

TANSTAAFL

After the War of the Almonds, the Land of Kulmar was the richest and most powerful of all.

Its fields were bountiful and its grainaries were full.

Its flocks were fat and sleek.

The Kulumese were proud and productive. They worked and they rejoiced in the highest standard of living known.

Sire, the Generous, surveyed all this plenty and said: "Surely a country as rich as Kulumar should provide food and housing and garments for our less fortunate. I will ask the Lawmakers to levy a tax on the workers to provide this."

And the Lawmakers, each of whom hoped one day to become Sire, levied the taxes. They then said: "Let there also be free circuses for those who do not work. And let there be soft hassocks and free food and wines for those who watch the circuses."

And the Lawmakers levied more taxes.

When the workers of Kulumar heard of the free circuses, the soft hassocks, and the food and wines, and then figured their new monstrous taxes, they said: "That is for us."

The farmers left the fields. The shepherds abandoned their flocks. The weavers laid down their shuttles. The blacksmiths cooled their forges. All the Kulumese were watching the free circuses.

Plenty turned to scarcity. No longer was there abundant food. Garments were hard to come by. The Kulumese did not even have camel chips to heat their tents.

Prices rose and rose. And the lawmakers raised taxes again and again. (It was the only thing they knew how to do.)

Misery and gloom replaced joy and pride. And Sire, the Generous, who was well-intentioned, went to the Wise Man of the Mountain and said: "Wise One, I have tried to give the good life to my people. But they no longer want to work. food and goods are scarce. Prices are outrageous. Taxes are even more so. Give me a solution."

And the Wise Man of the Mountain replied in Kulumese: "TANSTAAFL."

Which means: "There Ain't No Such Thing As A Free Lunch."

- Taken from Robert Heinlein's classic
The Moon is a Harsh Mistress