

## REPRODUCTION

By  
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The rumors were there. They had always been there, floating around the community of pipe collectors. They were quietly passed around, slightly above the babble and background noise at the pipe shows. Nothing solid, the rumors just made their way around. He first heard it lightly mentioned at the first Castle Pesaro Pipe Show. It was nothing definite, just an allegation 'reproduction pipes were turning up at pipe shows and being passed as genuine Old Earth antique pipes'.

He was sitting in his office in the capital city of Rayleigh, on the planet Augary. As chief editor and publisher of the Empire Pipe Collectors' Magazine, Chuck Stinyon's office was quite opulent, vying with some of the largest heads of the business world. He was a force to be reckoned with in the pipe collecting circle of people. Chuck Stinyon was smoking a genuine Old Earth black blasted, slightly curved S. Bang pipe. He knew that the pipe was from the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century on Old Earth, handmade in the political subdivision called Denmark. He enjoyed his collection of Old Earth Danish pipes. However, the one sitting on the table was a puzzle. It was purported to be a Danish Old Earth pipe carved by Gunnar Rasmussen. It was also a bent blast in his famous Gollum shape. In its time, it probably could fetch a price in thousands of Old Earth dollars. Unfortunately, in his opinion, it was a fake.

Rasmussen had been a famous Danish pipe carver between 2003 - 2010 F.A. His pipes were superb and were highly sought after by many famous pipe collectors of that time period. The problem was that his production was very low. Although one of the best carvers on Old Earth, he was a man of many and varied interests. He only made pipes when he needed the money. During the seven years that he made and sold pipes, his total production was less than one hundred pipes. He stopped producing pipes in 2010 F.A. when the Anti-smoking factions took over control of the Old Earth governments which lasted until 2050 F.A. During that time period, if you made, sold, or used smoking materials you were considered a criminal and could be arrested and prosecuted.

The alleged Rasmussen Gollum pipe had been sent to him via courier from Donald Trimp, one of the richest men in the Empire and a noted pipe collector. He had purchased it through intermediaries from Robert von Metz. He had thought it to be genuine, as had a number of other collectors of Old Earth pipes, but the rumors had started. Mr. Trimp had requested Chuck to investigate the rumors, determine if the pipe was genuine, and if it was not, find out who is behind the scheme to defraud noted pipe collectors.

Chuck took out his high powered magnifying glass and began to examine the pipe. The briar was a perfect straight grain. The shape and carving of the lines and the stem work was perfect. He examined the nomenclature stamped on the pipe:

*G. Rasmussen  
Danmark, Handmade  
006, Silver*

According to his research, the nomenclature was correct. It indicated a Gunnar Rasmussen pipe, handmade in Denmark, 2006 F.A., and was of the 'silver' grade. Rasmussen had three grades; bronze, silver, and gold. According to the historical records, there were only 5 'gold' grade pipes ever made. Having seen a 'silver' grade pipe, he could only imagine what a 'gold' grade must be like.

The pipe was obviously true briar. All the supply of true briar ended when Earth was destroyed. Although there were many substitute materials that were close to it, true old earth briar could always be identified by the knowledgeable collector. There was not a flaw to be seen on the pipe. The draught hole was perfectly drilled. It met the bottom of the bowl at the proper angle.

Donald Trimp had told him that he could smoke the pipe. The pipe had been smoked by previous owners and had seen good care. He had previously smoked the pipe and found it to be an excellent smoke, just what he would have expected in a Rasmussen pipe.

In the end, he concluded that his gut feeling was that the pipe was not genuine. He could not say exactly why he felt that way. The rational part of his brain told him that it was genuine; however, he had learned a long time ago to trust his gut feelings. How could he get confirmation of his gut feelings?

He sat smoking the S.Bang pipe for a while until he hit on an idea. Emperor Leopaldo, 'Leo' to his friends when not in a formal setting, owed him a favor for the special coverage he provided on the first Castle Pesaro Pipe Show. He had devoted an entire issue of Empire Pipe Collectors Magazine to the show with a feature interview with Ike McCain, the man who had been brought back to life from a state of suspended animation. He would contact the Emperor and seek his assistance.

He wrote down a message and buzzed his secretary. "Have this message sent to Emperor Leopaldo at Castle Pesaro on the planet Hayden" he instructed her "and find out what passage is available to transport me to Castle Pesaro in the quickest manner."

After she left, he started thinking about his impending meeting. He felt better knowing he would be getting assistance from one of the most knowledgeable pipe collectors and most powerful men in the Empire.

He had boarded the ring drive spaceliner Cacophony a day earlier. The first jump towards the planet Hayden was uneventful. While eating dinner, he had thought he recognized one of his fellow passengers. He confirmed it later in the evening while he was having a pipe and a nightcap in the smoking lounge. The passenger was George Herment, a pipe smoker and minor writer. Chuck recalled that he had printed one or two of his articles in the Empire Pipe Collectors' Magazine.

The second day out he had spent in his cabin working on the layout and selection of articles for the next month's magazine. He had had a pretty enjoyable dinner and was sitting in the lounge smoking one of his traveling pipes, a Sam Learned full bent with a horn insert. He was enjoying his wexel-virginia neer-tobacco when he saw George enter the lounge. He walked up to Chuck's table and asked if he could join him. Although he would have preferred to be alone, he relented and invited him to join in a pipe.

George took out a rather plain Dunhill blasted bulldog, filled it and lit the pipe. They were discussing various pipe-related issues when George enquired if Chuck had heard anything about reproduction pipes filtering into the supply of Old Earth pipes.

"What do you mean, George?" Chuck asked.

"I have been hearing that a couple of pipe collectors have been taken with respect to the purchase, what they thought were true Old Earth pipes, but turned out to be fakes--- reproductions." George replied. "They have not come forward out of fearing the embarrassment that they would suffer."

"I have only heard rumors, and very faint ones at that." Chuck answered. "I have not heard or seen anything concrete."

"Well, why not? It is entirely possible to make reproductions of Old Earth pipes with today's technology. There are synthetic materials that are as good as Old Earth briar. Only an expert could tell the difference! The exacting electro-mechanical copying and duplicating equipment that we have can reproduce almost any shape from an original pipe or a pattern. The business of paints, varnishes, and coatings are so advanced that it would not surprise me, that any Old Earth finish could be reproduced including its aging attributes. I don't think that it would be hard to make a reproduction of an Old Earth pipe." George said.

"You may be correct, but I have not heard of nor seen any reproductions." Chuck responded. "I could be facetious and ask 'Why should one care if the pipe is genuine or a reproduction if it is a great smoker?' You would know the answer, besides the monetary value reason,"

"Yes, it has to do with the collectibility of the pipe, the prestige and other intangible benefits of owning a truly rare Old Earth pipe, and there is the idea that one was not being taken in a purchase or trade." George said.

“Those are all important factors. As you mentioned, it may be easy to produce reproductions, and it may be very difficult to detect them. However, most pipe collectors are honest and honorable people. If anyone was found fostering off reproductions, if such a scheme was discovered, they would quickly be railroaded out of the pipe collecting fraternity. I doubt if they would be able to do any business in the future. So you can see the returns would not be worth the risk.” Chuck elucidated.

“I would agree with all you said except for one point. When we are talking the large sums that Old Earth pipes command, it is worth the risk. One or two scores can make the perpetrator rich.” George responded.

“Perhaps you are right” Chuck replied “Regardless, I do not think it is happening, and if it is, it has not been discovered or made public.”

They had finished their pipes and drinks. George bid Chuck goodnight, Chuck was quite disturbed by the conversation with George Herment. Was George trying to tell him something? Was their chance encounter not purely by chance? Is he being followed? The Cacophony would land in the morning at Hayden’s spaceport. He had been offered rooms at Castle Pesaro and would be picked up at the spaceport. He would have to remember to recount this conversation with the Emperor when they met.

He picked up his pipe. Placed a rather generous tip on the table, and left the smoking lounge for his cabin. Unbeknown to him, a pair of eyes observed his departure from the smoking lounge.

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The Cacophony had landed early in the morning on Hayden. Chuck had made it through customs without any problems. A young man about his age had flagged him down as he exited the door.

“Chuck Stinyon I believe? I am Nick Reardon.” He said “We met during your stay after the Castle Pesaro pipe show.”

“Yes, I remember Nick. You are on Leo’s staff.” Chuck replied.

“Yes I am, and also one of his good friends. Leo asked me to bring you back to the Castle. He is quite interested in the problem you have presented to him, as are we all. Most of his inner staff are pipe smokers or collectors. We have already begun making some discreet inquiries.”

They left the spaceport administration building. Nick directed him to an aircar that was parked in the garage. They were soon airborne heading towards the castle. “It will take about a half an hour to reach the castle. I like your magazine and am one of the original subscribers. I thought the issue dealing with the pipe show and Ike McCain was quite

good. I also enjoyed the little article you did on how Leo achieves the ‘perfect’ smoke.” Nick said.

“You are too kind. Our surveys indicated that the Pipe Show issue was one of the most highly purchased and read issues we have ever produced. There is a lot of interest in the Emperor’s pipe collecting and his collection. From the tour he gave me I have to say that it is truly one of the best I have ever seen. He is a very discriminating collector and is very knowledgeable about the whole topic of pipe smoking and collecting. I look forward to meeting with him again. I am also relieved that he is going to look into this little matter. What is your take on it, Nick?”

“I don’t know that much. We have done an E-net computer search and have gone back through all the historical records regarding Gunnar Rasmussen. The biographical information you sent us is totally accurate, but I will let him relate our findings to you.”

The aircar was flying up the valley below Castle Pesaro. The castle sat on the high wall at the end of the long tree-covered valley. He piloted the aircar around the castle, while contacting the castle for landing privileges. They landed and parked the vehicle in the castle aircar garage. Nick informed Chuck that his luggage would be taken to his suite of rooms in the castle and that they would go straight to meet with the Emperor and his staff. He told Chuck to take any pipes or other material he would need for their meeting.

Nick took Chuck to the security office where Varten von Eckman was waiting. Chuck was put through the normal security verification procedures, ID check, retina and vocal scan with comparisons to the records on file.

“Although we know you, there are certain precautions we must take. It’s those damn shape changers, you know.”

“No problem Varten. I fully understand. You can’t be too careful.”

“Ok, you are cleared. Here are your castle credentials. This card will admit you those areas and rooms in the castle for which you are cleared. If any additional clearances are needed, you will have to contact me.” Varten replied.

“That is fine. I doubt that I will be going anywhere without someone from your staff.”

The three of them left the security office and headed to the Emperor’s private meeting room. After a five minute walk, they finally arrived before an impressive set of doors. Varten nodded to the guard who knocked on the door and they were admitted. They walked into a large comfortable room with a number of plush leather-like covered chairs formed into a circle. A small group of people were already sitting down smoking pipes. Chuck recognized Emperor Leopaldo but not the two ladies. Leo rose with the ladies.

“Chuck, it is so nice to see you again. That was a fine issue of your magazine dealing with the Castle Pesaro pipe show.” Leo said as he shook hands. I would like to introduce my friends Helen Chamberlain and Lu Jo to you.”

He shook their hands. “It is great to see ladies smoking pipes. I believe I may have met you Lu Jo during my last visit. Ms. Chamberlain, it is a pleasure to meet you.” he said.

“Yes, we did meet briefly during your last visit as I recall.” Lu Jo said.

“I am pleased to meet such a distinguished editor and publisher” Helen Chamberlain said.

“Quite an interesting problem you have brought to us, Chuck.” Leo said. “Please, sit down; there is some fine tobacco in the jar. Please take some. It contains a blend of wexel-virginia cut with a new condiment tobacco from the planet Isel. The Isel tobacco is still under development, but I have high hopes that it will soon be a blending tobacco that will be available throughout the Empire. There are also some liquid refreshments on the table. Please take your choice, but I do recommend the bourbon.”

They all sat down, filled the pipes that were empty and selected their drink of choice. The pipes were lit.

Leo began “We have conducted a thorough search of the historical records. The information you provided was quite correct regarding Gunnar Rasmussen and his pipes. The historical records indicate that he only made two of the ‘Gollum’ shape. One is known to be owned by Jason Jones on Riegel IV, and the other by Donald Trimp. The Trimp pipe is the one that you have with you. Will you show it to us?”

Chuck opened his brief case and took out a box. He opened the box and passed it to Leo.

“Ah, this is a very nice pipe.” Leo said. He took it out of the box and spent a few minutes closely examining it. He took a red tag out of his pocket and attached it to the pipe before returning it back to the box. He then passed it around for the others to see.

“You may wonder why I attached the red tag to the pipe. That will become clear in a minute. As we both know, the records indicate that there were only two Gollum pipes made. They also indicate that they were quite expensive when they were made. I would expect that they would now sell for a quite significant sum of money.” Leo said. “Now, let me show you something”

He got up from his chair and walked over to a desk in the corner of the room. He opened a locked door using a security code and took out a small dilapidated box. Out of the box he removed a second box and walked back to the group.

“Chuck, I want you to open this box and tell what you find”

Chuck slowly opened the box and was speechless for a second. “What did you do? Have Jason Jones’ pipe sent here? It appears to be another Rasmussen Gollum pipe!”

Leo replied “No, Jason Jones still has his pipe, or at least he did when we contacted him yesterday. No, this Rasmussen Gollum pipe is from my collection. I have had it for the past two years. Now you can see why your little problem is of such high interest to me. Either the historical records are wrong, or one of us has a fake pipe – a reproduction!”

Leo took the pipe from Chuck and put a green tag attached to his Rasmussen pipe and passed it around for all to see. The pipes appeared to be identical. The grain and stem work were superb.

They all agreed that the pipes appeared to be identical. “But how do we determine if they are the real thing? How do we determine that they are real Old Earth pipes carved by Gunnar Rasmussen?” Leo asked. “I guess there are a number of things we can do.

1. We can check the historical records for nomenclature and compare the pipe to the record.
2. We can see if there are any pictures in the historical record for comparison.
3. We can compare this pipe to other work that the carver performed, but in this case there are so few Rasmussen pipes that it would be difficult.
4. We can determine if the briar is true, Old Earth briar and not a synthetic through DNA testing, the downside is that a piece of the pipe would be needed, thus a portion of the pipe would be destroyed.
5. We can use non-invasive techniques such as Chronospectrometry to date the pipe, and Optical Spectrophotometric methods to check the finishing on the pipe.

The only problem with all of these methods is that a pipe could be re-carved from a lesser Old Earth briar pipe, duplicated into the newer pipe made by a more prominent carver.

However, we must learn what we can learn. Chuck, you, Nick and I have an appointment tomorrow with Dr. Maxim England, Director of Antiquities, Empire College. We will take both pipes and he will tell us what he can about these pipes.

They continued their discussions on pipes. In the evening, they all met for a dinner Leo held in Chuck’s honor. Following dinner, they adjourned for pipes and drinks. By the time Chuck made it to bed, he was one very tired puppy.

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Morning came fast. A beautiful morning broke over Castle Pesaro. Of course, with climate control, every morning was beautiful. Leo, Chuck and Nick had an early breakfast after which they took an aircar to Empire College. Leo’s security team accompanied them on the visit in a separate car.

Dr. England met them in his office. He looked like the typical lab rat; thick glasses, smoking a full bent calabash, and wearing an immaculate white lab coat. "I am quite happy to have you here. The Department of Antiquities has quite an interest in pipe lore, especially since Emperor Leopaldo endows two fellowship chairs in our department through the college. He also support's the research of Ike McCain who spends part of the year at PittPenn University and the remainder of the year here at Empire College. We have helped the Emperor a number of times in the past when questions regarding a pipe's authenticity has been questioned.

We have also checked the historical records concerning Gunnar Rasmussen using Elsie, our Departmental E-Net Computer System. We have found, in the case of this carver, that he sometimes carved more pipes in a given shape or finish than he recorded. He did this to avoid tax payments. If he said he made two shape xyz pipes and sold them, but really made three, he avoided tax on 1/3 of his income. This was not a practice just for him, but was rather well known and followed by other pipe makers in that time period.

All of the historical information indicates that both of your Gunnar Rasmussen Gollum pipes are genuine. However, there are some tests we can perform without harming the pipes. Chronospectrometric techniques are used to date the pipe to the approximate time period when the pipe was made. Optical spectrophotometric techniques are used to date the finish and the aging of the pipes. If you will give me the pipes, we can start the testing." Dr England said.

Leo gave him both pipes and indicated the two colored tags. He did not tell him which pipe belonged to which individual.

"If you will go to the waiting room, we can begin the tests" Dr. England said "You can observe through the window. You may smoke, if you wish in the lounge. The testing will take about two hours."

They went into the lounge adjacent to the testing laboratory. They could observe the different pieces of laboratory equipment, looking very complex and sophisticated.

"We might as well enjoy ourselves." Leo said. He took out a Mickles blasted prince pipe. Chuck took out a small stanwell pipe. Nick took out his favorite Larenzetti pipe. Leo passed around a large tobacco pouch filled with McClelland #5100 red cake tobacco from Old Earth. They filled their pipes from the pouch and lit them. The smoke started rising from the pipes to the ceiling. "At least I don't have to test this Old Earth tobacco to know it is genuine. My educated pallet tells me that it is good and genuine. You see, I am as good as all of this scientific equipment!" He said as he chuckled.

They all chuckled, and smoked their pipes while waiting for the tests to finish.

Almost two hours from when he left them, Dr. England returned. "I have some good news and some not-so-good news" he told them. "The good news is that the Chronospectrometry testing established that the pipes are of genuine briar dated to the

time of Old Earth. The not-so-good news is that the Optical Spectrophotometric techniques seem to indicate that the green-tagged pipe is proper for Old Earth made pipes. However, the results for the red-tagged pipe are inconclusive. That does not mean that it is not Old Earth, or that it is fake, it just means that the test cannot firmly establish it being genuine with a high degree of certainty.” Dr England reported.

“So if I understand you correctly, Dr England, you are suggesting that the green-tagged pipe is firmly established as an Old Earth pipe, and that the red-tagged pipe may be from the same period and carved by the same carver, but you can not be as certain.” Leo reiterated.

“You would make a good scientist, my Emperor.” Dr England said “That is exactly what I mean.”

“Thank you very much” Leo said “I think we need to go back to Castle Pesaro for further discussions.”

They all thanked Dr. England and left the college campus, returning back to Castle Pesaro via aircar.

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They all assembled in the castle conference room. The group consisted of Leo, Varten, Nick, Lu Jo, Chuck, and Helen Chamberlain. They were all sitting in comfortable chairs smoking their pipes. An aroma of gentile virginias filled the room. Leo told the rest of the group that the laboratory tests were quite conclusive that his Rasmussen was genuine, but they could not confirm that Donald Trimp’s Rasmussen was genuine. He then asked Chuck to relate the story of how Donald purchased the pipe.

Chuck began “Donald Trimp had been contacted through intermediaries purportedly from the noted pipe collector Robert von Metz, head of the rubber conglomerate. Due to fierce competition from synthetics, natural rubber has been a declining commodity the past five years. Robert’s fortune has also experienced a tremendous loss the past five years. It was general knowledge in financial circles that he had been selling off his holdings to obtain cash to pay off debts. It was also well known in the pipe collecting community that he was selling off some of his valuable pipes. Although not cheap, the purchase price for the Rasmussen was fair, set at 20,000 solaris.

The pipe was delivered to Donald Trump by courier. Payment was made 50% at time of delivery, and the remaining 50% within one week. Two weeks after the final payment was made, Robert von Metz committed suicide.”

Varten said “It will be very difficult to ascertain if the pipe really belonged to Robert von Metz. Too much time has passed. As a suicide, I am sure that an investigation was conducted.”

“I want you to send a message to the local authorities on New Berlin asking them to re-open the investigation regarding Robert von Metz’s suicide.” Leo instructed Varten.

“Now that I think of it, I probably should tell you about an event that took place during my trip to Castle Pesaro.” Chuck tells the group about his run in with George Herment on the starship and his unusual enquiry and discussion regarding reproduction pipes.

“I wondered when you would bring that up” Varten said “We had you under observation during your trip, and we were quite aware of Mr. Herment’s ‘chance’ encounter with you. You may find it interesting that he immediately returned to Augary on the next available ship. I think that the whole purpose of his trip was to meet with you. I am not sure why?”

“I am not sure that I like the idea of being followed, by Hermet or your people, but it is too late now to do anything about it.” Chuck said.

“Let’s get back to the topic at hand.” Leo advises “I think that Lu Jo should head off and investigate Robert von Metz alleged suicide. He resided on the planet Vulcania II. Nick, I want you to make a quick trip to Augary and check out George Herment. This should take the two of you less than a week. We will reconvene here a week from now. Chuck, I would like you to remain here at the castle as my guest. We can work on a few articles and you can take care of some of your business via the castle communications office. I want to tell you about my plans for this new Isel blending tobacco.”

“That sounds like a good plan of action” Chuck replies “I think I can use a little working vacation away from the office. Your resources here give me a couple of ideas for the magazine. I think it would be a good idea to interview Dr. England and prepare an article on verifying the identification of Old Earth pipes.”

“Fine” Leo says “We will meet back here in a week. Varten will also look into a couple of areas I want to explore. I am starting to see a way to resolve our uncertainty, but more on that later.”

Varten left to make transportation arrangements for Nick and Lu Jo. Nick and Lu Jo left to plan their trips. Chuck, Helen, and Leo stayed behind to make plans for Helen to show Chuck the scenic wonders of planet Hayden.

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It took Lu Jo two days to travel via needle ship to Vulcania II. She was ushered into the office of Thomas Wurst Sr. of Wurst, Wurst, and Schimmel, LLP, the attorneys that were handling the estate of Robert von Metz. Robert had died interstate that is without a will. A number of his relatives were squabbling over the remainder of the once large estate. With the losses he had encountered, the remaining value was only in the neighborhood of 50,000 solaris.

“Welcome to our small planet” Thomas Wurst said to Lu Jo “I see that you are here on behalf of Criminal Investigative Division of the Empire Police. Mr. Sexton of the planetary police department asked me to meet with you.”

“Thank you for the fine welcome. I met with Mr. Sexton earlier this morning. He informed me about his investigation into the unfortunate death of Mr. von Metz. He is going to re-open his investigation. There are a few fine points that Castle Pesaro would like cleared up before the book is closed.” She said.

“If there is anything I can do to help you, please do not hesitate to ask. Do you mind if I smoke?” he asked.

“Only if I can join you” She replied.

“Please do. I have a nice blend of a pseudo-tobacco here in the tobacco jar” he indicates as he begins to fill his pipe.

“Thank you “she begins to fill her Old Earth Ser Jacopo hawkbill pipe and lights it. “That is a very nice pipe you have. It reminds me of an Old Earth Dunhill shell briar.”

“I wish it were a genuine Old Earth Dunhill shell briar. Unfortunately, it is only a reproduction. If you examine it closely, it would not fool you for very long. However, it smokes very well and I enjoy it. I could never afford a true Old Earth Dunhill pipe, however, in my line of work it is important to keep up appearances, if you know what I mean.”

“I quite understand. In my opinion, the important factor is how a pipe smokes. Speaking of pipes, have you found any record of Robert von Metz ever owing a Gunnar Rasmussen Gollum pipe? Rasmussen, as you may or may not know was a Danish pipe carver from Old Earth. I have a hologram for you to examine.”

She gives him the hologram showing a three-dimensioned image of the pipe suspended in air.

“No, there is no record of this pipe” He replied.

“Do you know if Robert’s accounts indicate any deposits in the amount of 20,000 solaris? It would have probably been in two deposits within weeks of his death?”

He walks over to his E-computer visiscreen display and keys in some information. “No, the bank records do not indicate any such deposit. I do have to admit that I find your questions quite unusual.” Thomas replied.

“Why is that?” Lu Jo asked.

“Because, if you examine the detailed records of Robert’s pipe collection, one thing stands out; Robert von Metz only collected English-type pipes, all of standard shapes. He did not have a single Danish pipe nor a non-standard shape in his collection of Old Earth pipes!”

“That is most interesting” Lu Jo replied “You are sure?”

“Beside the documentation of his collection, and I have holos of every pipe he ever owned, he was a good friend of mine. We often enjoyed pipe smokes together and traded a couple of pipes over the years. I have never seen him smoke anything else.” Thomas replied.

“I have one last question. Do you know if a gentleman named George Herment was an acquaintance of Robert’s” she asked.

“I have never heard that name, but then again, I cannot say if Robert knew the man.” He replied.

By now Lu Jo’s pipe had gone out. She carefully scraped out the bowl into the ash tray. She asked Mr. Wurst to send a duplicate set of the holos of Robert von Metz’ pipe collection to Castle Pesaro. She thanked him for his assistance and left the offices of Wurst, Wurst, and Schimmel, LLP,

She returned to the small military base at the spaceport where she sent a report back to Varten at Castle Pesaro. She added a note about the attorney smoking a reproduction Dunhill shell briar pipe. She found lodgings for the night before returning to Hayden the next morning.

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Nick Reardon had boarded his needle ship and piloted it at top speed to Augary. He had been there a number of years before. Varten had sent messages ahead to clear his arrival at the spaceport. He was met by Dennis Gardinia, one of the resident EIS operative. Following a fine dinner at a local restaurant, they visited one of the local pipe lounges. They sat at a corner table enjoying cognac and their pipes.

“As you are well aware, Nick, George Herment is a small time writer and author. He writes on a wide variety of topics. A couple of his articles on pipes have appeared in the Empire Pipe Collectors’ Magazine. He has lived here on Augary all of his life. He often travels off-world and seems to have an extensive group of contacts in all economic levels on this planet and throughout the Empire. The most unusual contact, as far as you may be interested, is Robert Sontell. Mr. Sontell is a small time pipe collector and a noted furniture antiquarian. He also has the distinction of serving a small amount of time in prison, convicted for attempting to pass reproduction Louis XIV pieces of furniture as genuine.”

“That is interesting. You would not know if he was into pipe reproductions, would you?” Nick asked.

“No, I do not know if he is into pipe reproductions. I do know that he is into furniture reproduction, but he is selling them legitimately as furniture reproductions for those that want to purchase such items. If you will give me a day or so I will make some inquiries of my contacts and try to find out.”

“Fine, I am staying at the Rayleigh Hilton Hotel. You can reach me there.” Nick replied.

They finished their pipes and split up for the night. Nick registered at his hotel. He worked late into the night, smoking several pipes, contacting undercover EIS covert agents. They were asked to make discreet inquiries into the affairs of Herment and Sontell.

The next morning the results of his inquiries began to filter back to him. He found out that Herment and Sontell both had hidden sources of income. In fact, both of the men were rather well off. His sources thought the income was from some illicit smuggling activities, but nothing was concrete.

Dennis finally got back to him about mid-day. He informed Nick that his contacts had not found anything substantial, other than the fact that Sontell had been acquiring a number of specimens of low-grade Old Earth pipes. The specimens included brands such as Graybow, Whitehall, and other lesser pipes. Supposedly, Sontell had acquired a small cache of Old Earth blocks of genuine briar.

Before his leaving Augary to return to Castle Pesaro, Nick prepared a report to be sent to Varten detailing his findings and some of his theories.

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Exactly one week from their last meeting, the group reassembled over pipes in the conference room at Castle Pesaro. Leo thanked Nick and Lu Jo for their reports.

Varten summarized the findings “There appears to be no indication of Robert von Metz having owned the Rasmussen Gollum pipe. He did not tend towards including Danish pipes in his collection. There was also no indication of von Metz having received any money from selling such a pipe. Herment and Sontel seem to have the capabilities of producing some reproduction pipes. Both also have hidden sources of income. There also seems to be a thriving business in pipe reproductions, however, there is nothing illegitimate in it as long as they are clearly sold as reproductions. I think that is where we are at.”

“I think you are quite correct, Varten. If Herment is involved in the fostering of this Rasmussen pipe as genuine, it is time to set a little trap for him, or for who ever is behind this activity. We need to draw them out into the open.” Leo said.

“Helen has discussed with me an idea she has had. Helen, would you present it to the group and see what they think?” Chuck asked.

Helen stood up and said to the group “I am a little new to this level of intrigue, but I think we need to bait a little trap for Mr. Herment. I think we should put forth an offer he could not refuse. We should entice Mr. Herment to find us a pipe that is both rare and very difficult to find. If he can locate the pipe, we can find out if it is genuine or fake. If it is genuine, then our suspicions in his regard could be put to rest. He may be an honest businessman. If he comes up with the pipe and it is a reproduction, then it may suggest to us that he is involved in the illicit pipe reproduction business, and that there may be some question of the authenticity of the Rasmussen pipe. There are just too many unknowns about him. He may be on the level, or he may be deeply involved in the fostering of the reproduction pipes as genuine pipes.”

“I agree.” Leo said “and I have a plan. There was a well known pipe carver named Trever Talbert. Trever Talbert was an Old Earth pipe carver who made many one-of-a-kind briar pipes. The briar pipes he carved were very unique and popular to a segment of the Old Earth pipe collecting community. He made pipes themed around many different topics such as Halloween pipes, Christmas pipes and pipes centering on the Cthulhu mythos. The Cthulhu mythos was a series of horror books written by an Old Earth writer named H.P. Lovecraft. Lovecraft and other writers produced many horror stories written around a staple theme about a series of evil gods. You can check H.P. Lovecraft and his stories out in the historical computerized records. Later in his career, Talbert crafted pipes from a substance called morta, a petrified bog material found in the Old Earth political subdivision called France. However, he never lost his love of crafting unique briar pipes, giving each one a unique name.

Anyways, his briar pipes were quite unique and his style is easily identifiable. One of the pipes he carved he named ‘Daughter of Dagon’, Dagon being one of the minor gods in the Cthulhu mythos. The Daughter of Dagon pipe is a black finished pipe illustrating a female in supplication to the god, Dagon. The bowl of the pipe is essentially a fish at a 90-degree angle to the shank. The tobacco chamber is the gaping mouth of the fish-god. Here is a holo of the pipe.”

Leo passed the holo around for the group to see. The pipe had a slightly curved stem. Mounted near the end of the shank one could see a small female figure bowing down before the much larger, evil looking fish-god bowl.

Leo continued “We will put the word out to the pipe collecting community that I am searching for this very unique and rare pipe. The historical record is very clear that Talbert only carved one of these pipes near the end of his career. How do we know this? Because, strangely, after he made this pipe, he never carved another briar pipe. The historical record is unclear, but there are indications that he went mad after he carved the Daughter of Dagon pipe, and spent the last of his days in an insane asylum in the Old Earth town of Arkham, Massachusetts, a political subdivision of the Old Earth country

the United States of America. The pipe dropped out of sight and has never again been seen again. The holo is a reconstruction from an old computer photograph that was posted on computers at the time. I had it made by Dr. England at the Empire College. What do you all think?"

"It might work" Nick replied "If George Herment takes the bait. It is strange enough that he may consider it a challenge. It could be reproduced, although it would be difficult. It could be copied using sophisticated equipment, but I doubt it could be reproduced without having an original. Who knows? He may even come up with the genuine item."

"I agree" Varten said "It could be very tempting."

"Let's pass the word to the pipe collecting community." Leo said "Chuck, I want you to pass the word to your contacts that I am seeking this pipe. Be sure to let them know that money is no object. Make sure that Herment finds out about our search."

"I can do that. Does it mean I get to enjoy your hospitality for a while longer?"

"It does. Beside, Ike McCain is going to pay us a visit. I want you to work with him on some articles for the magazine. He may have known Talbert. You will have to talk to him." Leo explained.

They continued discussing the plan and refining it on into the evening. After many bowls of pipe tobacco had been finished, they decided that any inquiries would be directed to Nick. He would be the agent assigned to deal with the project.

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Several weeks go by. There have been a couple of bites on the offer to locate the Daughter of Dagon pipe. All turned out to be false leads. Ike McCain had joined the group at Castle Pesaro for his periodic review and conserving of the Emperor's extensive pipe collection. A small social had been planned with about one hundred invited guests. Nick made sure that George Herment had been sent an invitation. He had responded to the RSVP and was expected at the social.

During the course of the social, Chuck Stinyon approached Nick accompanied by a short, balding man. "Nick Reardon, I want you to meet Mr. George Herment. George is a freelance writer whose articles on pipe collecting have appeared in my magazine."

"It is a pleasure to meet you." Nick replied "I enjoyed your article on searching out old pipes in ancient ruins."

"It is also a pleasure to meet you. Yes, I have written a few minor articles on the locating of pipes. Speaking of which, Chuck has told me that you are looking for a certain special

pipe for your employer. I believe it is the Daughter of Dagon pipe carved by an Old Earth carver named Trever Talbert. If you have the time, we can sit over there near the wall, light up, and I will tell you my story.”

“I will let the two of you chat.” Chuck says “I need to go and talk to Willem Ungar who is working on an article for the magazine on Old Earth meerschaum pipes.” He heads off to the other side of the room.

“That would be fine.” Nick said. They walk over to a secluded table, sit down, and take out their pipes. Nick offers his tobacco pouch to George. George fills his pipe and lights it. Nick does the same.

“I see that you have a liking for Old Earth Charatan pipes” Nick comments.

“Yes I do.” George replies “I find their Double Comfort stem to be most comfortable. This is an excellent tobacco you have.”

“Thanks, it is a plain virginia based tobacco blended with some Isel tobacco. The Isel tobacco is a new condimental tobacco that the Emperor is developing for market.” Nick added.

I have a lead on the ‘Daughter of Dagon’ Talbert pipe and it may be available. One of the people I deal with is a rather strange chap named William Whatley. He is a minor member of the Reichstagen representing his home planet. William Whatley is from the town of Innymouth on the planet Arkhem. His family fortunes have been declining. Let’s face it; there is not much of a market in whale oil and fur. He is down to the end of his financial resources. One of the items he still has is the ‘Daughter of Dagon’ pipe, which has been in his family for centuries, maybe since the days of Old Earth. I can obtain the pipe for the sum of 50,000 solaris for Whatley with a 10,000 solaris finding fee for me. I recognize that this is truly a large amount of money, but I think the rareness of the pipe speaks for itself.”

“The Emperor is very interested in obtaining this specific pipe. I think that the arrangements are doable, however we need assurances that the pipe is genuine.” Nick replies.

“I quite agree that this is a large sum of money and that assurances must be provided that the pipe is genuine.” Herment counters “I would suggest that the two of us travel to Arkhem and meet with William Whatley. I think that he can provide the assurances you need as to the pipe’s authenticity. He is a character I think you will find most interesting.” George said.

“Let’s meet at the spaceport tomorrow at 0700. I have a needle ship at my disposal that we can use for transportation. Please contact Mr. Whatley and let him know of our impending trip.”

They finished their pipes and separated. Nick met with Leo and Varten. He told them of Hermet's discussion and their meeting to travel to Arkhem. He was instructed to offer them the money, with half on delivery and the remainder when the pipe was tested and proven to be genuine.

They wished Nick well on his assignment.

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They had met at the spaceport early in the morning. Both had packed small travel bags. The needle ship had lifted off with no problem. Being of a new design, they only had to get a short distance away from Hayden before making the first jump. The trip to Arkhem was uneventful. They spent their time smoking and reading. Nick sought to draw George out, but had not learned more than that William Whatley had been a long-time acquaintance of George's and that he would find out that there was a certain strangeness about him. Herment explained that as they age, the native people develop a certain abnormality in their appearance, a strangeness, almost bachtrian appearance dubbed the 'Innyrmouth look'.

Two days later the needle ship sat down at the tiny Arkhem spaceport. The space port was just outside the planet's chief city, Innyrmouth. Even though it was late in the afternoon, the town was a dark, damp, dreary place. Nick was amazed that the spaceport was functional. The small military force stationed on Arkhem was hard to keep staffed. Military from off-world could only endure short periods of time stationed on the planet. Eventually they learned to staff it with soldiers that were native to the planet since only they could bear the queerness of the planet and its people.

As they were leaving the ship, George said to Nick "As I have told you, there is strangeness about this planet and the people. You will not find any aircars here. You may not even see a ground car. This planet is one of the most backward in the universe. You do not judge these people by our standards. You will see a certain sameness in their appearance. They do not make friends easily. Most likely, they will not talk to you. You just have to accept the queerness and go on. Do not let their appearances put you off. It may seem fish-like to you, and it is. I suspect that there is a lot of in-breeding taking place on this planet."

They were met at the gate of the spaceport by Crumb, Mr. Whatley's butler in a dilapidated ground vehicle. The groundcar would have been considered an antique on any other planet in the empire. It was a miracle that they could find parts to keep it operational. There was a heavy fog throughout the city of Innyrmouth. They plodded through the dark, dank streets of Innyrmouth. After a while, the old car started to climb up the hill overlooking the ancient, rotting town. They finally reached the top of the overlooking hill and pulled in front of a gate in the wall surrounding a mansion of immeasurable age. The gate and walls were encrusted with heavy growths of eerie vines.

Crumb got out of the car and opened the gate with a large iron key. They passed through, with him re-locking the gate once they were inside.

Crumb pulled up in front of the main portico of the mansion. They got out of the car and stood before two massive wooden doors. The panels of the doors were carved with grotesque figures. Nick recognized one of the carvings as being identical to the Daughter of Dagon pipe. Crumb showed them the way into the foyer. They removed their heavy coats. Crumb escorted them down a long hall. He knocked on the front of the large oak doors to the study/library. He opened the creaking door. They went inside to meet their host.

William Whatley was a tall, thin man in a long, black frock coat. He was smoking an old briar calabash pipe. He welcomed them to his home. Nick thought there was something odd about his appearance. He finally realized that it was his eyes. Besides being bulbous in nature, he noticed that the eyes never blinked. They just stared.

“Gentlemen, please sit down. I hope you have brought your pipes with you. I have some very old tobacco for you to try. It is an old blend named ‘Flower of the Miskatonic’” Whatley said “The Miskatonic River flows through Innyrmouth. Mr. Reardon, George informs me that you are interested in purchasing my ‘Daughter of Dagon’ pipe. I have a number of pipes that you may be more interested in purchasing instead of that pipe. We will take a look at them after dinner. Let me go check on the arrangements. Please sit and enjoy your pipes and tobacco. You may wish to take a look at some of the volumes on the shelves. Some are quite unique.” He added as he left the library.

Nick surveyed the surrounding furnishings of the library. There were hundreds of old volumes in neat rows on the shelves. He saw many strange books covering a wide range of esoteric topics with titles such as “The Necronomicon”, “The Pnakotic Ms.”, “The Book of Nod”, “Cultes Des Goules” and authors such as “von Junst”, “Alhazard”, and “Mobed”. He knew that some of the books had been banned in earlier times. A number of the books appeared like they would disintegrate if they were opened.

“I have been here twice before” George stated “and this room, this planet still gives me the creeps”. I have never seen a sunny day on this planet.”

There host returned. “Dinner will be served in about a half hour. Crumb will show you to your room so that you may wash up and refresh yourselves. I will join you in the dining room promptly at 6:00 P.M.” Whatley said.

Crumb showed them their rooms. They cleaned up and headed back downstairs to the formal dining room. The dinner tasted very good. The three men enjoyed the conversation. Nick discovered that Whatley had grown up on Arkhem, the sole son of rich parents. His father was a Whatley, his mother a Waite from Innyrmouth. His education was off-world and he had been to a number of planets in the empire. Once he hit the age of thirty, his desire to travel off-world disappeared. He had not left Arkhem in the past fifteen years. His business arrangements and investments had taken a beating.

There was very little for Arkhem to offer to the empire. Hence he was selling off some of his properties and personal property. Following dinner, they retired once, again to the library where they had drinks and pipes. Whatley was smoking a rather grotesque pipe shaped as a human skull carved to show bits of skin still attached. Each time he puffed, the eyes in the skull appeared to glow.

Whatley brought out a large rectangular case. He opened the case which held a number of pipes. Several of the pipes were very unusual. "Are you sure that you would not like to purchase one of these? Here is one of Talbert's Halloween pipes. I can do better, price-wise on these pipes."

Nick looked them over very closely. He knew that Leo would have loved to purchase the Halloween pipe, but that was not his assignment. "No, the Emperor has specifically sent me on a mission to purchase the Daughter of Dagon pipe."

Whatley took a strange tamper out of his pocket and tamped the tobacco in his pipe.

"May I take a look at your pipe tamper?" Nick asked. Whatley gave it to him to examine. Nick saw a strange octapoidal, tentacled shaped creature made out of an unknown substance. There was a largish head exhibiting an almost human intelligence. The tentacles ended at the bottom of the tamper standing on a flat surface. "What is it?" Nick asked.

"It is made to resemble Cthulhu, one of the elder gods. Cthulhu will be here when we are all gone." He explained as he traced a strange sign with his hand and returned the tamper to his pocket.

"Well I guess you need to see the pipe you came to purchase." Whatley said in a dejected voice. He walked over to the massive old desk. He took out a skeleton key and opened it, removing a box from a drawer. "This is the pipe you are seeking. It is Talbert's Daughter of Dagon pipe." He gave the box to Nick.

Nick opened the box. Inside the box was the Daughter of Dagon pipe, exactly as it had been shown in the holo. "This is indeed the pipe I was sent to procure. You seem very reticent to part with this pipe. May I ask why?"

"The Daughter of Dagon pipe has been in my family for centuries, perhaps from the day it was carved on Old Earth. My forefather, Ephraim Waite, purchased the pipe from Trevor Talbert, the carver. Now I am an educated man, and I don't believe in ghosts or curses, but there is a story that goes with the pipe. Supposedly the last Whatley will be the one to part the pipe from the family. That may well be the case as I have no living children." He replied.

"The agreed upon sum was for 50,000 solaris to Mr. Whatley and 10,000 solaris to Mr. Hermet. That is a significant sum which may help rebuild your fortune, William. If you still wish to go through with it, I have the contract. Half of the funds will be paid now,

and half upon the pipe passing the verification tests at Empire College.” Nick reminded him.

“What practical choice do I have? My options have about all run out. Give me the paper to sign. You can take the cursed pipe!”

William Whatley and George Herment signed the papers and accepted payment. Negotiable instruments of payment exchanged hands.

They celebrated the completion of the deal with a very old cognac and a fine old pipe tobacco. When the pipes had burned out and the cognac supply ran dry, the men quietly went to their beds.

During the night, Nick was awakened by a strange noise. He walked down the stairs. The massive oak library doors were locked and closed. He stood outside the heavy doors and heard strange noises from inside the room. It sounded like the voices of two men talking; one is William Whatley, the other was at times unintelligent and unidentifiable. An argument was taking place. He heard the other person berating Whatley for selling the Daughter of Dagon pipe, especially to Emperor Leopaldo. They could never get it back from such a powerful human. A struggle ensues. A muffled scream was heard, and then a strange sucking-like sound. Finally he heard the sound of a body falling into a chair. Since the library door was locked from the inside, Nick hurried upstairs and wakes Herment. They went back down the steps to the library. They forced the locked door and entered the darkened room. Inside they see no one. Nick uses a match to light one of the old fashion whale oil lamps. They find Whatley sitting still in his chair. As they turn around to face him, they look at a face, but it is not there. They can see clear through the skull to the back of the winged back leather chair. The horror of the sight draws a strange yell from their throats. They quickly got their belongings and ran out of the house, stealing the old dilapidated automobile.

They returned in haste to the Innyrmouth spaceport. Nick wrote up a report concerning the death of William Whately. It was provided to the military officer in charge, who scoffed at it. Regardless, George and Nick boarded the needleship, and departed Arkhem, bound for Hayden.

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Two days later the needle ship landed at Hayden in the early evening with its crew and valuable cargo. They were whisked through customs and Nick was taken by aircar to the Castle. George Hermet decided to visit the bank and take care of a financial matter. He wished Nick well.

The usual group, Leo, Varten, Nick, Lu Jo, Helen, and Chuck met over pipes in the castle conference room. Leo had decided to celebrate Nick’s homecoming by opening a tin of McClelland 2004 Christmas Cheer. They were all glad to hear the pop when the tin was

opened. They found the tin aroma to be quite enticing. They filled their pipes and lit them anxiously waiting for Nick's story to be told.

Nick did not disappoint them. He told them every detail including the depressing feeling he had while on Arkhem. Helen Chamberlain mentioned that it sounded like a dark Victorian novel to her. Lu Jo, who had read some of the H.P. Lovecraft stories while Nick was away, said that his experience sounded like it was out of one of his books.

Varten began "Nick, I have an interesting report from the Arkhem military base. They informed me that your report regarding the demise of William Whately was investigated. They believe you must have had something bad to eat or were sick and delirious. It seems that they report that Mr. William Whately is fine and that he sends Nick and Leo his regards. He hopes that the Emperor enjoys his new pipe. He also extends to you an invitation to visit him the next time you are in the sector. He also informs us that he looks forward to the completion of the verification tests and obtaining the final agreed upon payment.

"Look, I know what I saw and heard. I saw Whately stone cold dead, without the center of his head. There is something very weird taking place on that planet." Nick replied.

"Nick, Arkhem was always a strange planet. "Leo said "Many strange things have taken place there that are quite unexplainable. The planet has some of the weirdest people that have ever been encountered. There are stories that the inhabitants relocated as a group from Arkham, Massachusetts prior to the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> Age of Man before the destruction of Old Earth. Their religious practices are quite unusual, and there are some unique physiological changes that take place to the inhabitants as they age. They are a pretty closed society. I have met William Whately, and from what I have been told, he is very unusual in that he functions in our world, and in the world of Innyrmouth."

"Strange and unusual do not adequately describe that place and the people" Nick said.

Nick shows them the Daughter of Dagon pipe. All are amazed at the uniqueness, inventiveness, beauty, and yet grotesqueness of the pipe. Leo decides to send it to Dr. England at Empire College for testing the next day. They spent the evening drinking fine cognac and smoking their pipes, filled with Leo's Christmas Cheer.

Late in the evening, Nick and Lu Jo got up to leave. You could hear Lu Jo teasing Nick as they were leaving the room "So, you are afraid of a couple of little ghosties and goblins. All you had to do was pretend it was Halloween." She said as she jabbed him in the side. They headed back to their quarters looking for the little "Do not disturb" sign to hang on the door.

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A week later they again met in the Castle Pesaro conference room. Chuck Stinyon was in attendance since he had remained on Hayden to conduct business.

Varten began by reporting “A communications has been received from the New Berlin authorities. They reopened the investigation on the Robert von Metz suicide. Further investigation and forensic evidence still indicates that his death was a suicide. They have now closed the book on the matter.”

Leo told the group “I have the report from the Empire College Dept. of Antiquities. They have also returned to me the box containing the Daughter of Dagon pipe. Dr. England’s report indicates, with a 97% probability, that the Daughter of Dagon pipe is genuine. All the test results were positive. Send the remaining payment to Messrs. Whatley and Hement, Leo instructs Nick.”

Leo continued “I guess that we can conclude that Donald Trimp’s Rasmussen Gollum pipe is genuine, and that the historical record is just incomplete. There are now three of the Rasmussen Gollum shape pipes that are now known to exist. It also appears that the suspicion surrounding George Hement is unfounded and that the rumors regarding the pipe reproductions being fostered as genuine are just that, rumors. However, we have learned that there is a growing market for true Old Earth pipe reproductions.”

Varten adds “This could create problems. We need to introduce a bill in the Reishstagen to require that any reproductions are to be clearly stamped with an “R” for reproduction, whether it is for pipes or furniture. Failure to meet this requirement will result in a penalty.”

“I quite agree” Leo replied “Have our friends introduce the legislation.”

For the last time, Chuck picks up the Gunnar Rasmussen pipe. “I guess it has to be returned to Donald Trimp as genuine. This will probably be the last time I may have a chance to smoke it.”

“Light it up” Leo says as he proceeds to light up the Daughter of Dagon pipe. “If I start talking or babbling in strange languages, or doing anything unnatural, just take the pipe out of my mouth, call a shaman and say some esoteric chant.”

They all chuckled at his little joke.

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