

Comprehension Questions for *Terry Bisson's "They're Made Out of Meat"*

Check your comprehension of the following expressions.

In the following sentence, **"We picked up several from different parts of the planet, took them aboard our recon vessels, and probed them all the way through,"** what does **"recon"** mean?

1. reconditioned
2. recondite
3. reconstructed
4. reconnaissance
5. reckoning

One of the aliens says, **"They'll be considered crackpots if they do."** What is a **crackpot**?

1. A nut.
2. A crazy person.
3. A wacko.
4. Someone who is bananas.
5. A kook.

One alien states, **"And being meat, they can only travel through C space. Which limits them to the speed of light and makes the possibility of their ever making contact pretty slim. Infinitesimal, in fact."** What does **"infinitesimal"** mean?

1. infinitely large.
2. infinitely special.
3. infinitely thin.
4. infinitely far away.
5. infinitely small.

What does **"They always come around,"** mean?

1. Every civilization eventually does what we want.
2. Every civilization changes its mind repeatedly.
3. Every civilization eventually collapses.
4. Every civilization eventually sees things our way.
5. Every civilization starts traveling in space again after a while.

Discussion Questions for *“They’re Made Out of Meat”*

1. Would you say this is a comedy story that uses SF elements, or an SF story that happens to be funny? (In other words, if someone asked, “Is this story primarily SF, or humor?” how would you reply?)
2. Humans often imagine aliens either as being human-like, or as being completely strange and disgusting. Which depiction of aliens do you prefer?
3. Do you think humanity is lonely because it has not yet discovered other intelligent life in the universe? Would you like for us to discover signs of intelligent life elsewhere, or not?
4. How does the attitude of the aliens in the story satirize attitudes that we find among human beings?
5. This story relates to the **Fermi Paradox**: the paradox related to the fact that while the necessary conditions and components for life seem abundant in the cosmos, we have detected no sign of any other species in the universe. “The aliens are avoiding us” is one possible solution. What other explanations for this paradox can you think of?
6. How does this story relate to the Copernican Revolution?
7. Make up your own question and add it here: