

## Chapter Thirteen

### The Game's Afoot

The essence of good tactics is to let your opponent think he is calling the shots.

- hustler's maxim.

Harry Napp was enjoying himself. These birds were the best company he had kept for many years. Polite, curious, full of chatter, and yet keen to listen and learn, and what a cook the tubby one turned out to be. Harry's thoughts turned once more to the hotel trade; if the Avians held as high an opinion of young Clanteth's talents as he did, it might be worth trying him out as a partner. Even that straight-laced skipper of theirs let slip a twinkle in his eye now and then; a tartar with a soft centre. Would he let the lad go? What were the conditions of service? If it was in the same tradition as the Navy that Harry knew of old, it could be anything from ten years grind to a bundle of unmarked credit and a nod and a wink for a quick release. Just pick your pigeon correctly and cross fingers!

Shakespear beckoned for attention and Harry reluctantly abandoned his reverie for the matters of note. The education program was at last ready, despite having taken much longer than expected; the computer had devoted nearly all its time to this as primary task and had still taken the best part of a day to hone it into shape.

"Thank you, Shakespear. Run the first test for me, please."

A fluent stream of the Avian speech enquired after Harry's health, and prompted him for replies as he deliberately stumbled through. Then in the Avian dialect he asked for the second test, and was rewarded by a tutorial in Universal. Satisfied, he stretched, stood up, stretched again, and made his way to the galley. No need to ask Shakespear for breakfast, when Clanteth had the place under control.

A delightful aroma of grilled tomatoes, scrambled eggs, toast and strong coffee greeted him as he opened the hatch.