

SATISFACTION

by
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(aka PIPESTER on IRC #PIPES)

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Prologue

There had been three ages of mankind. The First Age of Man ended with the First Galactic War. The Second Age of Man ended with the Revolt Against Utopia. Mankind was in the Third Age of Man, some 20,000 years since the revolt. The Empire encompassed over 50,000 worlds. The form of government was basically feudal, having an Emperor at its head, a mostly ceremonial legislative body (Reischstagen), and was based more on political alliances between families.

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Emperor Leopaldo XVI, of the dynastic Family Lineaus walked deep into Castle Pesaro. Disturbing reports had filtered in all day. Varten von Eckman, the Emperor's weapons master and chief-of-staff, had reported a rumor he had received concerning an expected attempt on the Emperor's son, Kyle's life. There were inferences that Family Chesterfield, a family with whom there had been a long on-going vendetta, was behind such a plot. He also realized that they would use intermediaries so there would be no way to prove the source of the attack. On the good side, however, he received a message from Johannes Seiler. His family, a noble but minor one in the Reischstagen, had ties within the mercantile directorates. He was known to be able to obtain the unobtainable, through trade and other means. The Emperor had much on his mind as he entered his private study.

He walked into his library, and sat in his comfortable chair before a massive ornate polished oak desk. He had been assured that the oak was genuine, from Old Earth. He chuckled to himself. It was well known that he was a collector of pipes from all over the Universe and a smoker of the high nicotine content golden seaweed that passed these days for tobacco. The journals of the day spoke of his favorite deep brown pipe, carved from Acatian wercarra wood. In-fact, he was the owner of quite a collection of smoking pipes, and even had a small group of ancient briar pipes and a small cache of Old Earth pipe tobacco.

His eyes revolved around the room past the numerous bookcases lining the walls. He still had a large collection of books, even though "hollo-books" had done away with real books many centuries previously. Leopaldo, Leo to his intimates, tried to obtain the real books, as he found he enjoyed them so much more than by getting information from electro-optical means. He had

a number of rare books on pipes and tobacco in his collection, including books by Ehwa, Hacker, Herment, and many others. He also had some journals from ancient times such as Pipe and Tobacco, The Pipe Collector, and the Pipe Smokers Ephemeris. It was a very expensive proposition restoring and maintaining the old books, but it was one of his petty vices. As his eyes continued around the room, they fell on a large mahogany cabinet. Rich in ornate scroll work, it had an optical/thumbprint activated lock. This limited access to the contents to himself, alone, unless one of the devilish Carnish shape-changers could assume his form and fingerprints. Inside the cabinet was his pride and joy: several hundred currently available pipes from many of the known worlds of the universe, plus the jewels of his collection; six pipes from Old Earth.

Pipes from Old Earth were extremely difficult to obtain. During the First Inter-Galactic War, ending the first Age of Man, Old Earth had been ravished and destroyed. The old European heath bush used to make briar pipes and the tobacco plants all went up in a nuclear nightmare. It was the end of the briar pipe and genuine tobacco. Neither the heath bush nor genuine tobacco was found to grow well off of the Earth. Although substitutes were found, and very good ones at that, it was generally agreed among connoisseurs that there was nothing like the real briar pipes and tobacco from Old Earth.

He walked over to the cabinet, activated the eye scan, placed his thumb in the slot, and watched the doors open after his identity was validated. Inside were a number of pipe racks, all full of pipes of every sort. He selected an ancient pipe rack made by a skilled carver named Von-Erck. His eyes grazed lovingly over the six pipes housed in the rack. All were from Old Earth, and all were worth their weight in any of the Universe's rarest commodities. These pipes were the crowning pieces of his collection, worth more than the total holdings of some of the empire's first families.

The Duke knew the history of five of the six ancient pipes. The first pipe was a Savinelli Autograph from a part of Old Earth called Italy. He figured it was from the late 20th century First Age (F.A.). It was a full bent with a beautiful smooth finish. It was a grade 00 pipe. It was one of his favorite smokers, pleasant to hold with a straight grain. Over the centuries, it had colored to a deep, dark brown. The signature on the stem was almost gone, but this added to its uniqueness.

The second and third pipes were made by a company named Dunhill. It was from a political subdivision of Old Earth called England. It had a white spot or dot on the stem, and by studying his reference books, he knew from the code stamped on the pipe, that they were made in 1978 and 1984 F.A., respectively. The first pipe was a group 4 tanshell full bent billiard. The second a group 6 cumberland billiard. Both were very nicely made and smoked well. He knew that Dunhill pipes were made to last, and these had lasted many centuries. He often wondered if the original pipe maker ever envisioned how long their pipes would last?

The fourth pipe in the series was a Castello natural vergin, Shape #65. It also came from Italy and was a full bent billiard. Rough and craggy, it felt fantastic when he smoked it. He was not sure what the little diamond in the stem meant, but liked the appearance of the pipe. He believed that Carlo Scotti really enjoyed making pipes for others to enjoy. He also knew that a Castello with a white stem was one of the most valuable of pipes ever produced, but he also heard rumors

that the head of Family Trego had cornered the black market on them.

The fifth pipe was an enigma to him. The pipe came from an Old Earth political subdivision called Ireland. It was a Peterson Sherlock Holmes Series but had two stems. The first stem was a normal Peterson P-lip. The second stem looked like someone had taken a rasp and filed off the P-lip. From his extensive references on pipes, he knew that the pipes were designed based on those that Peterson thought were smoked during the period of Sherlock Holmes. He also knew that Sherlock Holmes was a fictional character. He had a copy of the rare Christopher Morley edition of Sherlock Holmes stories in his library.

The last of the Old Earth pipes was a complete mystery. The only stampings on it was a "DA". The pipe, a full bent with a screw-type curve on the shank, was very unusual. Sophisticated non-destructive dating techniques placed its carving around 1995 - 2000 F.A. He had Varten, conduct an informational search to find information on the "DA" pipe. There were some references to an IRC #PIPES Chat Channel, and one of the people that frequented it, but nothing concrete. It was also known that the original carver had once has honorable mention in a pipe carving contest sponsored by the old Pipe and Tobacco magazine. No one knew where or by whom the pipe was made.

Inside his mahogany pipe/tobacco cabinet were three drawers. They held about two dozen sealed tins and some loose bags tobacco from Old Earth. They had names like Deep Hollow, Frog Morton, Beacon, Chatsworth, etc. After all these years, they were still nicely aged and preserved since they were held in null-entropy fields. His researches had indicated that most of the really good Old Earth tobacco disappeared around the year 2010 F.A. when the anti-smoking movement took control of the political governments of Old Earth. That which survived was from caches from pipe collectors and those that had the forethought to put it in storage. He could not believe the gross stupidity of the anti-tobacco faction. Nothing that man ever developed was such a stress-breaker as pipe smoking. Everything has risks. Man had learned over the centuries that you cannot make a risk-free society. When they tried to create a Utopian society by turning everything over to computers and machines, the machines soon took control over mankind. Life had not been worth living for the humans, and much of mankind had ended up as slaves to the thinking machines. Thus mankind revolted against the machines. This event marked the end of the Second Age of Man. Nevermore would machines run mankind. But his thoughts went back to the tobacco. Although the pseudo-tobacco, golden nicotine laden seaweed was good, it was just not like real tobacco from Old Earth.

The last drawer in the cabinet held pipe tampers, matches, and pipe cleaners. After all these years, pipe cleaners were still made. Matches were not much used, since all the new pipes came with autoigniters. Since most of the pseudo-tobaccos left no ash, pipe tampers were not really needed, however, since he enjoyed his ancient Old Earth pipes, he had need for pipe tampers. His collection ran the gamut from the old aluminum nail with a flat shovel on the end, to a Ming Kahuna tamper, finally, to some exquisite rare wood tampers made by an artist named Vautrin.

He reached into the cabinet, selected the Dunhill Cumberland to smoke, carefully filled it, pinch by pinch, with a blend named Tom's Red and Black, of which he only had a few ounces left, lit the pipe, and sat back in his chair and enjoyed the taste and aroma.

As he blew smoke rings he thought about the package that he was going to receive. The message from Johannes was rather short"

To: Emperor Leopaldo, Castle Pesaro

From: Johannes, Family Seiler, Pittman IV

A messenger will call on you tonight with a package containing a Castello Shape #84 and some assorted Old Earth tins of real tobacco. If you wish to keep the package, the cost will be dear. You will know the messenger by the password "asp". rosebud

Another Castello Pipe! A shape #84!! He had read the treatise in his library on the collectability of this shape by Messrs. McCain and Davis! He knew that Castello had only made a few of this shape. If the message was true, it would be one great addition to his collection, but at what price? As these thoughts passed through his mind, he sat, smoked, and waited....

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Varten von Eckman entered the library, "Emperor Leopaldo! A courier has arrived from Pittman IV. He is a man named Grey-bo. He gave the correct password, "asp". Isn't that the name of an Old Earth Snake? Killed some queen during the First Age?"

" I believe so, Varten. Admit the courier. Have him sent here. I want you to stay. Be on the alert!"

The Imperial Guards admitted the small man, dressed in the Family Seiler colors, red and brown. Before Leo, he saw a small man wearing the assumed pose of importance. The Emperor indicated for the visitor to sit, opposite his desk, with Varten to Leo's right.

"Would you like some refreshments Gray-bo?"

"No, thank you M'lord, however, if you will permit, I would join you in a pipe."

"Please do. Gra-bo, are you a collector?", asked Leo.

Gray-bo replied " I am somewhat knowledgeable in pipe-lore, and have some Old Earth tobacco".

He took a pipe and a pouch of tobacco out of his jacket pocket .

"May I look at your pipe?" Leo enquired.

"It is a rare pipe from the late 20th century, First Age. It was made by a firm named Yello-bole".

Leo returned the pipe after noting the charred condition of the bowl, and that it badly needed a reaming and a cleaning. Gray-bo filled up the pipe and lit it.

"I have a nice blend that is made from an Old Earth Blend named "half and half" and a pseudo-tobacco from Cottman IX. My associates say that it has the aroma of stall apples from a Salusian Bull!"

Indeed, Leo tended to agree with the opinions of Gray-bo's associates as he found the aroma coming from Gray-bo's pipe quite offensive, but he said nothing.

Leo peered at his visitor, "Enough of the pleasantries, what has Johannes found for me?"

"Emperor Leopaldo! Sixteenth bearer of that venerated name to sit on the Lion Throne. Johannes of the Family Seiler offers you this pipe from Old Earth. It was found in an old derelict vessel. We believe to be from Old Earth. I believe it is a Castello #84 shape, also known as a hawkbill."

Leo checked the security seals on the package, opened the box and saw the most beautiful pipe he had ever seen in the real. He picked it up and studied it. Indeed, it was a smooth finished, Castello #84, KKKK Collection with a castle logo, no. 41.

"Truly, this is one beautiful pipe!" Leo said, "I see that you are a lover of pipes, Gray-bo, what can you tell me about this one?"

"Yes, I do enjoy collecting and smoking pipes, although I do not have the size nor quality of a collection like yours. Sire, your collection is known throughout the Empire!", he said, "The Castello #84 was made in 1988 as indicated from the stampings. A hawkbill is a unique shape. Not many were made. A Collection Grade hawkbill is most rare. Most of the #84 shapes were found in two great collections, however, they disappeared at the end of the First Age of Man, and have not been seen since."

Leo reflected a minute and said "Your knowledge is deep, accurate, and flawless, just as this pipe is!"

"Thanks sire, now the price." he retorted

"The price!" the Leo repeated "What is the price?"

"Emperor Leopaldo, it is known to us that the Oracle and her followers have "seen" that Prince Kyle's first descendent, will be the source of a dynastic line that will threaten their power in the future. They have also "seen" that he will mate between the age of 20 and 22 years of age, and this offspring will be the threat to them. They would like this mating not to happen! The timing is important. There are chemical means to prevent this. It would not be permanent. He could still have an heir, however, it could not be conceived until after that period of time. Then it will not matter. If you will accede to these wishes, the gift is yours!" he stated as if from rote memory.

"This is a handsome gift. It is extremely costly. You know the importance placed on Prince

Kyle having an heir. This is a choice I cannot make alone!" stated the Emperor.

"Varten, summon Prince Kyle to our presence!" ordered the Emperor.

As Gray-bo looked on, Varten summoned the young Kyle to the room using the communicator.

Leo studied Gray-bo intently. The door to the left of the room began to open. As Gray-bo stood up and turned, Leo motioned a command to Varten using a secret sign they had worked out long ago. Two darts sped out from the Weapon Master's sleeves and resided in Gray-bo's neck. He fell over dead from the neuro-toxins on the tip of the darts.

As Kyle entered he exclaimed "Father!" "Varten!" "What has happened?"

"I am not quite sure, Prince Kyle, but a first-order computation indicates that this man, Gray-bo, was the assassin that we feared. Ask your father." responded Varten.

"Varten, if you look you will find some sort of hidden weapon on Gray-bo" Varten looked, and found a small needle blaster under the skin of his right wrist, similar to the one just used.

"Son, Obviously this was a well thought out attempt on your life. If I had declined the "gift", he would have taken your life. If you look, you will see that Gray-bo is really a Carnish shape-changer. The real courier from Johannes is probably dead! I must let Johannes know of the lapse in his security."

"But how did you know?" asked Varten.

"Actually, it is not difficult to figure out! Johannes is an old friend of mine. He has helped me acquire pipes, tobacco, and other odd items from Old Earth in the past. The word "rosebud" in his message indicated that it was genuine", he recanted.

"First, the password "ASP". While you are correct that it is a snake from Old Earth, it is also an acronym for "Alt.Smokers.Pipes" which was an Old Earth computer newsgroup according to my research. In the early days of computers, it was used to disseminate news on pipes and tobacco. We usually use that password, but in the newsgroup sense. This is sort of a built-in security procedure. A real courier would have used it in the sense, as Johannes and I knew it, and mentioned it in our initial conversation."

"Second, a knowledgeable pipe collector would know that a Castello Shape #84 is referred to as a "donkeynut". A pipe of the same shape made by anyone else is a "hawkbill". He obviously never read the monograph by McCain and Davis, who were both donkeynut collectors of note on Old Earth!"

"Third, a Yello-bole pipe was a rather boring pipe, not a great one, and finally, his pipes looked like the remains of a desiccating carcass! He was not a TRUE pipe smoker." he concluded.

"Therefore, Gray-bo was not what he seemed. It appears that the purpose of the visit was for

Gray-bo to get into Prince Kyle's presence and eliminate him, if the "gift" did not do its job! I suspected it at the very beginning, when Gray-bo arrived. This is why I had Varten stay with me. You really were in no danger. When Kyle entered the room I read the intent from his movements and realized it was time for the game to end, hence my instructions to you Varten", Leo explained.

"Amazing Leopaldo!" commented Varten.

"Very instructive" said Kyle.

"Elementary", exclaimed Leo.

"Varten, get rid of Gray-bo's body and send out the usual reprisal messages to those involved. Let them all sweat for a while. I want you to find out who exactly is responsible!" ordered the Emperor.

The body was removed. Varten went off to perform his duties. Prince Kyle left.

Emperor Leopaldo sat behind his desk staring at the Castello Donkeynut. It has been a good day, he thought. One plot foiled. One new, old pipe obtained! Kyle's fate is decided. It's off to my old friend Viscount Hawman on Macamas VI where Kyle can further his education for a year. Maybe if he is gone, the plots will end.

He picked up his new Donkeynut, filled it with some Deep Hollow, lit it and was off to dream land. Satisfactory! Most Satisfactory he thought!

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