



People of the Third Planet by Dale Crail

The silver flying saucer hovered silently high above the ground. From far below, on the earth, the craft seemed to be just another star glowing brightly in the dark night sky. Slowly, the spaceship began to descend. It settled in a parking lot near the center of a small sleeping town.

The heat generated by the tremendous craft caused the asphalt on the ground to sizzle. This was the only sound that broke the stillness of the night.

It was about three o'clock in the morning when the alien craft landed. The town was completely deserted. The only sign of activity was a lone traffic light a short distance away. It changed from yellow to red to green over and over again.



For several moments, the ship remained motionless on the ground. Then, slowly, a section of the saucer slid open. Two creatures from another world stepped off the ship and into the light of a street lamp. For a brief moment, they thought that no one was near. Then they noticed a line of figures standing silently before them.

One of the aliens leaned toward the other and whispered, "Over there are some people of the Third Planet. It is strange that they do not come forward to greet us. Perhaps this is not the time to tell the people of the Third Planet about our world."

The other alien surveyed the figures standing in the dim light. "No," said the alien. "Our charts were right. Our orders are clear. Now is the time. We must approach these Earth people and arrange a meeting with the leader of their world."

The alien stepped forward and began to speak. "People of the Third Planet – or Earth, as you call it. We greet you in peace. We are messengers sent from a world many light years away from your own. We wish to establish a peaceful link between our two worlds and exchange ideas with you. We would like to speak to someone of importance on your planet. Please direct us to such a person."

No one in the line of figures moved. They remained silent. They did not seem to care about the space creature's words.

After several seconds, a look of bewilderment crossed the face of the alien. "This is strange," whispered the alien to the other. "These earth people act as though they do not understand what I am saying. How can that be? We listened very carefully to their radio signals. We studied their words. I am certain we are using their language correctly."

"Remain calm," said the other alien. "I will speak to the people of the Third Planet again." The alien gazed at the shapes in the darkness then said, "Earth friend, perhaps you were startled by our sudden appearance. Or perhaps you did not fully understand the significance of our message. I can assure you it is of the greatest importance. It is essential that we speak to the leader of your world. Please tell us where we may find your leader."

No one said a word or moved.

"One of you please come forward," continued the alien. "We will not harm you. We wish only to talk with you. However, if you do not cooperate, we will be forced to take one of you with us for questioning. Please, we do not wish to harm anyone."

But the figures in the darkness continued to remain absolutely still.

The alien from another world began to grow angry and glared at them harshly.

"Apparently," said the other alien, "These earth people have no intention of telling us anything. Let us take one of them aboard. We must force one of them to give us the information we need."



The first alien nodded, then shouted at the figures standing in the dim light. "People of the Third Planet, you have left us no choice! We will have to use force!"

But, to the amazement of the alien, even these words had no effect. The figures did not turn and run. They did not move at all.

Furious, the alien rushed up to the first figure in the line. "You are my prisoner!" shouted the alien. "March to the spaceship at once!"

There was no response.

The alien struck the figure hard. Still, the figure refused to move.

"It is no use," said the alien. "I cannot force this earth person to walk. It is as though he has roots that go deep into the ground."

"Use your ray gun," said the other alien. "Cut him away from the earth he so dearly loves."

There was a single flash from the alien's gun, and the earth person fell noisily to the ground. Still, none of the other figures moved.

The alien looked at the defiant row of figures before him. They did not seem upset that one of their ranks was being prisoner. This was more than the alien could stand.

"People of the Third Planet!" shouted the space creature. "We came in peace, and you refused to speak to us. We took one of your people captive, and you did not attempt to stop us. You are strange people who have no feelings. You baffle me, people of the Third Planet. I will not even try to understand you. I will leave that to another expedition from our planet. Perhaps they will have more success with you than we. Farewell, people of the Third Planet. Farewell!"

The alien turned and joined the other space creature aboard the flying saucer. There was a sudden flash of light, and the spacecraft rose swiftly and disappeared in to the night sky.

A patrol was making its usual rounds on the late night shift. The two police officers inside the car were talking. Suddenly one of them looked up. "What was that?" asked the officer.

"Where? I didn't see anything."

"It looked like an explosion up there in the parking lot. We'd better check to see what happened."

The patrol car sped toward the parking lot and screeched to a halt. The officers jumped out of the car and played their flashlights over the deserted lot.

"Hmmm," said one of the officers. "Something smells burned. Let's look around."

They moved through the area, searching the darkness.

Suddenly, one of the officers called to his partner, "Look at this,"

The other officer walked quickly toward the light. He found his partner down on one knee looking at a circular piece of steel which was still hot to the touch.

"Someone sliced off this thing," said the officer. "Did a pretty neat job of it, too. But why? They could only have gotten away with a few nickels. What would anyone want with a parking meter?"



Telling About The Story. Complete each of the following statements by putting an x in the box next to the correct answer. Each statement tells something about the story.

1. The aliens asked the figures in the dark to— give them all of their valuables
 take them to their leader tell them about life on planet Earth invite them to return again
2. The figures in the dim light— were afraid of the aliens did not answer the aliens
 were happy to see the aliens leave gave the aliens what they wanted
3. The aliens thought that the people of the Third Planet were strange because they— were awake at 3:00 A.M. did not seem to have any feelings could not understand what the aliens were saying
4. The police officers went to investigate— a suspicious explosion a report of vandalism
 a spaceship which had landed nearby reports that aliens had landed in town

New Vocabulary Words. Answer the following vocabulary questions by putting an x in the box next to the correct response.

1. The aliens stated that they brought a message of great significance. What is the meaning of the word *significance*? — price size importance age
2. “You baffle me,” said the alien. “I will not even try to understand you.” Define the word *baffle*.—
 puzzle or confuse help or assist recognize or know compartmentalize or divide
3. The heat generated by the tremendous spaceship caused the asphalt to sizzle. The word *generated* means — produced borrowed cost wiggled
4. The heat generated by the tremendous spaceship caused the asphalt to sizzle. Define the word *sizzle*.
 fly away make a hissing sound grow cold glow

Identifying Story Elements. Each of the following questions tests your understanding of story elements. Put an x in the box next to each correct answer.

1. What is the *setting* of “People of the Third Planet?” a parking lot a spaceship
 a planet many miles away from Earth a police car
2. What happened last in the *plot* of the story? The alien ordered a figure to march to the spaceship.
 The aliens fired a ray gun. The police officer looked at a circular piece of steel.
 They all died.
3. Which one of the following statements best *characterizes* the aliens? They came in peace to establish a link with another world. They were unfriendly and wanted war. They did not understand Earth people’s language.
4. What is true of the *style* of the story? It contains no dialogue. There are many long, descriptive passages. There are many short sentences. It contains many foreign words.

Thinking About The Story. Each of the following questions requires you to *think critically* about the selection. Put an *x* in the box next to the correct answer.

1. The figures in the darkness were – Earth people who were too frightened to speak some very brave people of the Third Planet a row of parking meters a park full of tall trees

2. We may infer that the aliens– had met Earth people before knew what people of the Third Planet looked like had never seen Earth People before

3. The police officer thought that a parking meter had been– destroyed in an explosion hit by a car stolen by someone sliced off by an alien

4. When they return home, the aliens will discover that their captive – still refuses to talk is very frightened will tell them what they want to know is smarter than he looks

• Look through the story for hints that the people of the Third Planet were actually parking meters. See how many clues you can discover. Discuss them with your classmates.

• In what ways did the aliens' civilization seem more advanced than civilization on Earth? Give specific examples.

• What was surprising about the aliens' behavior?