

LITTLE FUZZY

Words: 1010

by H. Beam Piper

Victor Grego crushed out his cigarette slowly and deliberately.

“Yes, Leonard,” he said patiently. “It’s very interesting, and doubtless an important discovery, but I can’t see why you’re making such a production of it. Are you afraid I’ll blame you for letting non-Company people beat you to it? Or do you merely suspect that anything Bennett Rainsford’s mixed up in is necessarily a diabolical plot against the Company and, by consequence, human civilization?”

Leonard Kellogg looked pained. “What I was about to say, Victor, is that both Rainsford and this man Holloway seem convinced that these things they call Fuzzies aren’t animals at all. They believe them to be sapient beings.”

“Well, that’s—” He bit that off short as the significance of what Kellogg had just said hit him. “Good God, Leonard! I beg your pardon abjectly; I don’t blame you for taking it seriously. Why, that would make Zarathustra a Class-IV inhabited planet.”

“For which the Company holds a Class-III charter,” Kellogg added. “For an uninhabited planet.”

Automatically void if any race of sapient beings were discovered on Zarathustra.

“You know what will happen if this is true?”

“Well, I should imagine the charter would have to be renegotiated, and now that the Colonial Office knows what sort of a planet this is, they’ll be anything but generous with the Company....”

“They won’t renegotiate anything, Leonard. The Federation government will simply take the position that the Company has already made an adequate return on the original investments, and they’ll award us what we can show as in our actual possession—I hope—and throw the rest into the public domain.”

The vast plains on Beta and Delta continents, with their herds of veldbeest—all open range, and every ’beest that didn’t carry a Company brand a maverick. And all the untapped mineral wealth, and the untilled arable land; it would take years of litigation even to make the Company’s claim to Big Blackwater stick. And Terra-Baldur-Marduk Spacelines would lose their monopolistic franchise and get sticky about it in the courts, and in any case, the Company’s import-export monopoly would go out the airlock. And the squatters rushing in and swamping everything—

“Why, we won’t be any better off than the Yggdrasil Company, squatting on a guano heap on one continent!” he burst out. “Five years from now, they’ll be making more money out of bat dung than we’ll be making out of this whole world!”

And the Company’s good friend and substantial stockholder, Nick Emmert, would be out, too, and a Colonial Governor General would move in, with regular army troops and a complicated bureaucracy. Elections, and a representative parliament, and every Tom, Dick and Harry with a grudge against the Company would be trying to get laws passed—And, of course, a Native Affairs Commission, with its nose in everything.

“But they couldn’t just leave us without any kind of a charter,” Kellogg insisted. Who was he trying to kid—besides himself? “It wouldn’t be fair!” As though that clinched it. “It isn’t our fault!”

He forced more patience into his voice. “Leonard, please try to realize that

the Terran Federation government doesn't give one shrill soprano hoot on Niffenheim whether it's fair or not, or whose fault what is. The Federation government's been repenting that charter they gave the Company ever since they found out what they'd chartered away. Why, this planet is a better world than Terra ever was, even before the Atomic Wars. Now, if they have a chance to get it back, with improvements, you think they won't take it? And what will stop them? If those creatures over on Beta Continent are sapient beings, our charter isn't worth the parchment it's engrossed on, and that's an end of it." He was silent for a moment. "You heard that tape Rainsford transmitted to Jimenez. Did either he or Holloway actually claim, in so many words, that these things really are sapient beings?"

"Well, no; not in so many words. Holloway consistently alluded to them as people, but he's just an ignorant old prospector. Rainsford wouldn't come out and commit himself one way or another, but he left the door wide open for anybody else to."

"Accepting their account, could these Fuzzies be sapient?"

"Accepting the account, yes," Kellogg said, in distress. "They could be."

They probably were, if Leonard Kellogg couldn't wish the evidence out of existence.

"Then they'll look sapient to these people of yours who went over to Beta this morning, and they'll treat it purely as a scientific question and never consider the legal aspects. Leonard, you'll have to take charge of the investigation, before they make any reports everybody'll be sorry for."

Kellogg didn't seem to like that. It would mean having to exercise authority and getting tough with people, and he hated anything like that. He nodded very reluctantly.

“Yes. I suppose I will. Let me think about it for a moment, Victor.”

One thing about Leonard; you handed him something he couldn't delegate or dodge and he'd go to work on it. Maybe not cheerfully, but conscientiously.