Chapter 7: An Alien Hand

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Exercise 7.1 — Comprehension Check I (after Part 1)

Q1 How does Tilloo manage to find his way to the 'forbidden passage'?

SOLUTION

Tilloo's father was taking a siesta (afternoon nap) at home instead of being at work.
Tilloo took advantage of this and stole his father's security card.
He then slipped away while evading his watchful mother and reached the forbidden passage.
At the metal door, he inserted the security card into the slot — just as he had seen his father do — and the door opened noiselessly, letting him in.

Answer: Tilloo steals his father's security card while his father is taking a siesta. He evades his mother's watch, goes to the forbidden passage, and uses the card to open the metal door, just as he had seen his father do.

Q2 What did Tilloo hope to see once he emerged from his underground home?

SOLUTION

The passage led upward from the underground habitat to the surface of the planet.
Tilloo had heard and read about the sun and the stars but had never actually seen them.
He hoped that if it was daytime, he would see the sun, and if it was night, he would see the stars.

Answer: Tilloo hoped to see the sun (if it was daytime) or the stars (if it was night). He had heard and read about them but had never seen them, as he lived underground.

Q3 Why did Tilloo's father advise him not to try to reach the surface of the planet?

SOLUTION

Tilloo's father explained that the surface conditions are extremely hostile for an ordinary person.
The air on the surface is too thin to breathe and the temperature is so low that an unprotected person would freeze to death.
Only specially trained people in special suits with oxygen reservoirs and specially designed boots can survive on the surface.

Tilloo was neither trained nor equipped, making it dangerous for him to go there.

Answer: The surface has air too thin to breathe and temperatures so low that an unprotected person would freeze to death. Only specially trained personnel wearing special suits with oxygen reservoirs can survive there. Tilloo was neither trained nor equipped.

Q4 What changes had occurred, which forced people to live in underground homes?

SOLUTION

Their ancestors had lived on the surface naturally for millions of years.
Over time, the sun changed slightly but enough to upset the balance of nature on the planet.
As a result, birds became extinct first, then animals, and finally fish could not survive either.
The people managed to survive only because of their superior technology, but were forced to move underground and live under artificial conditions.
They now rely on solar energy to generate power to make their underground life comfortable.

Answer: The sun changed slightly but enough to disturb the balance of nature. Birds, animals, and fish became extinct one by one. The people survived only through superior technology but were forced to live underground under artificial conditions, powered by solar energy.

Exercise 7.2 — Comprehension Check II (after Part 2)

Q1 Why was everyone in the Control Room greatly excited?

SOLUTION

The big TV screen in the Control Room showed a dot moving against a clear background — it was not a star because it was changing its position.
The computer had calculated a trajectory showing this 'thing' was heading towards their planet.
The Supervisor explained that it appeared to be a spacecraft coming from outside their solar system — an unprecedented event since their own ancient space programme had confirmed they were 'alone' in the solar system.
The appearance of an alien spacecraft heading towards them was extraordinary and alarming news.

Answer: The Control Room's TV screen showed an unidentified object changing position and heading towards their planet. The computer identified it as a spacecraft — a shocking discovery, since their own ancient explorations had confirmed no other life existed in the solar system.

Q2 Was the spacecraft manned or unmanned? How do you know it?

SOLUTION

The spacecraft was unmanned — it contained only instruments, not living beings.
This is clear from what Number One told the Central Committee: 'Our reports say that they do not contain living beings, they only have instruments.'
This is also confirmed later when the mechanical hand (an instrument) emerges from the spacecraft to collect soil samples, with no living crew visible.

Answer: The spacecraft was unmanned. Number One told the Central Committee that their reports confirmed the spacecraft did not contain living beings — only instruments. This is further supported by the fact that a mechanical hand, not a person, emerged to collect soil samples.

Q3 What did Number One and Number Two suggest should be done about the alien spacecraft?

SOLUTION

Number One (in charge of defence) suggested that they could totally destroy the spacecraft with missiles, but he also noted they could render the craft ineffective once it landed, at any time they chose.
Number Two (the scientist) recommended non-interference and passive observation. He argued that since they did not know the power or intentions of whoever sent the spacecraft, it was wiser not to reveal their own existence by destroying or disabling the craft.
Number Three agreed with Number Two and added they should keep surface activities to a minimum to create the impression that there is no life on the planet.

Answer: Number One said they could destroy the spacecraft with missiles or render it ineffective after landing. Number Two recommended non-interference and passive observation, arguing that acting would reveal their existence to an unknown and potentially powerful sender. Number Three agreed with Number Two.

Exercise 7.3 — Comprehension Check III (after Part 3)

Q1 What do you think the mechanical hand was trying to do?

SOLUTION

The mechanical hand emerged from the alien spacecraft and approached the surface of the planet.
It bent and touched the soil of the planet.
Based on the NASA press releases in the story, the mechanical hand was designed to dig out soil samples for examination — to test whether there was any sign of life on the planet.
This matches the real Viking Mission's purpose of collecting and examining Martian soil.

Answer: The mechanical hand was trying to collect soil samples from the planet's surface to examine them for signs of life. This is confirmed by the NASA press release in the story, which states it was designed to dig out Martian soil for examination.

Q2 Tilloo pressed the red button and "the damage was done". What was the damage?

SOLUTION

Tilloo, fascinated by the coloured buttons on the control panel, could not resist pressing the most prominent red button.
His father pulled him away and restored the red button to neutral position, but it was too late.
The damage was that the mechanical hand from the alien spacecraft ceased to work — it stopped functioning.
From NASA's perspective (as shown in the press conference), this appeared as a malfunction in the mechanical hand, for which the cause was unknown.

Answer: The damage was that the mechanical hand from the alien spacecraft stopped working completely. By pressing the red button, Tilloo accidentally disabled the hand. From NASA's side, this appeared as an unexplained malfunction in the equipment.

Q3 Where had the spacecraft come from?

SOLUTION

The President of the Central Committee stated that the two spacecraft were guessed to be coming from their 'neighbouring planet'.
In the context of the story — where Tilloo and his people live on Mars — the neighbouring planet would be Earth.
This is confirmed by the NASA press releases which refer to the Viking Mission and Martian soil, making it clear the spacecraft came from Earth.

Answer: The spacecraft had come from Earth. The President guessed the craft came from their neighbouring planet, and the NASA press releases in the story confirm these were Earth's Viking spacecraft on a mission to Mars.

Q4 On which planet do Tilloo and his parents live?

SOLUTION

Tilloo and his parents live on Mars.

Clues from the story: the planet's surface has air too thin to breathe and extremely low temperatures; birds, animals, and fish became extinct; people live underground.

The NASA press releases mention the Viking Mission and 'Martian soil', confirming the setting is Mars.

The story also ends with the statement: 'The Viking Mission found no signs of life on Mars' — because Tilloo's people deliberately concealed their existence.

Answer: Tilloo and his parents live on Mars. The NASA press releases in the story explicitly mention the Viking Mission and Martian soil. The story ends confirming the Viking Mission found no signs of life on Mars — because the inhabitants hid their existence.

Exercise 7.4 — Discuss

Q1 If you had to live in a home like Tilloo's, what parts of life would you find most difficult? What compensations might there be?

SOLUTION

Life underground like Tilloo's would mean never seeing the sky, the sun, the stars, or the open outdoors — the loss of natural light and the freedom to roam outside freely would be the hardest to bear.

However, the technology that makes underground life comfortable — generated power, artificial conditions, and a safe shelter from hostile surface conditions — would be genuine compensations.

Answer: The most difficult part would be never seeing the sky, sun, stars, or open outdoors — the absence of natural light and fresh air. A compensation might be the safety and comfort provided by advanced technology, and the close-knit underground community with all needs met artificially.

Q2 What, if anything, might drive mankind to make their homes underground?

SOLUTION

As shown in the story, extreme climate change making the surface uninhabitable — caused by changes in the sun or severe global warming — could force people underground.

Other possibilities include nuclear war, asteroid impacts, or severe air pollution making the surface too dangerous to live on.

Advanced technology and energy sources like solar power could make underground life sustainable, as in the story.

Answer: Extreme and irreversible climate change — whether from changes in the sun, nuclear war, or catastrophic pollution — could make the surface uninhabitable and drive people underground. The story shows that superior technology and solar energy can make such a life sustainable.

Q3 Do you think there is life on other planets? Can you guess what kind of people there may be on them? In what ways are they likely to be different from us?

SOLUTION

Scientists have not yet found confirmed evidence of intelligent life on other planets, but the universe is vast and many scientists believe life could exist elsewhere.

In the story, the inhabitants of Mars are technologically advanced but physically adapted to survive in extreme conditions, much like humans might be in the far future.

Life on other planets might differ in physical form (to suit their planet's gravity, atmosphere, and temperature), in their energy sources, and in their level of technology.

Answer: Scientists have not confirmed life on other planets, but the universe is so vast that it seems possible. Such beings might look very different physically, adapted to their planet's gravity and atmosphere. They might be far more or less technologically advanced than us, with entirely different social structures and ways of living.