dave Woblar to have a dinner with Ike McCane. The meeting started over cocktails.

Ike was telling the group about an incident that had happened at one of the meeting of the Conclave of Richmond Pipe Smokers around 1999, First Age. "You see, what happened was that one of the members of the '#Pipes' computer chat group with the nickname 'Old Sea Rock' had decided to play a practical joke. He and a couple others put together a large batch of tobacco which contained equal mounts of straight latakia tobacco and cherry blend. After blending, it was pressed. They bagged it and put a nicely designed label on it. It was named 'Chatsworth'. An announcement had gone out over the computer newsgroups and the Chat Channel concerning the availability of this 'NEW' blend at the show. They started passing it around the show as a new legitimate blend. Some people thought it was great. Others thought it was the worst tobacco they had ever tried. Some of the #Pipes people were passing it out as if it were a totally legitimate blend. Little did people know and find out after the show that it was just one big joke. It is amazing just what people will try and their reactions. Some were polite, some were not so polite. I wonder how much just ended up in the garbage."

They all laughed at the story. Ike was much the center of attention. He definitely had the gift of the gab, and the group was much entertained by his stories.

Martin Davis told Ike about his hawkbill collection. "I have about 20 hawkbills in my collection. I am looking forward to viewing your collection tomorrow. My collection represents only about a dozen companies and carvers. My largest pipe is one carved by Clarence Mickles. I will show it to you tomorrow."

"I have two Mickles pipes" Ike said "Clarence was one of the best carvers of the hawkbill shape. He really had a knack at drilling the pipe and was the closest in making his to the Castello #84 shape. I knew Clarence and he was a real gentleman. He passed too soon."

John Lowlar showed the groups two Old Earth Castello #65 pipes from his collection. One was a Castello Collection Grade, the other a Castello old searock finish. He proceeded to tell the group about the time Emperor Leopaldo had out bid him on a matched set of 65s, having a natural vergin finish and an old searock finish. He joked that he had never forgiven him for beating him out in the bid. "I have a little something for us to try tonight. It is a bottle of screech from Old Earth. Skreech is rum based liquor from the eastern part of the Old Earth political subdivision of Canada. It was a very popular drink in the First Age." They all sampled the liquor with varying reactions.

Dave Woblar, a writer of mystery books, told the group about his collection of calabash pipes. They all admired his Ardor Brissie Calabash from Old Earth. Dave said that the pipe was the pride and joy of his collection that it had been passed down through his family over the centuries and had a high sentimental value.

The group sat down for dinner. Leo's chef had put out a very nice buffet.

Following dinner, they continued discussing their pipes and tobacco interests until the get together ended about 11 P.M. Everyone had a most enjoyable time, especially listening to Ike's reminiscences.

-12-

The day of the pipe show had arrived. Castle Pesaro was a buzz with activity. Breakfast was being served in the castle sunroom. Leo, Varten, Nick, Lu Jo, Jim McClelland, and Ike McCane had just finished a sumptuous breakfast. Coffee had been poured. Pipes were beginning to be taken out to be smoked.

"Ike, I promised you a little surprise. Here it is." Leo handed him a fresh tin of 'Old Donkeynut'. "Please, open it up and try some."

Ike opened the tin. He smelled the aroma eluting from the tin. "Un, ahh, this is a surprise! I haven't smelled tobacco this bad since Chatsworth!"

"What do you mean?" Leo said "Give me that tin!" Ike handed it to Leo. Leo inhaled the aroma from the tin. "I think we have a problem here. Varten, go get me another tin from the storage room." Varten left and came back a few minutes later with two additional tins. They opened them and had similar results.

"This is not the tobacco we had tinned by the Mortonfrog Tobacco Company. It is not the same tobacco we sampled the other night. Look at the label on this tin. It has the number '300' on it, and we smoked the #300 tin the other night. I think someone has replaced the original tins with some monstrosity of a tobacco blending. The labels are a pretty good match to the original, but now that I look closely, I can see that they are not originals but copies." Leo observed.

Varten replied "It would appear that someone has stolen the original tins of tobacco and replaced them with an imitation. I would think that this was done with malice aforethought and that the original tins have not been destroyed. You were not meant to find the switch before the show, but we were lucky."

"I quite agree" Nick said "I think that this would be a good solo for our secret agent girl. Perhaps she can investigate and find out who switched the tobacco, how it was done, and why? The icing on the cake would be if the remaining 299 tins could be recovered."

"What do you think, Lu Jo? Do you accept this assignment as your solo? Varten's staff will be available to assist you. I want the culprit of this dastardly deed found." Leo said.

"Yes, I accept. I will start my investigation immediately. Don't mention the Old Donkeynut tins to anyone. If asked, say that you expect to have them later in the show."

It is time for me to get started. You guys go off and run your pipe show. Do have fun! I will keep you posted.”

Lu Jo left the room. The men filled their pipes up with some Early Morning Pipe that Ike still had left. Once the pipes got going, they proceeded to the ballroom.

-13-

They arrived at the ballroom. Many of the collectors with displays and wares to sell or trade were already inside. A mass of the public filled the anteroom and the overflow crowded the hall and went down the main steps of the castle. The crowd was in no way unruly. Castle security kept the group very calm. The strong odor of tobacco pervaded the entire space.

Emperor Leopaldo, Varten, and Ike approached the main door to the ballroom. The Emperor was given a large pair of shears. He cut the ribbon that went from one side to the other side of the doorway. “I now declare the first Castle Pesaro Pipe Show to be officially opened!” They had very little time to get out of the way before the crowd surged into the ballroom.

Leo, Varten, and Ike went up a set of steps to a balcony that opened up into the ballroom. They stood above the facility and watched the action. On the left, there was about one hundred chairs set up in front of a podium. On the right, Ike’s hawkbill collection was on display. The rear half of the room contained over 150 tables filled with pipes and tobacco from all over the empire. Neer-tobacco, pseudo-tobacco, and even some Old Tobaccos were available. Genuine briar pipes from Old Earth, neer-briar pipes, and pipes of many other materials were seen on the tables. Pipe collections and displays abounded. They saw Dave John Lowlar’s collection of Castello #65s, Dave Woblar’s collection of calabashes, and Chuck Stinyon’s table for the Empire Pipe Collector’s Magazine. Although 150 tables were squeezed into half the ballroom, there was not an empty table to be found.

“Any estimate of the attendance, Varten?” Leo asked.

“Our estimate is 300 vendors, displays, and their help, plus approximately 600 people from the public. It is a nice size group for our first show.” Varten observed.

“Look over by the Mortonfrog tobacco table. Isn’t that Lu Jo?” Ike pointed out.

“Why yes it is. That is Lu Jo. I guess she is investigating. Ike, you only have a few minutes until your scheduled talk. I think we should be going down stairs.” Varten said.

They went down into the ballroom among the crowd and headed towards the lecture area. The seating area was rapidly filling up. Finally, Leo went up to the podium. “I wish to welcome you to the first Castle Pesaro Pipe Show. Today, we have a truly honored guest speaker. To say that Mr. McCane has traveled for 50,000 years to get to this stage would

not be an exaggeration. As most of you are aware, Ike McCane lived during the 20 and 21st century First Age. He and his collection of hawkbill pipes and tobacco were all placed in suspended animation. He was recently revived and has accepted a position on the faculty of PittPenn University. He has been named ‘Conservator of the Emperor’s Pipes’ by me. I am sure that his talk today will keep you enthralled, and once he has completed it, I recommend that you go and see his remarkable collection of Old Earth hawkbill pipes. Ladies, and gentlemen, I give you Mr. Ike McCane.”

The crowd arose with a standing ovation. Ike walked calmly up to the podium, shook the Emperor’s hand and stood before the crowd. As Leo left the stage, he could hear Ike’s opening remarks “ I am sure you know the old adage ‘If you have one pipe you are a pipe smoker, if you have two or more you are a pipe collector’, well I am both, a pipe smoker and a pipe collector. Never did I ever imagine that I would stand in front of a group in this place and time, a place and time I never would have conceived existed.....”

Ike continued with his talk as Leo spoke to Varten off to one side of the room. “Any report from Lu Jo yet?”

“She has reported just this information. She had found out that the Mortonfrog Tobacco Company had blended, tinned, labeled, and shipped the original tins of tobacco. It was no secret in the collecting community that you were tinning this special blend for the show. The shipment had gone from New Caledonia via Cairo II to Castle Pesaro. As we know, it was received here at the castle two days ago. Since we opened a tin, checked it, and found it to be good, the switch had to be made here at the castle. The tobacco had been stored in an unsecured storeroom the past two days. We did not think that anyone would have an interest in it.” Varten reported.

“Ok, sounds like she is making some progress. Let’s listen to the rest of Ike’s speech”

They listened to Ike’s talk. He told the group about the history of Castello pipes. How the hawkbill shape was originally an old French shape. Castello pipes had revived the shape. A group of American collectors increased the awareness of the hawkbill or donkeynut shape. Ser Jacopo came out, as did many other companies and individual pipe carvers with their versions of hawkbills. He told the crowd that the hawkbill shape was one of the hardest of shapes to correctly carve and drill. He mentioned the monograph on donkeynuts written by two of the most famous donkeynut collectors, Mike McCain and Michael Davis. He then discussed the variations that various carvers made to the hawkbill shape including bowl shape, shank cross-section, degree of arch, and style of the bit.

He concluded with the comment that you either loved the shape or hated it. There was no in-between. Upon conclusion, he thanked the crowd and took questions.

As the questions ended, Leo joined Ike at the podium. He thanked Ike for the most informative presentation. He took a box out of his pocket. The box was opened and a pipe removed. He turned to Ike “Ike, I have a little present for you. This pipe was carved by Mick Tinsk out of Krenellian B’iar, which is similar to Old Earth briar. You can see it

is in your favorite hawkbill shape. The titanium band has been inscribed 'First Castle Pesaro Pipe Show'. I hope you will enjoy it and that it will become a welcome addition to your fine hawkbill collection."

The attendees gave Emperor Leopaldo and Ike a standing ovation. Shortly thereafter, the audience departed to see Ike's collection and get back to the pipe show.

Varten had a communication from his staff so left Ike and Leo. For security reasons, Leo was always shadowed by security people in the crowd. Although injury was a remote possibility, Leo always wore a protective shield, and security was nearby if needed.

Leo and Ike chatted as they went from table to table. Ike thanked him for the Mick Tinsk pipe. He said that it would be unique in his collection as he did not have any non-Old Earth hawkbill pipes. He had asked Leo about the proper break-in process. Leo told him that the pipe required virtually no break-in period.

They wandered through the pipe show looking at displays, talking with the collectors, and eyeing up possible purchases

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Lu Jo was excited. She finally received her solo assignment. She had quickly concluded that the switching of the tins had taken place at the Castle. Once the pipe show opened, she had gone straight to the Mortonfrog Tobacco Company table. Craig Tattle, the chief tobacconist for the company was manning the table.

She had asked him about the shipping of the tobacco. He related the route and indicated who had custody of the shipment. Although Gorag Paese had made the original blend, and Jesper Reed had designed the label, the Mortonfrog Tobacco Company made the final 300 tins. "All 300 tins were assembled at our factory, or should I say 3005 tins." Craig said "Two tins were sent to Gorag Paese and two tins to Jesper Reed for their final clearance. Gorag's was sent to him for the blend approval and Jesper for the artwork. One tin is still in the factory museum."

Lu Jo next went to Gorag Paese's table. He was surrounded by his admirers as he had introduced a new latakia-like blend at the show. She introduced herself as Louise Reardon, a member of the Emperor's staff. She asked him to join her in a pipe. He filled up a Krenellian B'iar pipe with some of his new blend entitled 'Old English Silk' and offered some to her. "You have a very nice pipe, Louise. A Dunhill group 2, if I am correct."

"You are correct. It is, of course, from Old Earth. It was a gift from the Emperor. He asked me to find out from you if there was anything odd regarding the Old Donkeynut tobacco you designed for him. Do you still have your two tins."

“That was a good job. Too bad it was an exclusive for Leopaldo. I could have made some money off of it. No, nothing unusual happened. I still have one sealed tin. I smoked the entire tin I opened. Wait, there was one thing unusual, after I received the sample, I had an enquiry from a pipe collector on New Winston asking if I would be interested in selling a tin. He said that he wanted to get a peek at the tobacco before it was introduced here at the show. I sent him a return message that it was not available and that he could get some here at the show. By the way, when is the Emperor going to have it available?”

“I don’t know. I think an announcement will be made after lunch. Do you know who sent the message?” Lu Jo asked.

“No, I don’t recall the name. I replied, and just tossed it off. I just remember that it went to the planet New Winston.”

“Thanks Gorag. I like your new blend and think that it will be a success.” She said as she got up to leave.

Lu Jo got on her communicator and called communications officer. She asked that a Priority One hyperwave communication be sent to Jesper Reed. The question was did he still have his two sample tins of Old Donkeynut, were there any inquiries in purchasing them, and if so, by whom. The communications officer said he would get the message off immediately and that there should be a reply in an hour or so.

She noticed that Ike’s lecture was getting started. She had wanted to hear it, but had more important things to do. She went to the table of John Lowlar. John was showing his collection of Old Earth Castello #65 pipes. He had about 40 pipes set out on the table in every size and finish. The full-bent pipes looked fantastic.

She introduced herself as Louise Reardon. “It seems that I have lost my tobacco pouch. Would you have anything I could try?” she asked John Lowlar.

“Sure, I have some nice mature Virginia here in my pouch.” He offered her his nice leather pouch. She filled her pipe, lit it, and returned the pouch to John.

“This is quite good” she said “It reminds me of an Old Earth tobacco, McClelland 5100.”

“Yes, it is quite good. A nice tobacco for a nice lady.” He said. “I don’t think it is much like the 5100, but do agree it is a nice Virginia tobacco.”

“I must say that you have a fine collection, and a fine tobacco. I have to run, but I may be back to make you an offer on one of your sale pipes.”

“That would be nice. While you are at it, why don’t you consider dinner tonight?” John Lowlar proposed.

“I will keep it in mind.” She said as she walked away.

She headed towards the lecture area when her communicator rang. The communications officer told her that Jesper Reed had told them that he had received his two tins of Old Donkeynut. He had approved the artwork. He also had an inquiry from a collector on New Winston regarding his tins. As he was not a pipe smoker, he had sold them to the collector, for a tidy sum. The collector was a Mr. J Rallow on New Winston. They had followed up trying to find such a person on New Winston, but thus far had no luck.

Lu Jo noted that Ike’s lecture was almost over. She left the show and headed for the security office. She had called Varten and asked him to meet her there. Anyone seeing her as she left would have noted a smile on her face.

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Leo and Ike had been wandering about the show. Ike left to man the display of his hawkbills. Leo observed that Ike was mobbed by people asking many questions. Everyone said that his collection was fantastic. Ike was really eating up the comments and playing the crowd.

Leo walked over to Martin Davis’ table. Martin had displayed his collection of hawkbills. He was smoking a Ser Jacopo smooth apple. “Not quite like Ike’s collection, eh Leopaldo” he said to Leo as he approached.

“Not as large, but very nice”

“You are too kind” Martin replied “Ike really knows his 20 and 21st century Old Earth pipes, doesn’t he?”

“He sure does. I guess we would too, if we had lived then. He is also adapting very well in this time period.”

“He sure is. I do not think I would have survived if I had been in his shoes.” Martin observed.

“Martin, I would like to purchase that Ser Jacopo hawkbill that you have on your sale table. I see that you have it marked at 150 solaris. I think that the price is a bit steep. I will offer you 100.”

“What say you if we split the difference and agree at 125 solaris?” he asked Leo.

“Done. I think I can live with that.” Leo paid Martin for the pipe and put it in his pocket. His communicator rang. It was Varten. He asked Leo to meet him in the small conference room below the entrance. Leo said he would be there shortly. He slowly left the display area and headed towards the room below the main entrance.

A security guard let him into the room. Inside were Nick Reardon and Varten von Eckmann. On a table set several boxes containing tins of tobacco.

“It looks like Lu Jo is going to pass her solo, Leo.” Varten said.

Leo walked over to the boxes. He took out a tin, examined the label and opened it. He smelled the tin for the tobacco’s tin aroma. He filled up his Peterson Sherlock Holmes Baskerville pipe and lit it. “The labels are genuine. It’s the real thing! She has found my lost tins of Old Donkeynut.! Where is Lu Jo?” he asked.

Nick Replied “She is out in the show area with a security team keeping one of the displays under observation. She wants us to take the tobacco into the show and start selling it. She expects to apprehend the culprit.”

“Ok, why don’t you each fill up you pipes, then we shall do as she asked.”

They filled their pipes from the open tin of Old Donkeynut and lit them. They returned to the show. Two of the security people carried the boxes behind them. Varten and Leo sat down at the Emperor’s table. Nick moved off to find Ike and have him go to the Emperor’s table, then went off to observe Lu Jo.

An announcement was made that the show tobacco “Old Donkeynut” was available at the Emperor’s table. A line quickly formed. They started selling the tobacco, limiting each person to a limit of two tins. A number of people opened a tin as they purchased their maximum. Some just purchased the tobacco and walked away. The people that opened the tin were amazed at the excellence of the tobacco. They all praised the Emperor at the nice job he had done in commissioning the special tinning. Many went off to praise Gorag Paese and the Mortonfrog Tobacco Company for such an excellent production.

Meanwhile, Lu Jo and the security team had John Lowlar’s table under observation. The announcement of the availability of the Old Donkeynut was made. John was nervous as they could see by him pacing at his table. When word filtered through out the show that the Old Donkeynut was truly an excellent tobacco he was confused.

Lu Jo approached his table “Hi John, I am back. I am going to make you an offer you can’t refuse.”

“Oh, regarding the pipe, dinner, or both?” he asked.

“Both I think. I think we can arrange dinner tonight. It won’t be with me, but rather will be with some of Leo’s staff. It will be with his security staff” she observed. She signaled the security men whose presence was now well established around John Lowlar. The men discreetly walked away with John Lowlar in their midst.

“Nice job Lu Jo” Nick Reardon said as he came up behind her. “I knew you could do it.”

“Thanks, Nick. It was actually quite simple. I think a full explanation will be made later. Let’s go on and enjoy the rest of the show.” She said.

“Yes, let’s go enjoy this excellent show.

They went on and enjoyed the show the rest of the day making minor tobacco purchases.

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The show continued until around 3:00 in afternoon. Finally, Leo went to the grand stage to make some announcements. “I would like to thank you all for attending the first Castle Pesaro Pipe Show. I plan to make this an annual event. Next year’s show will be under the direction of Ike McCane, my pipe conservator.” A cheer went up in the crowd. “The proceeds from the sale of the Old Donkeynut show tobacco is being donated to the relief effort on New Florida. Many of you know the suffering due to the terrorist attack on the weather control station that took place. The monies will go to help in the relief effort.” Another cheer went up. “I now have a couple of awards to make. The award for the best new tobacco goes to Gorag Paese for his new blend Old English Silk. The award for best carver goes to Brian Rathenberg. The award for best collection goes to Martin Davis for his hawkbill collection. The award for best pipe in show goes to Dave Woblar for his Ardor Brissie calabash. I would like all of the award winners to come up to the stage to receive their awards, get their plaques, and have pictures taken. Again, I want to thank you all for attending and will you give all of the award winners a round of applause. Please get the next issue of Empire Pipe Collectors Magazine for coverage of the show”

The group applauded the award winners. Chuck Stinyon took pictures of the award winners being presented their awards by Emperor Leopaldo as the show came to an end.

Later in the evening, after a sumptuous dinner, a small group comprised of Varten, Leo, Ike, Leo, Jim, Nick, Lu Jo, and Sohei convened in Leo’s study. Each had lit their pipes. “This has been a very satisfying day.” Leo said “Lu Jo, I would like to congratulate you on the recovery of the Old Donkeynut tobacco. I think you have a story to tell us.”

“It was all very simple. I was told that there had been five additional tins of tobacco tinned. Two were sent to Gorag Paese for his approval of the blending. Two were sent to Jesper Reed for the approval of the artwork. The final tin was in the museum of the Mortonfrog Tobacco Company. Gorag had his two tins; however he had refused an offer from someone on New Winston to purchase them. Jesper Reed had sold his two tins to a collector named J. Rallow on New Winston. There was no J. Rallow to be found on New Winston. When I went to John Lowlar’s table, he gave me some tobacco from his pouch. When I smoked it, I recognized it for what it was, Old Donkeynut. I guess he just could not help himself. By the way, J. Rallow is an anagram for J. Lowlar. I just put two and two together and got four. Varten and I searched his hotel suite of rooms and found the missing tins of tobacco.” Lu Jo said.

“It seems that the planet New Winston is nominally under the control of House Chesterfield. We all know how much they like Leo. You will all recall that John Lowlar told us of the time that Leo out bit him for a matched set of Castello #65s. He joked about it, however he never really got over it. He had plotted his revenge for a long time. He, with the cooperation of House Chesterfield, made the fake Chatsworth-like tobacco. They had copied the labels from the two samples they had purchased from Jesper Reed. The original tins were kept here at the castle in an unsecured storeroom. He made the switch prior to setting up his display. Plain and simply, it was an attempt to embarrass the Emperor. Fortunately, it was discovered and prevented. Lu Jo performed excellently in her solo.”

“That she did!” Leo exclaimed “She will now graduate as a full fledged member of the Empire Intelligence Service. Your identification tattooing will be done tomorrow. Congratulations Lu Jo.”

They all gave Lu Jo a standing ovation. She thanked them with tears in her eyes. “I appreciate this all coming from such an exalted group.”

They sat down, pipes sending smoke towards the ceiling. “Lu Jo, just one last thing” Leo said “I have a little presentation for you. I think you deserve this Ser Jacopo hawkbill and these two tins of Old Donkeynut to remember the First Castle Pesaro Pipe Show and your successful completion of your solo assignment.”

She thanked Leo and the group profusely.

“One last thing” Nick said “he reached in his pocket and took out a small wrapped package. “Here is a little present for you from me. It is volume 2 of the ‘Secret Agent Girl’ series. I hope you enjoy it!”

“You are a smart rear end of a donkey!” She said as she chuckled “I hope the author’s writings got better the longer he wrote, unlike the direction your long running joke is taking!”

They all laughed, repacked their pipes and smoked long into the night.

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