

The Jahxx

I probably shouldn't have agreed to this. I haven't talked on record about the Jahxx since they left - and that was forty-nine years ago.

But when a prestigious magazine sends a nubile little cookie like you to work on an old man's vanity - not to mention his hypothetical libido - who can say no? I never could resist a petite blonde with a tape recorder.

Besides, as of eight months ago, I'm the only living soul (on earth, anyway) who was in that final meeting with the Jahxx. I can have the last word, and no one can contradict me. Those are privileges rarely granted to anyone, let alone an obsolete bureaucrat.

So, let me get out my scrapbook to jog my memory. I'll talk - you record.

Since most of your readers weren't around when it happened, I guess I'd better begin at the beginning. Of course it's in all the history books, but let's do this my way.

It started on a crisp winter day in New York. One of those days when you can hope spring will eventually come and don't think of the slushy, sloppy winter. Why they ever put the UN there...

Oh, I guess I'd better identify myself for readers who don't know. Although I'm in the history books - right up there with Benedict Arnold and Vidkun Quisling. I wonder if their place in history is as unjust as mine. Anyway, I am the famous (I'm telling this story - I refuse to say infamous) Dr. Melvin Green. Erstwhile Director of the United Nations Bureau for Extraterrestrial Relations (UNBEXTREL).

Nobody had heard of UNBEXTREL before that January morning fifty years ago. My Directorship was a comfortable niche in the UN labyrinth for an unambitious 32-year-old Ph.D. who liked to travel and look at stars. The only responsibilities were to speak to those interested in such things and prepare position papers for the SecGen's office when peculiar things happened somewhere in the world. It was a fairly anonymous post - in those days the UN didn't give choice jobs to Americans.

Back to my story - the Jahxx landed about 9:00 AM in Sheep Meadow in Central Park. Their ship was about 60 meters in diameter and 15 meters high at its thickest point - what we used to call a "Flying Saucer". The landing drew quite a crowd. Even the most jaded New Yorkers weren't that blasé, and they lost no time. The first graffiti was put on the saucer within minutes after the landing. The first "PRESERVE SHEEP MEADOW - SAUCERS GO HOME" picket signs were in evidence by noon.

I was an early arrival on the scene. Just luck - I was in the Park for my morning jog (look it up in an old dictionary - "jogging" was a custom of the time) when the ship landed.

I saw it coming, and made it to Sheep Meadow in record time. I was trying to catch my breath as it settled into place and crowds began to form.

I was in an agony of indecision. I couldn't leave. On the other hand, how could the United Nations' ranking representative on the scene greet the first Ambassador from the Stars in a sweaty jogging suit!?!?

Well, police showed up and started stretching those nifty yellow "Police Line - Do Not Cross" tapes all over the place and officiously pushing the crowd back to a safe distance (how did they know the safe distance from a flying saucer?). I had quite a battle to keep my place. Fortunately, I had my UN ID card and it was sufficiently impressive that I was allowed to remain within the barricade.

The mayor and his entourage soon showed up. They must have really rushed, because they even beat the TV reporters to the location. Luckily for Mankind, the Press arrived before anything more happened.

I'm sure you've seen this famous photo of the scene. There are the police struggling to hold back the crowd and keeping a wary eye on the saucer. There is the mayor and his crowd dressed for the occasion and trying to look as if they have everything under control. And if you look carefully at the

mayoral grouping, you can see a slight, bespectacled figure in a jogging suit, waving his ID, trying to stay up front with the officials. That's me.

Actually, I was suffering a severe attack of *deja vu*. I was expecting Gort, followed by Klaatu, to come forth and destroy all the police weapons. The setting was the same as the movie (look it up - "The Day the Earth Stood Still", circa 1955), except the scene was in New York, in color and no one had thought to call for tanks. I'm sure they would have - had there been time.

Just about when the crowd was settling in for a long wait, a small door opened and a set of stairs unfolded. In a few seconds Bork climbed to the ground. He was astonished to see all the graffiti on his ship, but recovered and turned to face the crowd. Bork was a medium person. Medium height, medium weight, medium salt-and-pepper hair cut to medium length. He was wearing a sky-blue uniform similar to a stylized jogging suit. He reminded me of an astronaut. Not surprising, I suppose, but somehow unsatisfactory.

The whole thing had happened in a hundred movies, and a thousand books. I just knew what was next - the "take me to your leader" speech in flawless English, with just enough accent to make it slightly exotic. Sure enough...

"People of Earth, the Federation of Jahxx greets you. We come in pieces to bring you the stars. I will now meet with your leaders."

Naturally, the VIP's inside the barricade surged forward to greet the Man from the Stars. It was a shock to everyone when Bork picked me out of the group, walked up to me, shook my left hand, and handed me a business card. I still have it.

**** Business Card ****

I wasn't sure what was expected, so I dug in my wallet and gave him one of my cards. He was very pleased. This was the first of many times the Jahxx would have our customs, like our language, almost correct. You never knew what quite what to expect.

"Ah, Melvin Green Phudd - may I call you Mel?" I guess the "Melvin Green, Ph.D." on my card had thrown him off.

"Certainly, Captain. May I call you Bork?"

"Of course, Mel. If you, and your assistants there, find it convenience, I would like to speech to the United Nations as soon as possibly."

My "assistants", were the Mayor, the mayor's ego, and the mayor's staff. All were at the boiling point. But that didn't bother me.

"Mr. Mayor - would you be so kind as to provide me and Captain uh... n'Brathen with transportation to the United Nations building?" I noticed a couple of other Jahxx dressed in drab gray sweats had come out of the ship and attached themselves to Bork. "Oh, and we'd better make room for the Captain's staff, too."

The mayor was fuming - the biggest thing in New York since King Kong, and not even a photo opportunity for him. While he was trying to find a speech to start, the Chief of Police brought the Mayor's limo, and Bork, me, and his two staff members climbed in. Discretion being the better part of common sense (I remember I had this little problem with parking tickets and hoped the Mayor would look into it), I asked the Mayor to come with us and point out the sights. It had been almost three minutes since he had spoken - I was later told that was a probable record - but he waved to the Press, grinned the grin of a courageous Mayor doing his Duty to the City by dealing with Alien Beings, and got in with us.

New York was currently between austerity campaigns, so the car was the full stretch model. The

small cars were in the garage until the next campaign, I guess.

The ride to the UN was nothing special. The Mayor busily pointed out landmarks and attractions. I fervently hoped the Jahxx would not notice the smelly symptoms of the current garbage strike. Bork seemed bored by the whole thing, probably mentally rehearsing his speech. His staff was more animated.

We spent a lot of time stopped in traffic. Going cross-town in New York at midmorning was no joke, even with a police escort. During one of the delays, Bork's two assistants presented me with their cards. I still have them, too.

***** more cards *****

Mike was very fair, and slender to the point of being emaciated. He had the look of a marathon runner - not a world-class one. George was a swarthy heavy-set individual, not fat, but very muscular. He was clearly excited at seeing the sights and listening to the Mayor, although his listening had the nature of an anthropologist recording a tribal chant. I felt an immediate affinity for George when I saw the typo on his card.

Bork's only words during the entire trip came when he was able to get a close look at some pedestrians cursing us for holding up traffic.

With vague annoyance, Bork commented to his aides, "They don't look at all fit on this world."

Arriving at the United Nations Building, getting us in, getting in to see the Secretary General, interrupting the debate in the General Assembly to announce the stunning events of the morning, and scheduling Bork to make a speech took until mid-afternoon. The press was kept at bay, and the visitors said nothing of consequence. Finally, all were ready to hear the speaker from the stars.

When Bork came to the podium, the entire General Assembly gave him a standing ovation. Everyone applauded and cheered. Everyone, that is, except the delegate from Upper Volta who sulked with folded arms. His eloquent address on the current border dispute with Mali had been interrupted by the aliens.

Bork's speech was a masterpiece (I found out later that George and Mike had been working on it for a week). The Times had the best synopsis the next day, here it is:

Alien Speaks to UN

To Evaluate Earth for Membership In Federation of Jahxx

UNITED NATIONS, NY January 8.

In a stirring speech before the General Assembly, Captain Z'Borken n'Brathen informed "all Men of Planet Earth" that there exists a Federation of over 700 Worlds. These worlds have coexisted in peace and harmony for over a thousand Earth-years.

The Planet Earth is now being considered as a candidate for membership in the Jahxx Federation. Such a membership would bring the people of Earth many advantages. Among them Capt. n'Brathen numbered "advanced medical technology, interstellar competition, and improved training techniques."

The Captain and his crew are to observe Earth and its people to see if we can qualify as a probationary Jahxx Federation mem-

ber. If so, the benefits will begin immediately, as he is authorized to give us much of the advanced technology he carries in his starship.

Captain n'Brathen concluded by expressing his thanks to the People of Earth for the hospitality they have already shown. He singled out for particular thanks a "Melvin Green Fudd", who, he said, was the first ranking official to greet him. He is looking forward to being in close contact with him during the coming year.

The Times has discovered that a Dr. Melvin Green is the Director of the UN Bureau for Extraterrestrial Relations, a little-known Department within the Secretariat.

At the conclusion of his speech, Captain N'Brathen was given a lengthy, standing ovation by the entire General Assembly. The Secretary General, speaking for all, welcomed the Jahxx to Earth and urged all nations to show Captain N'Brathen and his crew the finest Earth has to offer. He expressed his confidence that Earth will meet whatever standards the Jahxx have set.

At a later press conference, the Secretary General affirmed that Dr. Melvin Green will be the primary liaison, "as long as our visitors wish."

Basically, the whole story is in the Times clipping. The UN was wild with joy, and couldn't do enough for the Jahxx. The SecGen approved me only because there wasn't much choice after Bork's unexpected words.

Lost in the blaze of glory was the question of exactly what standards the Jahxx expected us to meet. Everyone believed what they wanted to.

After the speech, of course, there had to be a Press Conference (look it up - another tradition of the era). It took quite a while to make Bork understand what was expected of him. He agreed to do it, but I think he thought it was some sort of religious ritual - and in a way he was right.

Most questions were inane, also a custom of the times. Let me read a few from my clippings.

"Where do you come from?"

"I don't know your astronomical system - how can that be answered?"

"How would you describe your feelings at this moment?"

"Very fit."

"Are you married?"

"I don't understand."

"What is the political system of the Jahxx?"

"Each world has its own rules. Basically, whatever produces the fittest competitors."

"How did you happen to come to Earth?"

"Each world in the Jahxx Federation must find two other worlds qualified to become members. This is a condition of membership, and how we grow."

"Have you found another world?"

"Two cycles ago, another expedition found a world which was fit and became a member. Our expedition found one world which did not qualify."

"How did you happen to come to Earth?"

"You must ask the astrogators. I understand it has something to do with the type of sun you have."

"What happens when we become members?"

"You pay a small tax to support expeditions such as mine. You must send representatives to the Cyclic Games to validate your continued fitness."

“How is it that you have no wars?”

“Wars are impractical. Besides, they interfere with training.”

“How does your ship fly?”

“You must ask the engineers that question - after you qualify for membership.”

“How many people are on your ship?”

“About a hundred. But only half of them are Athletes. I am proud to say that they average over Thirty, and we even have two Forties with us.”

“How long will you stay?”

“As long as needed to see if you are fit.”

The conference went on for quite a while. The reporters would have kept going all night, but Bork abruptly announced that he must return to the ship for his workout. The meaning of that escaped us, but no one pressed the point.

On the return back to the ship, Bork silently looked out the window. When we arrived at the ship, Bork gave Mike and George instructions, speaking in the twittering Jahxx language. Mike and George looked glum, but acquiesced. Bork left us after shaking my left hand.

Mike and George informed me that they had been ordered to work with me to plan the itinerary.

Some foresighted soul had reserved a VIP Suite at the Waldorf for the Jahxx, even though it meant evicting some of Europe’s bluest blood. Since Bork had gone back to the ship, I figured I might as well stay in his place and live the high life as long as possible.

The Jahxx inspected the suite. The manager was a little puzzled when they asked about exercise facilities. Mike and George seemed disappointed when told they would have to share common equipment with other guests.

Finally, I was able to chase the last visitor out of the rooms.

Groping for something to say, I asked them what types of things they would like me to arrange for them during their stay.

With a conspiratorial wink, Mike said, “Mel, you’re too serious. Why don’t we loosen up and have a little fun before we talk business?”

Uh oh.

George chimed in, “Yeah, the Coach said we weren’t supposed to - but let’s have a workout. Although I’d have thought Earth would have put us up in a place where every room has its own equipment.”

Anything to oblige. I called the manager and got the exercise room to ourselves. No problem with blue bloods this time.

Mike and George sneered politely when they saw the place. It was definitely heavy on velvet and chrome, but the equipment was the best Nautilus could provide. The exercise went well, the guests worked up a good sweat and seemed to enjoy themselves. I went through the motions. The only problem arose when George criticized the attendant for not having bench press equipment that went over 200 kilos.

Back in our suite, I had in mind testing the effects of ethanol on the Jahxx, but Mike and George were way ahead of me.

“Mel,” sighed Mike, “since it looks like we will be out of training for quite a while anyway - how about a drink?”

I was mildly concerned about how alcohol would affect them, but they assured me they knew what they were doing. Apparently body chemistry of natives of all 700 Jahxx worlds was the same. There was no known reason for this, but it was extremely convenient.

We all sipped silently, and wondered what to say next. I had a thousand questions I wanted to ask, and didn't know where to start. Finally, I took the plunge.

"Do you know why Bork picked me first out of the group that met him?"

They looked surprised at the question.

George answered, "Your clothing distinguished you as the only Athlete. The others were clearly not Athletes."

Somehow, I felt in the presence of a severe cultural gap. But I thought it best not to pursue it. It might have saved a lot of grief if I had. Whatever the reason, I didn't want to blow the deal.

Trying again, "I'm surprised Bork wanted to go back to the ship. I'd have thought he'd be glad to get away and breathe some fresh air."

"But he is the Coach. Our ship has the best variable gravity facilities, and he has priority on their use. Even over the Forties." Another gap.

I don't give up easily. "What's a Forty, I know Bork mentioned them in the press conference."

Pay dirt! A glow of hero worship appeared in Mike's eyes. "Forties are our most honored citizens and Athletes. They have proved themselves in the Cyclic Games. We are very fortunate to have two with us. Only the fact that Bork was once a high Forty himself persuaded them to come along."

"Why didn't they come out and meet us?"

George sighed enviously. "If you are a Forty, you are allowed unlimited time for training. How could they interrupt that?"

As I said, I don't give up easily, but sometimes I do give up. By now, George was feeling the effects of the ethanol, and became slightly maudlin.

"I studied and worked for years to become an ethnologist. And what do I get - nothing. The Forties still get all the privileges, and even Thirties and Twenties are ahead of us. We're lucky if we get three hours a day in variable gravity. It's so unfair. And now we're stuck with no variable gravity at all - just to check out another dirt ball. By the time we get home we'll be lucky to be tens."

Mike, the diplomat, thought it best to steer us onto safer ground. "Mel, this beverage is excellent - I would rank it only a little below Saurian Brandy."

George snorted, "Don't be ridiculous - Saurian Brandy is in a Universal class by itself."

"Well, maybe we can get some for Mel to try before we leave. In the meantime, perhaps we should discuss our agenda."

This I could handle, "Well, I'm sure each country has things they would want you to see. For myself, I think many cultural treasures can be seen here in New York. Perhaps we could start with a tour of the museums and libraries. And then, I'm sure you'd like to see Paris, Rome, the Pyramids..." Oh, I was planning a real grand tour - what a joke.

I think George was ready to agree. His professional interest was starting to get the better of him. Mike, however, recalled him to duty.

"I'm sure that would be very interesting, Mel. But on your television, I saw that people spend much time on sports. That is what we would like to see - particularly the thing they call profootball."

Well, that's how the visit began. There wasn't any trouble getting tickets to Sunday's game, of course - even though it was the Conference Championship and all the Jahxx wanted to come.

The Jahxx made quite a procession arriving at the stadium. Both men and women were dressed in the same stylized jogging suits. Mike pointed out the two 'Forties' - they were in silver outfits. The Thirties wore red, and the Twenties wore blue. Mike and George and most of the rest were in the usual gray.

Ever since George had explained why Bork picked me out of the crowd, I had stuck to jogging suits - that day I was in maroon. The Jahxx seemed a little puzzled at the color, but politely said nothing.

I had given Mike and George a book and quick tutorial on the rules of the game which they had translated for the Athletes. A noted former lawyer and football commentator (I forget his name, but he always wore a hairpiece) was there to explain any little points needing clarification. The Jahxx chattered excitedly when the teams took the field. The gist of their comments (George explained) was that the men "looked very fit."

I don't remember much about the game, but at the end, there was a spectacular crashing run by "Freezer" Pearcider. Even the Forties cheered. They insisted on going to the locker room after the game to meet the Freezer.

Of course, the Jahxx made a dramatic entrance - just as Freezer was getting out of his pads. The Forties stopped and stared - they hadn't realized he was wearing pads and apparently had thought his shoulders were extremely broad. Still, they conceded he looked fit, and gave him their cards. He gave them the game ball. The language barrier prevented much man-to-man talk, so we soon left. Mike, George, and I to the Waldorf, the rest of them back to the ship. Before they left, I saw Bork giving Mike his marching orders.

On the way back to the hotel, Mike sprung it on me.

"Mel, the Coach wants to set up a game. He says profootball looks like fun, and the Forties feel like a little competition."

I was at a loss for words. I told them Chicago had to play in the Superbowl in two weeks, but maybe something could be worked out for the week after that...

"Excellent, that will give us time to learn the game. Can you get some equipment? The Forties really liked those shoulder things. They might start a whole new fashion at home."

Choking slightly, I excused myself, and put in a panic call to the SecGen at his home (oh, yes, I was a real hot number then). When I explained the situation, he treated me to thirty seconds of Finnish profanity. He explained that he always swore in Finnish, unless swearing at a Finn, when he used Urdu. He told me to come to his office the next morning to discuss the matter, and to make no commitments until then.

When I arrived at his conference room, not only was the secretary-general waiting there, but the American Ambassador, the Russian Ambassador, and - to show that the meeting was to be really important - NFL Commissioner Burt Dant, himself. Talk about a power meeting!

As I entered, I could tell I had troubles. The meeting had gotten under way without me, and from the looks I got, I could presume the topic hadn't been my pretty blue eyes.

The Russian shot first. "What is this nonsense, Dr. Green. You should be showing the Jahxx the glories of Earth. Our museums. Our philosophers. Our music. Our advanced forms of government. Yet you only take them to this barbaric spectacle."

The American chimed in with a Texas drawl. "Mel, are you sure you're handling this right. Perhaps we should get someone with more background in this kind of thing - y'know, to help you through the rough spots."

Commissioner Dant leaned forward to make his point. "Pro Football is a tough, violent world, Mel. Your Jahxx could be severely injured - even killed. What would that do for interstellar relations?"

I felt like a moth caught in a popcorn popper.

The SecGen gave me a chance, "Perhaps we should let Doctor Green explain himself - before we reach any conclusions."

I took a deep breath. “Gentlemen, I know how you feel. I certainly don’t want to see them hurt or injured. After all, they are my close friends. But you must understand. Sports and physical fitness are tremendously important to the Jahxx. In fact, it seems to be the only thing about Earth that interests them.”

“Please to explain that statement,” growled the Russian.

“Their most honored citizens are the Athletes they call ‘Forties’. There are ‘Thirties’ and ‘Twenties’ who are also honored. I don’t really understand it, but the Jahxx somehow feel that the physical fitness of Earth’s citizens is quite important.”

If only I had pursued that last point. I remember it so clearly. I don’t know if it would have affected the eventual outcome, but if only I had pursued it...

“Mel, as I see it, there are two issues.” The American again. “One - can we talk them out of it? Two - if we can’t, what can we do?”

“Sir, I’ve given both points a great deal of thought. Can we talk them out of it? In a word - no. Their Forties want it - and they seem to be used to getting what they want.”

“As to the second point, I’m sure Chicago would understand if we ask them to take it easy. No one would be hurt. Maybe they could even let the Jahxx win. That should make our visitors very happy.”

“Also, look at the positive PR value. ‘**Interstellar Aliens Love Sports!**’ The whole world could relate to that.”

There was a lot more discussion, but the issue was settled. The Jahxx wanted it, they would get it.

Commissioner Dant agreed to explain the situation to Chicago and handle the logistics of the game. He also promised to provide all the equipment, training facilities, and coaching the Jahxx wanted.

It turned out they didn’t want much but equipment and some books. George took on the roles of translator/instructor. I guess Mike was the team manager. Of course, Bork was the Coach and the Forties were co-captains. The only problem arose when the game uniforms arrived, and all the Twenties and Thirties wanted numbers to match their rank. I guess Bork worked that one out - I heard a lot of shouting, and everyone wore what was available.

Not having much else to do, I spent most of my time watching them learn the game. Since they wanted to be near the ship for variable-gravity workouts, a practice field was laid out in Sheep Meadow. By this time, of course, a fence had been erected to keep out the quaint New York citizenry, so they had plenty of room.

You know, it just now struck me. We never asked them to move their saucer. It would have made life a lot more convenient.

I was no football expert, but they looked pretty good. They ran and threw and blocked with abandon. The only thing was, none of them looked like they weighed much over 100 kilos. I didn’t like to think what might happen when a Jahxx met the Freezer head on. The only part of the game they couldn’t seem to get the hang of was kicking field goals. As it turned out, it made no difference.

Well, as they say in the sports pages, game day dawned bright and clear. Chicago was fresh from victory in the Super Bowl. Although they had grumbled a little at delaying their post-season partying for a week, they approached the whole thing in a spirit of fun.

The stands were packed. The game was a sellout to end all sellouts.

It was a slaughter. I have never seen such a one-sided football game. 60-0 at half-time. 98-3 final score. The Forties left the game at half-time and most of the Thirties were out by the start of the third quarter. The most unusual play was when Freezer tried one of his patented crashes through to the goal line. One of the Forties picked him up and **carried** him and the ball through the bewildered Chicago

team to the opposite goal. It didn't count, of course, and the officials had to explain the finer points of the forward motion rule. At first, Chicago tried to take it easy on the Jahxx. But when Chicago was down by 28 at the end of the first quarter, they started to take things seriously.

It was all useless; the Jahxx handled them like children.

The fans stopped cheering about halfway through the second quarter - they realized they were seeing the utter humiliation of the finest Earth had to offer. By the end of the game, they booed loudly every time the Jahxx had the ball - which was most of the time.

The final gun was greeted with stony silence from the stands.

I didn't know quite what to say to George and Mike after the game, but I needn't have worried. They'd picked up the spirit of being out of training, and were ready for our evening cocktail hour and bull session.

As Mike poured, he commented, "We really must bring you some Saurian Brandy, Mel. It would really please me to have your opinion."

Savoring his Cognac, he continued, "That was a splendid spectacle today. Maybe there's hope for Earth, after all. Although I had really expected better competition."

George chimed in, "Yes, but the Forties were most pleased. What other sports events can we see?"

I mentioned basketball, hockey, and soccer - but my listeners were not impressed.

"Mel, we have to show them something big, even bigger than profootball."

"The only thing I can think of is the Olympics, but that isn't until next summer."

Of course, I had to explain what the Olympics were all about. International competition, brotherhood, etc. As I talked, the Jahxx got more and more excited.

"But that's perfect. It sounds just like the Cyclic Games. Earth will be able to prove its fitness right away. The Forties will go wild. All the Athletes will. They won't be able to wait to compete."

Uh-oh.

The call to the SecGen wasn't as bad as I had expected. He was with the Soviet Ambassador, and I got the impression they weren't entirely displeased at America's humiliation. I was told to show up the next morning for another meeting.

I thought I had better get a few things straight with George and Mike. By this time, our evening sessions had become ritual - but tonight I was going to get some specific answers.

"Mike, I need to know a few things. First of all - exactly what does it mean to be a Forty?"

"To be a Forty, you must be one of our finest Athletes. You must average forty points or more in strength, speed, and endurance - either in the Cyclic Games or in local competitions, although local ratings are strictly provisional. Once you become a Forty, Society gives you all the best - training facilities, dietary advice, medical technology, everything."

"How do you and George rank?"

Mike turned red and was unable to answer. George reproached me.

"Uh, Mel - you just don't ask such personal questions. I realize your customs are different, but it isn't polite to discuss such things so bluntly. I should think you'd know to be more discreet. All citizens train and work out as much as they can, but some... Well, some of us are selected for special academic schooling, which leaves little time for training."

I apologized - which cleared the air.

"If you spend so much time on sports, who tends to business?"

I had to explain what business was - although I felt they should have understood something as ba-

sic to Earth as that. They thought it was hysterically funny.

Wiping the tears from his eyes, Mike snorted, "You mean grown adults spend all day doing things like that? How do they find time to train?"

I assured him it was so and that their laughter was not appropriate, after all, they were the guests of Earth and had been treated rather well.

"I'm sorry, Mel. It's just that we don't think such things are significant. Most people are assigned to work a few hours a day to provide necessities, but they get done as quickly as possible to have more time at the gym. This makes them very efficient."

"Of course, the higher rank you are, the less you work, and the more time you have to train. Forties and Thirties do very little work. We all support them so they will be ready for the Cyclic Games."

"Why are the Games so important?"

"Conditions differ on all worlds, so we meet periodically under uniform conditions to see which world is the fittest. I'm proud to say that our world has placed in the top fifty for the last three cycles."

We went on like that into the wee small hours. I finally thought I understood the Jahxx. You know, it turned out I was almost right.

The next morning I showed up at the secretary-general's office. The same crowd was there, except that it was Lord Somebody, Chairman of the International Olympic Committee, not the NFL Commissioner. The mood was really peculiar. The secretary-general and the Russian were positively euphoric. The American was deeply depressed - in fact, he didn't say a word the whole meeting. The IOC Chairman was suitably aristocratic.

This meeting went much easier for me than the last one had since there were no more fears for the Jahxx's health. The head of the IOC raised the only objection - he could not be sure the Jahxx were really amateurs - but let it pass in the interest of interstellar amity.

So Sheep Meadow was set up as an Olympic training camp and the Jahxx feverishly practiced the various events.

In the months before the Games, I finally had the chance to take Mike, George, and many of the non-Athletes to see some of Earth's proudest monuments. I really think they enjoyed the trips - it must have been a pleasure for them to get away from the overpowering Athletic environment. Mike kept promising to get some Saurian Brandy for me, but somehow it never worked out.

The Summer Games that year were held in Ulan Bator, and the whole World was ready to see the Jahxx in their glory. I have a copy of the final medal scores here somewhere...

Yes, the Jahxx took 98 Golds, no Silver, and no Bronze. The U.S. was second with 12 Golds, 73 Silver, and 48 bronze. The Soviet Union was third with 10 Golds, 68 Silver, and 63 Bronze.

The only reason the Jahxx didn't win all the medals is that they didn't compete in every event, and they only entered one person in the events they did enter. More to the point, however, were the records they set. Every event with a Jahxx in it set a new World Record (although the IOC later put an asterisk by each one). The records were incredible - here are some samples:

100-meter dash- 8.12 seconds
1500-meter run- 2 minutes 46.6 seconds
Shot-put - 35.66 meters
Decathlon- 23,778 points
High jump- 3.29 meters
Marathon- 1 hour 32 minutes 12.2 seconds

The marathon is the one I remember. The time would have been a lot less, except no one expected the Jahxx to knock half an hour off the existing record and the track still had hurdles set up. It confused the runner, but he jumped over each of them on his way to the finish line.

But you get the point. In its way, it was as bad as the football game. The Jahxx were most courteous competitors, and offered helpful tips to the losers, but it was small consolation.

During the Games, most of the non-Athletes among the Jahxx were closely following the competitions and busily punching data into what I took to be small computer terminals they carried with them. When I asked George about it, he replied that they were 'keeping score.'

The spectators went from cheering the Jahxx to booing and whistling, and then to ominous silence.

After the Games closed, the Jahxx informed me that they wished to return immediately to Sheep Meadow and their ship. We were happy to oblige - assassination threats were becoming numerous.

All the Jahxx, even George and Mike, disappeared into the ship as soon as we arrived, and weren't seen for several days. I waited around, feeling foolish, until I got a message saying that Bork wanted to meet with me and the UN officials the next day.

Yes - the final, famous meeting - I bet you thought I'd never get around to it - but we octogenarians have a few privileges, and rambling is one of them.

The meeting was the same select group, the secretary-general, the American Ambassador, the Russian Ambassador, and yours truly. Bork, Mike, and George walked in right on the dot and were ushered to their places.

Bork spoke, and was right to the point. "Men of Earth, I am sorry to tell you that you are not qualified to enter the Federation of Jahxx. In the recent Games, you were given a provisional score of 15.68. A minimum score of 25 is required to enter the Federation. We must now leave and go in search of other worlds."

I think Bork would have walked out right then, but the SecGen had to ask, "Do you mean to say, the only thing you were looking for was athletic ability?"

"Of course, we have found it to be the most important thing in judging a world's fitness."

Mike piped up, "You shouldn't despair, your score was pretty good, and another expedition will probably check you out again in a few hundred years. Keep up the good work."

With that they left.

Of course the whole thing was blamed on me - we didn't even have to spend five minutes establishing that point. But what were the People to be told?

It was decided that it would be detrimental to the World Situation if the People were told the truth - they might want to spend time at sports and physical training, instead of keeping their mind on Significant Issues. Besides, who knew when, or if, the Jahxx would ever come back?

So, that is how the decision was made. The official story was to be that the Jahxx had been somehow dissatisfied with their treatment on Earth, and a certain unnamed UN Bureaucrat had been disciplined and his Department dissolved as a cost-saving measure. I was gently told that a comfortable pension awaited me the next day, and I was expected to keep my mouth shut if I wanted to enjoy it.

It could have been worse, but most of Earth was happy to see the Jahxx leave after they had humiliated us so badly.

I only have one regret over the whole thing - I never got to try that Saurian Brandy.