



It's not always easy to tell the players from the fauna without a program . . .
by JOSEPH GREEN

"It looks so good it scares me," said First Officer Pasquale Morelli, turning away from the viewscreen to speak to Lars Holmquist. He had just reported to the bridge and received his first look at the planet below. "I'd like to send down a probe ahead of the shuttle."

The captain of the United Man-kind Ship Explorer chuckled. Lars was a Dane, a big and bearded blond throwback to Viking ancestors, the image spoiled somewhat by a developing middle-aged paunch. He glanced at his console chronometer, rose to his feet, and in his somewhat formal World English said, "You are in command as of now, Pat; you may do as you think best. I ask one favor. When you conclude that it is indeed safe, please schedule Margarete and I for the first week of R&R."

"Well, at least you asked," said Pat, grinning up at his much taller superior. In contrast, he was short, lean, and darkly olive. "Take Deerheart down with you, too. She got bored and overworked herself on those analyses from Jungeland."

"I see no reason why Deerheart and all the other scientists should not go downside for the full two weeks. Crewmen, of course, will take one week each." Lars sounded slightly resentful, and Pat repressed a smile. As a member of the flight crew, married to a scientist, he knew the appearance of privilege was illusory, that under normal circumstances the scientific contingent worked harder and longer than the spacemen. Lars's wife, Margarete, had a foot in both camps.

The captain left for a short nap, and Pat spoke to the engineering duty officer on the intercom. The probes were specialized into biological, geological, atmospheric, and general underwater versions. He ordered a biological launched. Within five minutes the engineer had one calibrated to the planet, programmed, and on its way. Heavily protected, it shed orbital speed by atmospheric friction. In less than fifteen minutes the probe was flying above the treetops, scanning the terrain and relaying the picture and other data to the Explorer. The operator hunted a place to land before its meager fuel supply was exhausted. When a clearing appeared he promptly set it down, and activated the soil analyzer and microscope. The bacteria detector had been sampling the air through the latter part of the flight.

The Explorer's low orbit took it out of range just four minutes after the landing, and the probe automatically went to the storage mode. Pat enjoyed the lovely scenery for an hour, and called for a data dump into the computer as soon as the probe's carrier wave was picked up on the second orbit. The ship's giant banks did the secondary analyses, the synthesis, and the integration. By the time they were passing over the probe Pat had to concede that the world below was better suited for human

occupancy than Earth itself.

This unnamed planet circled a G4 star slightly smaller than Sol. There were only two major planets, exactly opposite each other in very stable 80-million mile orbits. They had entered the system at a point that put the other world 160-million miles away, and barely scanned it before it was lost behind the sun. This star was a heavy rf emitter and interference had ruined all data except the visual, but they had determined its size and orbit; a twin to the one below. The astronomer was analyzing the input to see if the opposite world had moons. This one had four medium-sized satellites, in orbits that ensured at least one always being above the horizon. The average albedo was 0.14, double that of Luna; this world had beautiful moonlit nights. It also had a dense animal population to enjoy them. There were more life forms than the ship's biological section could properly classify in a lifetime, many of them large and potentially dangerous. The microscopic life, far more to be feared, was benign to the limit of the ship's computer to extrapolate. There was always the risk of an entirely new or undetected disease, but all spacefarers had the added protection of a "tame" virus in the bloodstream that viciously attacked intruding organisms.

The scene from the probe's slowly turning camera was being relayed to the flight-deck's main screen. The little clearing it had landed in was on the shore of a small lake, in a sandy area where the bottom seemed almost free of plant growths and there was a lovely small beach. Tall hardwood trees grew thickly on every side. The grass appeared thick and rich, and there was little brush. As Pat watched, one of the larger animals the camera had already spotted approached the probe, staring curiously at the camera. The operator stopped its rotation and the creature walked directly toward the lens, completely unafraid. It was a biped about five feet in height, a lean, hard figure of compact muscles and bird-like tendons, covered from head to knee joint with a thin blanket of soft down. Huge brown eyes stared into the camera lens, growing enormous on the large screen. The face was dominated by a short, broad beak, and the head was large and round. Instead of true wings it had articulated upper limbs ending in horny talons. The creature's erect posture and four limbs made it seem almost humanoid, but it walked with a rhythmic, jerky movement that betrayed omithoid origins.

Pat had only a moment to study the curious biped. The probe relayed a whistling, screeching sound from out of camera sight, and the animal suddenly turned and ran back the way it had come. In full flight it moved with incredible swiftness, the slim lower legs and three-toed feet only a blur to the eye; in seconds it vanished among the trees. The camera caught a brief glimpse of two pursuing figures; they appeared to be members of the same species.

When they lost the probe again Pat ordered the shuttle prepared for flight. The cheerfully feminine voice of Lhasa Chungita, the shuttle specialist, informed him it had been ready for two hours.

"I'm about to post the duty roster for the first week, and the name of Ras Chungita is prominently on top," Pat told her. "You have to stay down with the shuttle, of course." Both Ras and Lhasa were members of the crew, the only two among the eight not married to a member of the Explorer's twenty scientists.

"You're a liar, and a dirty old man besides," Lhasa's happily insubordinate voice crackled over the intercom. "Announce the three unlucky souls who are staying with you and let the rest of us go."

Pat chuckled, and broke the connection. Lhasa knew him too well to have taken the threat of separate Rest & Recreation for the Chungitas seriously. He buzzed the Holmquist cabin, and knew the captain was asleep when it was quickly answered by Margarete. She was a physiological researcher who doubled as ship's M.D. The Holmquists were packed and awaiting his signal.

On the next approach to the probe the shuttle dropped away, leaving only Pat and three crewmen—the least of whom had a master's degree in an engineering discipline—manning the Explorer.

Pat knew the entire ship's company badly needed the R&R. They had left the KO component of 40 Eridani four months back, and this system was the last one they would pass near on the way home. While making the relatively short trips between the stars in their assigned survey area they had abandoned the regular travel routine. Instead of four hours of 2.5G in the Accel or Decel Mode, followed by six hours of 0.4G in Rotation Mode, they had operated for months on a basis of four hours each. Every person on board was both physically tired and mentally bored. Even 2.5Gs was hard on the human body when the stress endured for several hours, and confinement to the accel couches grew very monotonous. This

system was on their second priority schedule, and Lars had decided they would not work while here. On leaving they would have accel periods for four months, coast one, and decel for another four to Earth. Two weeks of freedom under 1 G seemed a good investment in morale. Pat, Lars, and the six crewmen would have only one week each, but that was far better than nothing.

And the first four unlucky ones settled down to a monotonous week of routine maintenance, performing some chores that were best handled in zero-G.

On the morning of the fifth day Deerheart Morelli made a personal call to Pat when the U.M.S. Explorer orbited into radio range. After an exchange of endearing words she said, "I really called to tell you a snake has slithered into our little garden. The behavior of these large land-birds has Lars and Anse Hardy worried. The things seem completely unafraid of us, and there are thousands of them around. If they should decide to attack . . . We already keep a nightwatch against the larger carnivores, but my chief has Lars worried enough that he's told us to capture one and see what we can learn. We're going to rig some traps today."

"You mean you had to go to work? You poor overstressed kid," said Pat, who had just finished helping two shipmates pull a very bulky deuterium pump and replace a leaking seal. "Any other problems?"

"Don't be a null. No real problems here, except"—she made a kissing sound—"that I miss you."

"You will stop missing me and enjoy yourself. And that's an order!" Pat growled in his best First Officer manner. Actually only Lars held authority over the scientists. Deerheart's real boss was Anscombe Hardy, the chief biologist.

She sent him another kiss and broke the connection. Pat went back to work, somewhat puzzled. Anse Hardy was a known fussbudget and worrier, but it was not like Lars to order someone to work when they were supposed to be relaxing.

On the seventh day Deerheart called again. They had made their traps but failed to catch a single Fastie, as they had dubbed the over-large landbirds. Anse Hardy was getting upset because the two assistant biologists did not have their hearts in the assigned work. Everyone else was hugely enjoying the R&R, and the four, who could only stay a week, were lamenting their hard luck.

On the second orbit on the eighth day the shuttle gently fitted itself into its cut-out in the central hull, and Lars resumed command. Pat said hello to the Chungitas and the fourth crewman, who had had to leave her scientist husband below, and gave Lars a detailed status report. Although he was in a hurry to join Deerheart, Pat asked Lars why they were worried about the large land-birds.

The tall captain hesitated, then said slowly, "It is the oddness of their behavior that worries Anse and me, Pat. They are . . . disturbing. Sometimes they simply run around like any animal, eating or loafing, but at others . . . they gather into massed teams, almost like armies, and play complicated games. We had not realized they could organize and coordinate their actions that well. If they should decide to attack as a body, the landing party could be wiped out. Anse convinced me it was best to capture and examine one, but so far they have not succeeded."

Inability to capture a large land-bird when there were thousands around did seem odd. Pat decided it was not his problem, and concentrated on getting himself and his three companions down to the surface. He was an alternate shuttle operator, and the only one available. The versatile craft had to land vertically, there being no open area nearby for a horizontal runway. It taxed Pat's skill to set its four legs down in the small space available. When he finally killed the rockets and felt the shuttle settle solidly upright, he had to wipe sweat off his forehead. Pat hurried down the access ladder in Leg Three, to find a nearly nude Deerheart waiting amidst fitfully burning grass at its base. Her long and very black hair hung free to her shoulders, and a large white feather stood casually upright from a band around her forehead.

After a long and joyful kiss, the first thing Deerheart told Pat was that they still had not captured a Fastie. Anscombe Hardy had decided a dissection would do as well as a live examination, and wanted to shoot one. She had stubbornly resisted the idea, insisting the traps would eventually work. Her reasons were part reluctance to kill an alien creature obviously not far from intelligence, and part worry about the consequences. If killing one made the others hostile, the humans' vacation might be cut short.

Pat held his short, strongly built wife in his arms—Deerheart weighed slightly more than he did—and examined the camp. The area that had been held clear for the shuttle took up most of the open space, except for the gently sloping beach. The small lake was far prettier than it had appeared on the viewscreen; the expended probe rested on the grass a short distance from the water. The tall hardwood trees were majestic and stately. They seemed to have crowded out most of the usual brush, giving an almost cathedral-like air of spaciousness under their branches. The temperature was pleasant, and the breeze carried an odor first cousin to pine. Leantos, plastic tents, and various other shelters were scattered around the general vicinity. It would have been a restful woodland scene at any time. To people facing eight months of grinding acceleration periods to Earth, it was the next thing to paradise.

The other three crewmen were enthusiastically greeting their wives and husbands. Most of the people in the camp, like Deerheart, wore a bare minimum of clothing. Pat saw that her coppery skin had reddened slightly from the sun, and despite the fact she was supposed to be working she looked happy and carefree.

A two-legged creature almost as tall as Deerheart broke from the nearby trees and streaked toward them, moving with almost incredible speed. Two more appeared, apparently converging to head it off. Deerheart also saw the runners, noted his alarm, and turned in his arms to say, "Nothing to be afraid of; watch."

It was close, but the Fastie in the lead reached them just inches ahead of the grasping talons of the two pursuers. It stopped near Deerheart, not touching her but standing close. The other two swerved away and continued across the clearing, disappearing on the opposite side.

"Pat, try to grab it," Deerheart said softly. She made no move herself.

He had already partially turned to face the creature. This close it seemed more humanoid than he had realized, primarily because it stood upright; in motion it leaned forward, far more like a bird. It was breathing rapidly but evenly, and seemed completely unafraid of the larger humans.

That heavy beak looked dangerous, but Pat decided he could probably hold it until help came. He jumped.

Pat might as well have tried grasping the gentle breeze blowing in off the lake. As he made his first motion, lifting his arms and leaning forward, the Fastie darted sideways. It stopped, watching with the huge brown eyes as Pat aborted the move and caught his balance, and then streaked back the way it had come. The animal went from stillness to dazzling speed in a second. It vanished in the woods.

Feeling somewhat foolish, Pat turned back to his wife. Deerheart was smiling slightly. She said, "Don't feel outdone; no one has come close to catching one."

"It's the fastest thing on two feet I've ever seen," Pat conceded ruefully. "And I'm no animal psychologist, but that bit of running to us to be sheltered from its pursuers seems very strange. You'd think it would be more afraid of us than members of its own species."

Deerheart linked her arm with Pat's, drawing him toward a lean-to near the shore. "You just think that one's fast. I've dropped a hand-released rope net on one, watched it touch his shoulders ... and he vanished! Actually moved so fast he blurred before my eyes, and then was gone."

"Can't you shoot one with a paralysis hypo?" asked Pat.

"No, beloved idiot." She gestured for him to be seated on a mattress of springy boughs covered by a blanket, under the shade of the slanted roof. "I haven't the faintest notion of how our drugs would affect one. Any given dose could be fatal, or completely ineffective. Now I'll be happy to supply the right potion after you catch one and give me a blood sample."

"Thanks a lot. What does your boss plan to do?"

Deerheart shrugged. "Anse is going to shoot one tomorrow if no luck with the traps, and I'm a little ... afraid. They're just too darn near human. I think they'd rate above the dog, or porpoise, in intelligence, but we've never encountered a semi-intelligent ornithoid before and have no established behavior patterns for comparison. I trust you noticed the wing tips have evolved into talons with an excellent grasping ability?"

"Yes, but there's something you haven't grasped," said Pat, stretching out comfortably and relaxing. "I'm on vacation. Let me know when you catch one."

But Deerheart dug him unmercifully in the ribs, and when he rolled away, yelping in pain, she laughed at him and ran into the water. He eventually caught and thoroughly dunked her, but knew there was no getting out of helping his wife.

Next morning Pat, who had had some experience in capturing animals for zoos as a college student, studied the four traps Anscombe and Deerheart had improvised. All were of the net type, and he could see nothing wrong with them. Three were activated by trip-ropes and the fourth by a hand-pulled release. While they are examining the third one two Fasties appeared, moving slowly for once, and walked directly toward the horizontal trigger cord. Both stepped over the hidden line with a casualness that seemed to border on contempt.

Anscombe Hardy joined them while they were checking the hand-released net. He was carrying a laser rifle. The chief biologist was the oldest person on board the Explorer, though only forty-seven. Pat had little liking for him, primarily because the scientist seemed to have developed mental hardening of the arteries. The U.M.S. Explorer had investigated fourteen star systems in its assigned area. Eleven possessed planets, and life existed on a total of sixteen, life in such bountiful profusion and strange forms that the three biologists could not have hoped to do more than scan it in a lifetime. Three of the worlds were inhabited by primitive humanoids with rudimentary civilizations. Nowhere, however, was there any sign of another species even approaching the machine technology stage. And the Explorer's chief biologist had decided Homo sapiens as unique in the galaxy, and, therefore, superior.

It was an old and familiar attitude, one that colored a person's thinking in innumerable subtle ways. In Pat's opinion it was also premature. The Search and the Quest had departed Earth with the Explorer, and since only a self-propelled solid object could exceed the Einsteinian limitation, their radio reports would arrive at Earth some forty or fifty years after the ships completed their three-year voyages. The data was dispatched only as a safety factor, in case the ship itself did not return. But it was quite possible they would arrive home with their own reports and learn one or both the other ships had contacted civilizations equal to Man's. Anscombe Hardy had dismissed the possibility from his mind.

There were no Fasties in sight at the moment. They seemed to come and go in odd patterns, sometimes acting as loose groups, at others as individuals. Only twice had they been observed to mass into what resembled armies, and the encounters between the three opposing forces had taken place well away from the camp. Ras Chungita had observed and reported on one. All Fasties in the area had apparently been there, and the three groups had met and mingled in complicated move and countermove, advance and retreat, the motions occurring at top speed. The human eye had been unable to follow individual actions, but Ras had seen a large number drop out and later leave the area. Not one Fastie had been hurt or killed, though many collapsed and lay on the grass a time before leaving.

It sounded like a mating ritual to Pat, the equivalent of the "King of the Hill" selection process used by several species of deer on Earth. Deerheart, with her vastly superior knowledge of animal behavior, assured him there were more differences than similarities between the reported actions and those of her namesakes.

"Are you absolutely determined to shoot one, Anse?" asked Deerheart. She sounded more annoyed than disrespectful of her official chief's authority.

"Yes, yes indeed I am," Anscombe replied testily, clutching the gun as though it were a strange new toy. In fact, Pat knew the biologist was a very good shot. The older man was short and sturdy as a keg, with a balding pate and very wide shoulders. He had made a lucky discovery as a graduate student, and ridden his fame into a sinecure as department head of biological sciences at the University of Mankind.

"I really don't understand your reluctance, Deer," Anscombe went on, his voice fretful. "You are certainly not displaying a very professional attitude."

Deerheart shrugged. "The ancestral voices of my people are warning me, Anse. There's an old Indian saying that goes, 'Better to fight the big wolf than the little wolverine, for the wolf is what he appears but the small stinking one is death in disguise.'" Anse Hardy looked baffled, and Pat had to hide a smile. Deerheart made up her old Indian sayings to suit the occasion.

There was a sudden jarring, savage scream to Pat's left. He whirled in time to see a flying body land on the shoulders of a Fastie who had appeared beneath a tree a hundred feet away. The low branch on

which the cat had hidden was still swinging from the recoil.

The hunter's paralyzing cry had done its work. For a second sheer fright had immobilized the victim, and the Fastie went down beneath the hurtling weight. Pat, though his biology was limited, realized they were watching a night-prowler who had missed his kill and continued the hunt into the day. The humans kept their camp well-lighted and a guard posted, just in case the strangeness of their smell was not enough to discourage carnivores such as this one. No one knew where the Fasties went when darkness fell, but in the day-time their astonishing speed kept them safe from meat-eaters. This one had been caught quite unprepared.

The big cat had his claws locked in the down-covered shoulders. Pat saw the gleaming fangs in the open mouth as the hunter struck at the neck, saw the frantically writhing or-nithoid thrust a protecting arm between his throat and the seeking jaws—and the long teeth closed on empty air. The Fastie had vanished.

The cat lost its balance, fell on one shoulder, and sprang erect, howling in comic outrage. The passion of the kill had vanished as abruptly as the victim. As Pat watched, not quite believing his eyes, the carnivore trotted in a short circle around the ambush site, visibly sniffing for a trail. Baffled, it sat on its haunches and looked up into the trees. After a moment it whined like a discouraged dog and trotted away, tail dragging.

"Would one of you two explain that to me?" asked Pat. Deerheart and Anscombe were staring at each other, faces equally bewildered.

"I wish I could!" Deerheart said fervently. "Now we have an unknown factor; how did it wiggle out of the claws and then use its speed to vanish? Still going to shoot one, Anse?"

"Why yes, certainly!" the chief biologist looked baffled but determined. "It must have a very loose skin, as many bird species do, and endured some injuries to rip itself free of the claws. Possibly it moved behind that brush to the right on all fours and with the same speed it exhibits while erect, so that to us it seemed to literally vanish. You look skeptical; do you have a better explanation?"

"No, but I'd rather be without one than accept a rationalization like that!" Deerheart said, her voice rising. "I don't want to be there when you shoot one, Anse. I'm afraid of what may happen to you."

"Then you had better be leaving," Anscombe said coldly, raising the rifle butt to his shoulder. "There's one now."

Another Fastie, apparently identical to the first, had appeared and was walking toward the spot where the attack had occurred. For a Fastie he was moving quite slowly. As Anscombe sighted on him Pat acted on an impulse he could not explain, and abruptly thrust a hand against the gun's stock. The ornithoid looked up and saw the humans, just as a beam of bluish light burned past his face and obliterated a patch of leaves behind him. The Fastie vanished.

"What did you do that for!" demanded Anscombe angrily, lowering the gun and turning on Pat. "I'll file interference charges against you, Mister!"

"I think I can justify assuming Lars's authority when he isn't here," Pat said calmly. "File any charges you please. For now, I'm taking the gun." And he suited action to word by pulling it out of the other man's grasp. "You will confine yourself to non-harmful means of examining the landbirds, Mr. Hardy. And that's an order!"

"You . . . you have no right!" Anscombe spluttered indignantly. "You are not my superior! I—" And then a Fastie appeared by Pat's elbow and yanked the laser out of his hands. The creature vanished as abruptly as it had come, taking the gun. Behind them there were surprised yells from the camp. Alarmed, Pat hurried back to the main group, Deerheart and Anscombe at his heels.

It took only a moment for Pat to sort the tangled reports and realize what had happened. A Fastie had suddenly appeared near every human who possessed a weapon, including knives and other cutting instruments. Every item had been suddenly and forcefully plucked out of its owner's grasp, and the thief had vanished into thin air.

Pat looked around at the beautiful scene. The golden sunlight was playing across the surface of the little lake, and quartz grains sparkled on the sandy beach. The woods were cool and green and lovely, and a gentle breeze fluttered leaves that lived and breathed.

Pat did some rapid mental calculations. There would be just time to prepare for liftoff before the Explorer rose above the horizon on its third orbit of the day. He turned to the scientists and crewmen and said, "Pack up! We're lifting off in thirty-five minutes. All leaves are canceled and all personnel will be in the shuttle by 10:45."

There were surprised and angry protests, especially from the three crewmen Pat had brought down with him, but little real resistance. A lurking air of danger had enveloped the ship's company, lying like a fearful haze over the sylvan glade and tranquil water. All were ready before the last minute, most of the temporary possessions they had acquired being left in the camp. Deerheart at first had seemed as puzzled as the rest, but she gave Pat a large wink when they were strapped in the accel couches. He had a strong hunch she understood the situation.

Anscombe Hardy did not. In a muttered undertone he had informed Pat he was going to file a protest with Lars Holmquist.

The timing required that Pat lift off before the Explorer came into radio range, which saved him one possible argument. By the time he contacted Lars he was almost out of the atmosphere, and rapidly gaining orbital speed. The shuttle had an excellent communications system, and Pat set the multipurpose antenna to its widest scanning range and began recording. He also used the computer to select an intersecting orbit that required they pass between the nearest moon and the continent they were leaving. Twenty minutes after lift-off he was using the attitude jets to ease the shuttle into its locks. Five minutes after that he, Deerheart, and Anscombe Hardy were facing Lars on the bridge.

"What happened, Pat?" asked Lars quietly. "Why did you perform an emergency liftoff?"

"There's also the matter of the charges I am filing for his interference with a scientist!" Anscombe broke in before Pat could answer. "The work being performed was at your specific order, Lars. He's guilty of insubordination as well!"

"Please be quiet, Anse," Lars said, without raising his voice. "Pat?"

Instead of answering Pat extended his hand. When Lars took the proffered container he said, "That's a tape of a very tight beam Extra-High Frequency transmission I recorded on the way up, Lars. It will show a simple triggering signal from the surface, and a response from the closest moon that contains waveforms I think you'll find too complex for analysis. But I can tell you what the second one is; the operating beam of a matter transmitter."

Lars's normally grave expression became more so. Matter transmitters were only a theoretical principle on Earth. "Are you saying the Fasties operate such a transmitter from that moon, Pat?"

"I'd say probably every moon, so that there's always one available," Pat answered. "When we head for home I suggest we focus our main antenna on the twin of this planet. I predict we'll find the entire spectrum full of signals."

"Which were masked by the sun because of the angle of our approach!" Deerheart chimed in.

"Are you saying these ... these overgrown birds are intelligent beings?" Anscombe demanded incredulously. "Surely you can't be serious! Why they haven't even developed enough to wear clothes! There were no tools, no artifacts, no . . . you're insane!"

"Oh, I think there were artifacts, Anse; we just couldn't see them. I think every Fastie on the surface has a little transmitter implanted under his skin somewhere, probably with a direct contact to the brain. I think they were always in touch with a tight-beam relay on the surface, one that amplified their very weak personal signals and sent them on to the matter transmitter. When that terrific physical speed couldn't get one out of danger he transported himself back to the Moon.

"Hasn't it dawned on you what that planet below is, Anse?" Pat went on. "Don't you understand why the Fasties go nude and have no weapons? The whole darn world is a vacation resort! It's a play planet for a species that's got a little further up the ladder than we have, a place where they can go back to nature and relax and enjoy the primitive life. I'll also predict that the twin world is crowded, everyone's favorite relaxation is some form of physical sport—and their games are played primarily over here!"

"Then I do not understand why they allowed us to orbit and land, interfere with their games," said Lars. "If they are that advanced why did they not communicate with us, send us on our way if they were not interested in making friends?"

"Your guess is as good as mine here, but I'll make one," said Pat. "I think it's not a part of their cultural norm to attempt contact with strangers. When we arrived and landed on their vacation resort they accepted us as a new factor in their games, just as they've worked on the carnivores and other animals. Their reluctance to transmit out of a game—they used the ability only when a life was threatened—makes me think there's a point penalty involved, some detriment to winning the particular game they're playing. When they decided we were actually dangerous they transmitted freely enough, and re-lieved us of our weapons."

"That was after Anse was idiot enough to try to shoot one," Deerheart said tartly. The chief biologist gave her an angry scowl.

"I'll make a final recommendation," Pat went on, relaxing when he saw no disbelief on Lars's bearded features. "Let's get the heck out of here and let the next survey ship try to contact the home planet. We've made fools of ourselves by not recognizing them, we tried to shoot one, and we interfered with their recreation and maybe cost some favorite team points. We've done enough damage for one crew. I don't feel safe here, and if they'll let us leave without interference I think we should be on our way."

Lars turned and ordered the helmsman to prepare to leave orbit. Anscombe hurried away, throwing Deerheart an unforgiving scowl over his shoulder. Pat smiled at his wife, and moved to the communications console himself. He wanted to set it for as complete a recording of rf data from the twin planet as its capacity permitted. And he would dispatch it immediately on to Earth; the news that a high civilization had been found would arrive whether they did or not.

But he had a feeling they would make it safely home, and he and Deerheart would again enjoy a brisk game of tennis on a very civilized plastifoot court. Every culture to its own.