

## An Alien Hand

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Tilloo and his parents live on Mars. However, they do not live on the surface of the planet. They live beneath the surface under artificial conditions. Only some very skilled persons in special suits can go on the surface. They go with a reservoir of oxygen for important work. Tilloo's father is one of them. He goes to work through a secret passage.

Tilloo has always been anxious to go through the passage. However, he has been never allowed. One day Tilloo gets a chance. He gets hold of his father's security card. Quietly he makes his way to the forbidden passage. He slips his father's magle card into a slot. The door to the passage opens.

Tilloo now looks forward to seeing the sun or the stars. He has never seen them before. But that was not to be. He moves hardly ten steps when the security staff gets hold of him. He is sent back to his mother.

Tilloo's father decides to brief him properly. He tells Tilloo that he cannot survive on the surface. The air is too thin and the temperature too low there. So he advises him not to try again to reach the surface of the planet.

Tilloo's father tells him that once upon a time their forefathers lived on the surface. But times changed. A slight change in the sun upset the balance of nature on the planet. First the birds became extinct. The animals followed. The fish also died. Human beings survived because of their superior technology. They used solar energy. Some of these machines which produce solar energy are on the surface. Tilloo's father belongs to a special group. It is this group's responsibility to look after these machines. He assured Tilloo that he could also join the team when he grew up. His mother however warned him that it was possible only if he obeyed his parents.

Next day when Tulloo's father went to work, he found the Control Room full of excitement. It was so because they had seen two space crafts. So far, it had been their belief that they were alone in the solar system. Although the conference room was full to capacity, nobody was speaking a word. They waited for the President to say something

The President looked at his paper carefully. After a pause he said that two spacecrafts were approaching their planet. While one of the two was orbiting the planet, the other was still far away. It was the President's guess that they were from their neighbouring planet. Thereupon, he asked the opinion of his colleagues. Together, they had to deal with these spacecrafts.

Number One was in charge of defence. He told what his reports had revealed. It was that the spacecraft did not contain any living beings. It had only instruments. He suggested that there was no need to destroy those spacecrafts. After their landing on Mars they could make them ineffective, if they so chose. Number Two also agreed With Number One. He added that by destroying those spacecrafts, they would be only revealing their existence.

Number Three also agreed with what the other two had said. Just then the President' got the message that the first spacecraft had landed.

It was a red letter day in Tilloo's life. His father had brought him to the Control Room. From here he could see the alien spacecraft on his TV screen. He looked with great interest at a panel with several coloured buttons on it. His father told him that this pane was very important. Through its buttons, they had power to make inert any part of the spacecraft.

Suddenly there was some movement in the spacecraft. All eyes were now glued tp the TV screen. A mechanical hand was coming out of the spacecraft. It bent and tpouched the soil. Everyone in the control room was watching with great interest. lop could not contain himself. He pressed the red button on the panel. There was shirill whistle. His father pulled him away roughly. Then, he restored the red button its earlier position.

But the damage was done. The mechanical hand of the spacecraft had ceased work.

All this was happening on the Mars. On the earth NASA was holding a press Conference. The spacecraft had come from the earth. NASA had sent it. In the press qonference, it was said that everything was well with the spacecraft. Only the mechanical hand had stopped working. They, however expressed confidence that very soon everything will be set right.

Soon after this, another press conference was held. It was informed that the mechanical hand had been reactivated. Soil samples were being collected. These samples would reveal whether there was life on Mars or not.

This was the part of earth's Viking Mission. The scientists behind the mission were disappointed. They found no signs of life on Mars.