

How to Serve Human Beings

by Damon Knight

62



- 1 The Kanamit were not very pretty, it's true. They looked a bit like pigs and a bit like people. I don't know what we thought creatures from outer space would look like. But we were all quite shocked when they landed in their spaceships.
- 2 The Kanamit were short and hairy. Their noses were shaped like snouts. And they had thick hands with three fingers on each.
- 3 I can't tell you how odd it was to see them at the United Nations, where I worked translating speeches. Somehow or other, the Kanamit had learned English and French. They said quite simply that they wanted to help us, and I believed them. They had some inventions that they thought would help everyone on Earth.
- 4 "Why are you doing this?" someone asked.
- 5 "Our aim is to bring you the peace and plenty that we ourselves enjoy," one of them answered. "When your world has no more

hunger, no more war, that will be our reward."

- 6 The next day reports began to come in from all over the world. Scientists were quite excited. It seemed that one of the Kanamit machines produced more power than atomic energy. And anyone on Earth could afford it. Along with this, the Kanamit announced plans to make Earth more fertile.
- 7 "You will now have unlimited power and more food," they said. "We have a third gift that is even more important."
- 8 One of them pointed to something on the table before her. "This device projects a force field. No other weapon of any sort will work around it."
- 9 When no one seemed to grasp this, she explained, "There will be no more war."
- 10 That was the best news of all. The Kanamit had simply made it impossible for us to kill each other. Besides, soon there wouldn't be

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any reason to do so. Every nation would have as much as every other nation.

11 I quit my job with the United Nations a few months later. I saw that soon there would be nothing left for it to do.

12 I took a job working for the Kanamit. It was there that I ran into an old friend, Gregori. He had been a translator for the UN too.

13 Gregori didn't trust the Kanamit. "Now, just what have they got to gain from helping us?" he asked.

14 "That's why you're here," I guessed. "You want to find out what it is?"

15 "Correct. I'm studying their language. It's not hard, really. I'm sure I'll get the answer soon."

16 A month later Gregori called me. He was very excited. It seems he had stolen a copy of a Kanamit book. Now he was trying to translate it into English.

17 Well, I was interested in spite of myself. We spent some evenings together on it. But all we had to work with was the extremely small dictionary the Kanamit had given us.

18 It bothered me that Gregori had stolen the book. But gradually I became absorbed by the problem. Languages are my field, after all. I couldn't help being fascinated.

19 We worked out the title in a few weeks. The

book was called *How to Serve Human Beings*. We guessed it was a handbook the Kanamit were giving to their people.

20 New members of their race were arriving on Earth all the time now. And huge shiploads of our own people had already left for their planet.

21 It was amazing to see the changes the Kanamit had made on Earth in less than a year. There was no more war, no more poverty. When you picked up a newspaper, the news was always good. It was a hard thing to get used to. Next, the Kanamit had plans to make our race bigger, stronger, and healthier than ever.

22 I saw Gregori two weeks after our last meeting. But I was shocked by the change in him.

23 "What ever is the matter?" I asked.

24 "It's the Kanamit," Gregori said. "They are not here to help us."

25 "But what about their book—*How to Serve Human Beings*? How do you explain that?"

26 "That's just it. I've read the first paragraph of that book," he said.

27 "Well," I asked, "how are they going to serve us?"

28 Gregori smiled a strange smile. "It's a *cook-book*," he said.

How Well Did You Read?

Write the letter of the best answer for each question.

- 1 What did the Kanamit promise the people on Earth?
 - a Eternal youth, a life of ease, and perfect weather
 - b Unlimited energy, freedom from hunger, and an end to war
 - c Cleaner air, an end to crime, and love among all races
- 2 If the Kanamit kept their promises, why would there be no more reason for war?
 - a All people would love one another.
 - b The Kanamit would have all the power.
 - c Every nation would be as well off as every other nation.
- 3 How did the storyteller feel about the Kanamit before their book was translated?
 - a He believed they really meant to help Earth's people.
 - b He kept wondering what they really wanted.
 - c He disliked them from the moment he saw them.
- 4 Why didn't Gregori trust the Kanamit?
 - a He hadn't seen results from their work.
 - b He thought they must want something in return for their gifts.
 - c The inventions they told about seemed impossible to him.
- 5 Why did the storyteller quit working for the United Nations?
 - a He was discharged from his job.
 - b There was little left for the United Nations to do.
 - c He grew tired of translating strange languages.
- 6 How did the Kanamit intend to "serve" human beings?
 - a By being of service to them
 - b By preparing them as food and setting them out to be eaten
 - c Neither a nor b

- 7 What will Gregori and the storyteller probably do next?
 - a Translate more Kanamit books
 - b Return to the United Nations
 - c Try to warn other Earth people about the Kanamit

Learn about Words

Vocabulary

- A** You can often tell the meaning of a word by reading the words around it.

Look at each number in parentheses. Find the paragraph in the story with the same number. Then find the word that fits the given meaning. Write the word.

- 1 very surprised (1)
- 2 pigs' noses (2)
- 3 suffering caused by lack of food (5)
- 4 able to produce food (6)
- 5 machine or instrument (8)
- 6 book of instructions (19)
- 7 state of being poor (21)

- B** A word may have more than one meaning. Its meaning depends on the way it is used. The word *watch* is an example.

A guard stood *watch*.
My *watch* is fast.

Look at each number in parentheses. Find the paragraph in the story with the same number. See how the word in **heavy type** below is used in the paragraph. Decide whether it has meaning **a** or **b**. Write **a** or **b**.

- 8 **projects** (8)
 - a gives off; puts forth
 - b sticks out
- 9 **grasp** (9)
 - a understand
 - b hold with the hands
- 10 **absorbed** (18)
 - a soaked up
 - b very interested and involved

Word Study

C Pups are **little** dogs, not **big** ones.

Words with opposite meanings are called antonyms. *Little* is an antonym of *big*. Read each sentence and the words below it. Write the word that means the opposite of the word in **heavy type**.

- 11** This winter is unusually **severe**.
mild snowy
- 12** Norma felt **adventurous**.
bold timid
- 13** Our guide led us safely over the **ru-
ged** mountain slopes.
gentle rough
- 14** This is a **vast** wilderness.
small beautiful
- 15** This day turned out to be another **typ-
ical** day.
unusual ordinary
- 16** George had a **vivid** picture of what his
new home would look like.
clear unclear
- 17** The ground in the park was much too
soggy for playing ball.
soft dry
- 18** The school board voted to **extend** the
school year until June.
shorten lengthen

D Writers sometimes use words in special ways known as figures of speech. A simile is a figure of speech that makes a comparison, using the word *as* or *like*. For example:

Glen is **as strong as an ox**.
Glen is **like an ox**.

Such comparisons help you understand that Glen is very strong, since oxen are known for their strength. Similes are imaginative (and sometimes exaggerated) forms of description. Read the sentences below and write the word or words that complete each simile best.

- 19** Rachel's smile is bright. The sun is bright. Rachel's smile is like the ____.

- 20** We have a lot of animals on our farm. Noah's ark had a lot of animals. Our farm is like ____.
- 21** My bedroom is messy. A pigpen is messy. My bedroom is as ____ as a pigpen.
- 22** Walking on the sand will burn your feet. Walking on hot coals will burn your feet. Walking on the sand is like walking on ____.
- 23** After I picked poison ivy, my hands were very red. Lobster claws are very red. My hands were as red as ____.
- 24** Pedro's teacher is very funny. A circus full of clowns is very funny. Pedro's teacher is as ____ as a circus full of clowns.
- 25** Phil's story was not believable. A fairy tale is not believable. Phil's story was as believable as a ____.
- 26** A tomb is quiet. The house is quiet. The house is like a ____.

E A metaphor is another figure of speech that describes something in an imaginative way. Sometimes metaphors exaggerate a little. In the sentences below, the metaphoric words are in **heavy type**. Choose a word from those in parentheses to tell what the metaphoric words mean. Write the word.

- 27** Our little lake became **an ocean** after the flood. (large, blue)
- 28** Huge **puffs of whipped cream** dotted the summer sky. (clouds, birds)
- 29** That puppy is **a real live teddy bear**. (cuddly, sleepy)
- 30** **Voices** howled in the attic throughout the storm. (People, Wind)
- 31** The dying tree raised its **tired old arms** towards the sky. (branches, birds)
- 32** My little brother is **a perfect angel**. (bad, good)
- 33** My feet have become **blocks of ice**. (square, cold)