



LOOPHOLE By:ARTHUR C. CLARKE From: President. To: Secretary, Council of Scientists. I have been informed that the inhabitants of Earth have succeeded in releasing atomic energy and have been making experiments with rocket propulsion. This is most serious. Let me have a full report immediately. And make it brief this time. K.K. IV. From: Secretary, Council of

Scientists. To: President. The facts are as follows. Some months ago our instruments detected intense neutron emission from earth, but an analysis of radio programmes gave no explanation at the time. Three days ago a second emission occurred, and soon afterwards all radio transmissions from Earth announced that atomic bombs were in use in the current war. The translators have not completed their interpretation, but it appears that the bombs are of considerable power. Two have so far been used. Some details of their construction have been released, but the elements concerned have not yet been identified. A fuller report will be forwarded as soon as possible. For the moment all that is certain is that the inhabitants of Earth have liberated atomic power, so far only explosively. Very little is known concerning rocket research on Earth. Our astronomers have been observing the planet carefully ever since radio emissions were detected a generation ago. It is certain that long-range rockets of some kind are in existence on Earth, for there have been numerous references to them in recent military broadcasts. However, no serious attempt has been made to reach interplanetary space. When the war ends, it is expected that the inhabitants of the planet may carry out research in this direction. We will pay very careful attention to their broadcasts and the astronomical watch will be rigorously enforced. From what we have inferred of the planet's technology, it should require about twenty years before Earth develops atomic rockets capable of crossing space. In view of this, it would seem that the time has come to set up a base on the Moon, so that a close scrutiny can be kept on such experiments when they commence.

Trescon. [Added in manuscripts] The war on Earth has now ended, apparently owing to the intervention of the atomic bomb. This will not affect the above arguments but it may mean that the inhabitants of Earth can devote themselves to pure research again more quickly than expected. Some broadcasts have already pointed out the application of atomic power to rocket propulsion.

T. From: President. To: Chief of Bureau of Extra-planetary Security (C.B.E.P.S). You have seen Trescon's minute. Equip an expedition to the satellite of Earth immediately. It is to keep a close watch on the planet and to report at once if rocket experiments are in progress. The greatest care must be taken to keep our presence on the Moon a secret. You are personally responsible for this. Report to me at yearly intervals, or more often if necessary.

K.K. IV. From: President. To: C.B.E.P.S. Where is the report of Earth?!
K.K. IV. From: C.B.E.P.S. To: President. The delay is regretted. It was caused by the breakdown of the ship carrying the report. There have been no signs of rocket experimenting during the past year, and no reference to it in broadcasts from the planet.

Ranthe From: C.B.E.P.S. To: President. You will have seen my yearly reports to your respected father on this subject. There have been no developments of interest for the past fifteen years, but the following message has just been received from our base on the Moon: Rocket projectile, apparently atomically propelled, left Earth's atmosphere today from northern landmass, travelling into space for one-quarter diameter of planet before returning under control.

Ranthe From: President. To: Chief of State. Your comments, please.

K.K. V. From: Chief of State. To: President. This means the end of our traditional policy. The only hope of security lies in preventing the Terrestrials from making further advances in this direction. From what we know of them, this will require some overwhelming threat. Since its high gravity makes it impossible for us to land on the planet, our sphere of action is restricted. The problem was discussed nearly a century ago by Anvar, and I agree with his conclusions. We must act immediately along those lines.

F.K.S. From: President. To: Secretary of State. Inform the Council that an emergency meeting is convened for noon tomorrow.

K.K. V. From: President. To: C.B.E.P.S. Twenty battleships should be sufficient to put Anvar's plan into operation. Fortunately there is no need to arm them - yet. Report progress of construction to me weekly.

K.K. V. From: C.B.E.P.S. To: President. Nineteen ships are now completed. The twentieth is still delayed owing to hull failure and will not be ready for at least a

month. Ranthe From: President. To: C.B.E.P.S. Nineteen will be sufficient. I will check the operational plan with you tomorrow. Is the draft of our broadcast ready yet? K.K. V. From: C.B.E.P.S. To: President. Draft herewith: People of Earth! We, the inhabitants of the planet you call Mars, have for many years observed your experiments towards achieving interplanetary travel. These experiments must cease. Our study of your race has convinced us that you are not fitted to leave your planet in the present state of your civilization. The ships you now see floating above your cities are capable of destroying them utterly, and will do so unless you discontinue your attempts to cross space. We have set up an observatory on your Moon and can immediately detect any violation of these orders. If you obey them, we will not interfere with you again. Otherwise, one of your cities will ' be destroyed every time we observe a rocket leaving the Earth's atmosphere. By order of the President and Council of Mars.

Ranthe From: President. To: C.B.E.P.S. I approve. The translation can go ahead. I will not be sailing with the fleet, after all. Report to me in detail immediately on your return. K.K. V. From: C.B.E.P.S. To:

President. I have the honour to report the successful completion of our mission. The voyage to Earth was uneventful: radio messages from the planet indicated that we were detected at a considerable distance and great excitement had been aroused before our arrival. The fleet was dispersed according to plan and I broadcast the ultimatum. We left immediately and no hostile weapons were brought to bear against us. I will report in detail within two days.

Ranthe From: Secretary, Council of Scientists. To: President. The psychologists have completed their report, which is attached herewith. As might be expected, our demands at first infuriated this stubborn and high-spirited race. The shock to their pride must have been considerable, for they believed themselves to be the only intelligent beings in the Universe. However, within a few weeks there was a rather unexpected change in the tone of their statements. They had begun to realize that we were intercepting all their radio transmissions, and some messages have been broadcast directly to us. They state that they have agreed to ban all rocket experiments, in accordance with our wishes. This is as unexpected as it is welcome. Even if they are trying to deceive us, we are perfectly safe now that we have established the second station just outside the atmosphere. They cannot possibly develop spaceships without our seeing them or detecting their tube radiation. The watch on Earth will be continued rigorously, as instructed.

Trescon From: C.B.E.P.S. To: President. Yes, it is quite true that there have been no further rocket experiments in the last ten years. We certainly did not expect Earth to capitulate so easily! I agree that the existence of this race now constitutes a permanent threat to our civilization and we are making experiments along the lines you suggest. The problem is a difficult one, owing to the great size of the planet. Explosives would be out of the question, and a radioactive poison of some kind appears to offer the greatest hope of success. Fortunately, we now have an indefinite time in which to complete this research, and I will report regularly.

Ranthe [End of Document] From: Lieutenant Commander Henry Forbes, intelligence Branch, Special Space Corps. To: Professor S. Maxton, Philological Department, University of Oxford. Route: Transender 11 (via Schenectady). The above papers, with others, were found in the ruins of what is believed to be the capital Martian city. (Mars Grid K1.302895.) The frequent use of the ideograph for 'Earth' suggests that they may be of special interest and it is hoped that they can be translated. Other papers will be following shortly.

H. Forbes, Lt/Cdr. [Added in manuscript] Dear Max, Sorry I've had no time to contact you before. I'll be seeing you as soon as I get back to Earth. Gosh! Mars is in a mess! Our Co-ordinates were dead accurate and the bombs materialized right over their cities, just as the Mount Wilson boys predicted. We're sending a lot of stuff back through the two small machines, but until the big transmitter is materialized we're rather restricted, and, of course, none of us can return. So hurry up with it! I'm

glad we can get to work on rockets again. I may be old-fashioned, but being
squirte through space at the speed of light doesn't appeal to me!
Yours in haste, Henry The End

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