Before You Read

The Sentinel

Reading Focus

What kind of evidence might convince someone that civilizations exist elsewhere in the universe?

List Ideas With a small group of classmates, discuss what specific pieces of evidence might lead someone to believe in alien civilizations. Then work together to make a "Top Ten List of Effective Alien Evidence."

Setting a Purpose Read to find out what evidence scientists discover during a futuristic moon expedition.

Building Background

The Time and Place

First published in 1951, this story looks ahead to the "future." It takes place on the surface of the moon during the late summer of 1996.

Did You Know?

Several years after writing "The Sentinel," Arthur C. Clarke expanded this short story into a screenplay for a major motion picture, *2001: A Space Odyssey,* which was released in 1968. Coauthored and directed by Stanley Kubrick, the movie stands as a milestone in science fiction filmmaking. Its special effects and realistic space-station interiors greatly influenced the science fiction movies that followed. Although both the short story and film were clearly within the realm of futuristic fiction when they were written, several "fantastic" elements have since become realities, including lunar landings, orbiting space stations, and computers with artificial intelligence.

Vocabulary Preview

tantalize (tant′ əl īz′) *v.* to torment or tease by tempting with something and then withholding it; p. 909
enigma (i nig′ mə) *n.* a mystery; a baffling person or thing; p. 910
exploit (eks′ ploit) *n.* a bold, daring deed; feat; p. 911
ebb (eb) *v.* to become less or weaker; decline; fail; p. 912
irrevocably (i rev′ ə kə blē) *adv.* in a way that cannot be revoked or undone; completely and hopelessly; p. 913
sentinel (sent′ ən əl) *n.* someone or something stationed to guard against and warn of danger; guard; p. 915
emissary (em′ ə ser′ ē) *n.* a person or agent sent, often in secret, on an official mission; p. 915

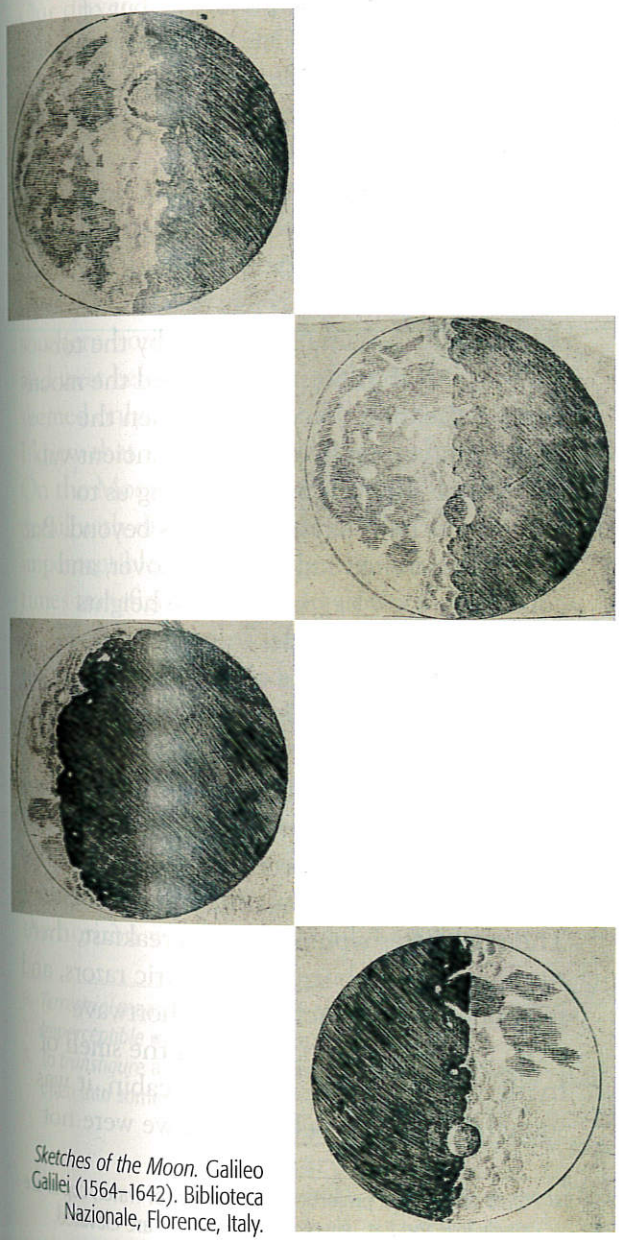
Meet Arthur C. Clarke

Unlike many science fiction authors, Arthur C. Clarke is truly a scientist. In fact, in 1945, when he was only twenty-eight years old, he developed the idea for orbital communication satellites, which are important to global communications today. He has written more than eighty science fiction books, many of which describe "fantastic" elements that later became reality. He has received numerous honors for his work, including nominations for both the Nobel Peace Prize and an Academy Award. Since 1956 Clarke has lived in Sri Lanka, keeping in touch with his international friends and colleagues by satellite, fax, and E-mail, all of which he predicted in his early science fiction.

Arthur C. Clarke was born in 1917 in England. This story was first published in 1951.

THE SENTINEL

Arthur C. Clarke



Sketches of the Moon. Galileo Galilei (1564–1642). Biblioteca Nazionale, Florence, Italy.

THE NEXT TIME YOU SEE the full moon high in the south, look carefully at its right-hand edge and let your eye travel upward along the curve of the disk. Round about two o'clock you will notice a small, dark oval: anyone with normal eyesight can find it quite easily. It is the great walled plain, one of the finest on the Moon, known as the Mare Crisium[1]—the Sea of Crises. Three hundred miles in diameter, and almost completely surrounded by a ring of magnificent mountains, it had never been explored until we entered it in the late summer of 1996.

1. *[Mare Crisium]* In 1609, when Italian scientist Galileo Galilei first viewed the moon's dark patches through an early telescope, he called them "seas." *Mare* (mär′ ā) is Latin for "sea." Today, these dark areas are known to be broad, lowland plains, but the Latin names given them in the 1600s are still used.

Our expedition was a large one. We had two heavy freighters which had flown our supplies and equipment from the main lunar base in the Mare Serenitatis,[2] five hundred miles away. There were also three small rockets which were intended for short-range transport over regions which our surface vehicles couldn't cross. Luckily, most of the Mare Crisium is very flat. There are none of the great crevasses[3] so common and so dangerous elsewhere, and very few craters or mountains of any size. As far as we could tell, our powerful caterpillar tractors would have no difficulty in taking us wherever we wished to go.

I was geologist—or selenologist, if you want to be pedantic[4]—in charge of the group exploring the southern region of the Mare. We had crossed a hundred miles of it in a week, skirting the foothills of the mountains along the shore of what was once the ancient sea, some thousand million years before. When life was beginning on Earth, it was already dying here. The waters were retreating down the flanks of those stupendous cliffs, retreating into the empty heart of the Moon. Over the land which we were crossing, the tideless ocean had once been half a mile deep, and now the only trace of moisture was the hoarfrost one could sometimes find in caves which the searing sunlight never penetrated.

We had begun our journey early in the slow lunar dawn, and still had almost a week of Earth-time before nightfall. Half a dozen times a day we would leave our vehicle and go outside in the space suits to hunt for interesting minerals, or to place markers for the guidance of future travelers. It was an uneventful routine. There is nothing hazardous or even particularly exciting about lunar exploration. We could live comfortably for a month in our pressurized tractors, and if we ran into trouble, we could always radio for help and sit tight until one of the spaceships came to our rescue.

I said just now that there was nothing exciting about lunar exploration, but of course that isn't true. One could never grow tired of those incredible mountains, so much more rugged than the gentle hills of Earth. We never knew, as we rounded the capes and promontories[5] of that vanished sea, what new splendors would be revealed to us. The whole southern curve of the Mare Crisium is a vast delta where a score of rivers once found their way into the ocean, fed perhaps by the torrential rains that must have lashed the mountains in the brief volcanic age when the Moon was young. Each of these ancient valleys was an invitation, challenging us to climb into the unknown uplands beyond. But we had a hundred miles still to cover, and could only look longingly at the heights which others must scale.

We kept Earth-time aboard the tractor, and precisely at 2200 hours the final radio message would be sent out to Base and we would close down for the day. Outside, the rocks would still be burning beneath the almost vertical sun, but to us it would be night until we awoke again eight hours later. Then one of us would prepare breakfast, there would be a great buzzing of electric razors, and someone would switch on the shortwave radio from Earth. Indeed, when the smell of frying sausages began to fill the cabin, it was sometimes hard to believe that we were not

2. *[Mare Serenitatis]* In the early 1970s, Apollo astronauts landed near the Sea of Serenity ("calmness").
3. A *crevasse* (kri vas′) is a deep, narrow crack.
4. One who is *pedantic* (pi dan′ tik) pays excessive attention to minor details and formal rules. Such a person would insist that a *geologist* studies the structure and history of the earth, while a *selenologist* studies the moon.
5. Points of land that project out into a body of water, *capes* are usually low and flat, whereas *promontories* are elevated.

back on our own world—everything was so normal and homely, apart from the feeling of decreased weight and the unnatural slowness with which objects fell.

It was my turn to prepare breakfast in the corner of the main cabin that served as a galley. I can remember that moment quite vividly after all these years, for the radio had just played one of my favorite melodies, the old Welsh air "David of the White Rock." Our driver was already outside in his space suit, inspecting our caterpillar treads. My assistant, Louis Garnett, was up forward in the control position, making some belated entries in yesterday's log.

As I stood by the frying pan, waiting, like any terrestrial[6] housewife, for the sausages to brown, I let my gaze wander idly over the mountain walls which covered the whole of the southern horizon, marching out of sight to east and west below the curve of the Moon. They seemed only a mile or two from the tractor, but I knew that the nearest was twenty miles away. On the Moon, of course, there is no loss of detail with distance—none of that almost imperceptible[7] haziness which softens and sometimes transfigures[8] all far-off things on Earth.

Those mountains were ten thousand feet high, and they climbed steeply out of the plain as if ages ago some subterranean eruption had smashed them skyward through the molten crust. The base of even the nearest was hidden from sight by a steeply curving surface of the plain, for the Moon is a very little world, and from where I was standing the horizon was only two miles away.

I lifted my eyes toward the peaks which no man had ever climbed, the peaks which, before the coming of terrestrial life, had watched the retreating oceans sink sullenly into their graves, taking with them the hope and the morning promise of a world. The sunlight was beating against those ramparts[9] with a glare that hurt the eyes, yet only a little way above them the stars were shining steadily in a sky blacker than a winter midnight on Earth.

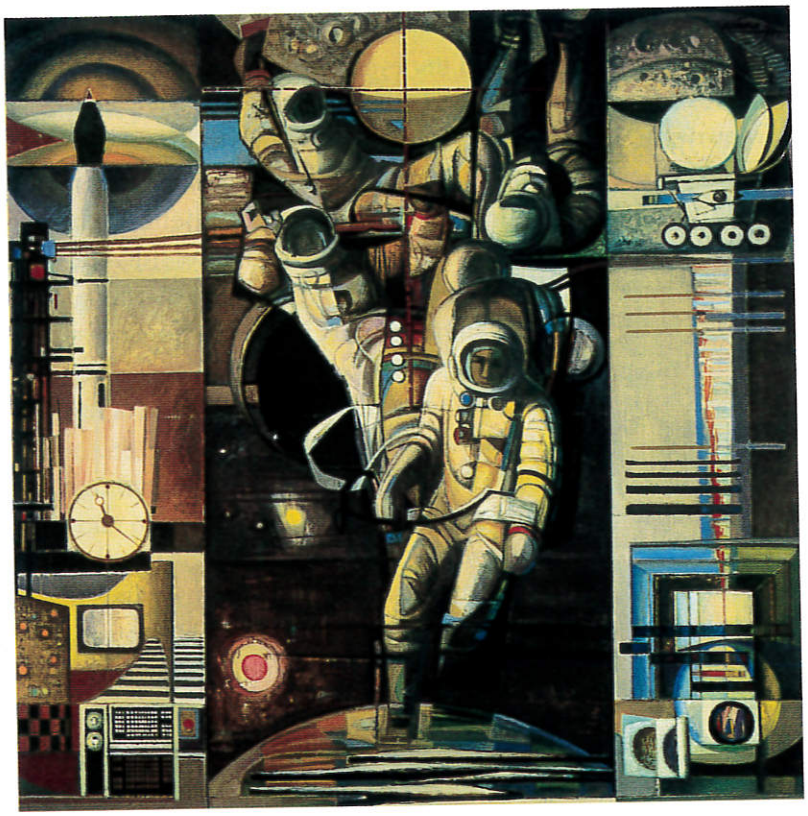
I was turning away when my eye caught a metallic glitter high on the ridge of a great promontory thrusting out into the sea thirty miles to the west. It was a dimensionless point of light, as if a star had been clawed from the sky by one of those cruel peaks, and I imagined that some smooth rock surface was catching the sunlight and heliographing[10] it straight into my eyes. Such things were not uncommon. When the Moon is in her second quarter, observers on Earth can sometimes see the great ranges in the Oceanus Procellarum[11] burning with a blue-white iridescence[12] as the sunlight flashes from their slopes and leaps again from world to world. But I was curious to know what kind of rock could be shining so brightly up there, and I climbed into the observation turret and swung our four-inch telescope round to the west.

I could see just enough to tantalize me. Clear and sharp in the field of vision, the mountain peaks seemed only half a mile away,

6. *Terrestrial* means "of the earth; earthly."
7. *Imperceptible* means "not noticeable."
8. To *transfigure* a thing is to change its outward appearance, often into something glorious.
9. *Ramparts* are walls or embankments built for protection, as around a castle. Here, metaphorically, the ramparts are the mountain walls.
10. Here, *heliographing* means "reflecting." A *heliograph* is a signaling device that uses mirrors to reflect light from the sun.
11. *Oceanus Procellarum* is the (waterless) Ocean of Storms.
12. *Iridescence* is a display of shimmering and changing colors.

Vocabulary

tantalize (tant′ əl īz′) *v.* to torment or tease by tempting with something and then withholding it



Man and Space, 1971. Lepo Mikko. 200 x 200 cm. Tartu Art Museum, Estonia.

Viewing the painting: Which astronaut in this painting do you think best symbolizes the narrator? Give reasons for your answer.

but whatever was catching the sunlight was still too small to be resolved.[13] Yet it seemed to have an elusive[14] symmetry, and the summit upon which it rested was curiously flat. I stared for a long time at the glittering enigma, straining my eyes into space, until presently a smell of burning from the galley told me that our breakfast sausages had made their quarter-million-mile journey in vain.

All that morning we argued our way across the Mare Crisium while the western mountains reared higher in the sky. Even when we were out prospecting in the space suits, the discussion would continue over the radio. It was absolutely certain, my companions argued, that there had never been any form of intelligent life on the Moon. The only living things that had ever existed there were a few primitive plants and their slightly less degenerate[15] ancestors. I knew that as well as anyone, but there are times when a scientist must not be afraid to make a fool of himself.

"Listen," I said at last, "I'm going up there, if only for my own peace of mind. That mountain's less than twelve thousand feet high—that's only two thousand under Earth gravity—and I can make the trip in twenty hours at the outside. I've always wanted to go up into those hills, anyway, and this gives me an excellent excuse."

"If you don't break your neck," said Garnett, "you'll be the laughingstock of the expedition when we get back to Base. That mountain will probably be called Wilson's Folly from now on."

"I won't break my neck," I said firmly. "Who was the first man to climb Pico and Helicon?"[16]

13. Here, *resolved* means "made clearly visible."
14. The precise shape of the object was difficult to identify or grasp *(elusive).*
15. Here, *degenerate* (di jen′ ər it) means "having sunk below a former condition." The idea is that as water vanished, the moon's plant life gradually deteriorated in quality and finally died out.
16. Moon mountains are commonly named after Earth mountains. *Pico* is a mountain in the Azores, a group of islands in the northern Atlantic, and *Helicon* is a peak in Greece.

Vocabulary

enigma (i nig′ mə) *n.* a mystery; a baffling person or thing

"But weren't you rather younger in those days?" asked Louis gently.

"That," I said with great dignity, "is as good a reason as any for going."

We went to bed early that night, after driving the tractor to within half a mile of the promontory. Garnett was coming with me in the morning; he was a good climber, and had often been with me on such exploits before. Our driver was only too glad to be left in charge of the machine.

At first sight, those cliffs seemed completely unscalable, but to anyone with a good head for heights, climbing is easy on a world where all weights are only a sixth of their normal value. The real danger in lunar mountaineering lies in overconfidence; a six-hundred-foot drop on the Moon can kill you just as thoroughly as a hundred-foot fall on Earth.

We made our first halt on a wide ledge about four thousand feet above the plain. Climbing had not been very difficult, but my limbs were stiff with the unaccustomed effort, and I was glad of the rest. We could still see the tractor as a tiny metal insect far down at the foot of the cliff, and we reported our progress to the driver before starting on the next ascent.

Inside our suits it was comfortably cool, for the refrigeration units were fighting the sun and carrying away the body heat of our exertions. We seldom spoke to each other, except to pass climbing instructions and to discuss our best plan of ascent. I do not know what Garnett was thinking, probably that this was the craziest goose chase he had ever embarked upon. I more than half agreed with him, but the joy of climbing, the knowledge that no man had ever gone this way before, and the exhilaration of the steadily widening landscape gave me all the reward I needed.

I don't think I was particularly excited when I saw in front of us the wall of rock I had first inspected through the telescope from thirty miles away. It would level off about fifty feet above our heads, and there on the plateau would be the thing that had lured me over these barren wastes. It would be, almost certainly, nothing more than a boulder splintered ages ago by a falling meteor, and with its cleavage planes[17] still fresh and bright in this incorruptible, unchanging silence.

There were no handholds on the rock face, and we had to use a grapnel. My tired arms seemed to gain new strength as I swung the three-pronged metal anchor round my head and sent it sailing up toward the stars. The first time it broke loose and came falling slowly back when we pulled the rope. On the third attempt, the prongs gripped firmly and our combined weights could not shift it.

Garnett looked at me anxiously. I could tell that he wanted to go first, but I smiled back at him through the glass of my helmet and shook my head. Slowly, taking my time, I began the final ascent.

Even with my space suit, I weighed only forty pounds here, so I pulled myself up hand over hand without bothering to use my feet. At the rim I paused and waved to my companion, then I scrambled over the edge and stood upright, staring ahead of me.

You must understand that until this very moment I had been almost completely convinced that there could be nothing strange or unusual for me to find here. Almost, but not quite; it was that haunting doubt that had driven me forward. Well, it was a doubt no longer, but the haunting had scarcely begun.

17. Here, *planes* are rock surfaces, exposed as a result of the boulder's splitting, or *cleavage*.

Vocabulary

exploit (eks′ ploit) *n.* a bold, daring deed; feat

I was standing on a plateau perhaps a hundred feet across. It had once been smooth—too smooth to be natural—but falling meteors had pitted and scored its surface through immeasurable eons.[18] It had been leveled to support a glittering, roughly pyramidal structure, twice as high as a man, that was set in the rock like a gigantic, many-faceted jewel.

Probably no emotion at all filled my head in those first few seconds. Then I felt a great lifting of my heart, and a strange, inexpressible joy. For I loved the Moon, and now I knew that the creeping moss of Aristarchus and Eratosthenes[19] was not the only life she had brought forth in her youth. The old, discredited dream of the first explorers was true. There had, after all, been a lunar civilization—and I was the first to find it. That I had come perhaps a hundred million years too late did not distress me; it was enough to have come at all.

My mind was beginning to function normally, to analyze and to ask questions. Was this a building, a shrine—or something for which my language had no name? If a building, then why was it erected in so uniquely inaccessible a spot? I wondered if it might be a temple, and I could picture the adepts[20] of some strange priesthood calling on their gods to preserve them as the life of the Moon ebbed with the dying oceans, and calling on their gods in vain.

I took a dozen steps forward to examine the thing more closely, but some sense of caution kept me from going too near. I knew a little of archaeology, and tried to guess the cultural level of the civilization that must have smoothed this mountain and raised the glittering mirror surfaces that still dazzled my eyes.

The Egyptians could have done it, I thought, if their workmen had possessed whatever strange materials these far more ancient architects had used. Because of the thing's smallness, it did not occur to me that I might be looking at the handiwork of a race more advanced than my own. The idea that the Moon had possessed intelligence at all was still almost too tremendous to grasp, and my pride would not let me take the final, humiliating plunge.

And then I noticed something that set the scalp crawling at the back of my neck—something so trivial and so innocent that many would never have noticed it at all. I have said that the plateau was scarred by meteors; it was also coated inches deep with the cosmic dust that is always filtering down upon the surface of any world where there are no winds to disturb it. Yet the dust and the meteor scratches ended quite abruptly in a wide circle enclosing the little pyramid, as though an invisible wall was protecting it from the ravages of time and the slow but ceaseless bombardment from space.

There was someone shouting in my earphones, and I realized that Garnett had been calling me for some time. I walked unsteadily to the edge of the cliff and signaled him to join me, not trusting myself to speak. Then I went back toward the circle in the dust. I picked up a fragment of splintered rock and tossed it gently toward the shining enigma. If the pebble had vanished at that invisible barrier, I should not have been

18. An *eon* (ē′ ən) is an indefinitely long period of time.
19. Most moon craters are named for scientists and philosophers, such as these Greek astronomers of the third century B.C. (*Aristarchus* was among the first to say that the earth moves around the sun; *Eratosthenes* accurately calculated the earth's circumference.)
20. *Adepts* are experts; here, they're priests.

Vocabulary

ebb (eb) *v.* to become less or weaker; decline; fail

surprised, but it seemed to hit a smooth, hemispheric surface and slide gently to the ground.

I knew then that I was looking at nothing that could be matched in the antiquity of my own race. This was not a building, but a machine, protecting itself with forces that had challenged Eternity. Those forces, whatever they might be, were still operating, and perhaps I had already come too close. I thought of all the radiations man had trapped and tamed in the past century. For all I knew, I might be as irrevocably doomed as if I had stepped into the deadly, silent aura of an unshielded atomic pile.[21]

I remember turning then toward Garnett, who had joined me and was now standing

21. *Atomic pile* is another term for a nuclear reactor.

Vocabulary

irrevocably (i rev′ ə kə blē) *adv.* in a way that cannot be revoked or undone; completely and hopelessly

Three Mountains. Mario Sironi (1885–1961). Tempera on paper, 16 x 22.5 cm. Estorick Foundation, London.

Viewing the painting: How does this landscape compare to the moon's landscape as described in the story?

motionless at my side. He seemed quite oblivious to me, so I did not disturb him but walked to the edge of the cliff in an effort to marshal my thoughts.[22] There below me lay the Mare Crisium—Sea of Crises, indeed—strange and weird to most men, but reassuringly familiar to me. I lifted my eyes toward the crescent Earth, lying in her cradle of stars, and I wondered what her clouds had covered when these unknown builders had finished their work. Was it the steaming jungle of the Carboniferous,[23] the bleak shoreline over which the first amphibians must crawl to conquer the land—or, earlier still, the long loneliness before the coming of life?

Do not ask me why I did not guess the truth sooner—the truth that seems so obvious now. In the first excitement of my discovery, I had assumed without question that this crystalline apparition[24] had been built by some race belonging to the Moon's remote past, but suddenly, and with overwhelming force, the belief came to me that it was as alien to the Moon as I myself.

In twenty years we had found no trace of life but a few degenerate plants. No lunar civilization, whatever its doom, could have left but a single token of its existence.

I looked at the shining pyramid again, and the more I looked, the more remote it seemed from anything that had to do with the Moon. And suddenly I felt myself shaking with a foolish, hysterical laughter, brought on by excitement and overexertion: For I had imagined that the little pyramid was speaking to me and was saying, "Sorry, I'm a stranger here myself."

It has taken us twenty years to crack that invisible shield and reach the machine inside those crystal walls. What we could not understand, we broke at last with the savage might of atomic power and now I have seen the fragments of the lovely, glittering thing I found up there on the mountain.

They are meaningless. The mechanisms—if indeed they are mechanisms—of the pyramid belong to a technology that lies far beyond our horizon, perhaps to the technology of paraphysical forces.[25]

The mystery haunts us all the more now that the other planets have been reached and we know that only Earth has ever been the home of intelligent life in our Universe. Nor could any lost civilization of our own world have built that machine, for the thickness of the meteoric dust on the plateau has enabled us to measure its age. It was set there upon its mountain before life had emerged from the seas of Earth.

When our world was half its present age, *something* from the stars swept through the Solar System, left this token of its passage, and went again upon its way. Until we destroyed it, that machine was still fulfilling the purpose of its builders; and as to that purpose, here is my guess.

Nearly a hundred thousand million stars are turning in the circle of the Milky Way, and long ago other races on the worlds of other suns must have scaled and passed the heights that we have reached. Think of such civilizations, far back in time against the fading afterglow of Creation, masters of a universe so young that life as yet had come only to a handful of worlds. Theirs would have been a loneliness we cannot imagine, the

22. Garnett seemed unaware of, or *oblivious to,* the narrator. *To marshal one's thoughts* is to organize and make sense of them.

23. In geologic time, earth's *Carboniferous* (kär′ bə nif′ ər əs) Period was between 280 million and 345 million years ago, when land was covered with lush vegetation and swamps.

24. An *apparition* is a ghost or ghostly vision.

25. *Paraphysical forces* produce ordinary physical effects without using recognizable physical causes. Such effects might include the ability to float in midair, to materialize and dematerialize, and to move objects with the mind.

loneliness of gods looking out across infinity and finding none to share their thoughts.

They must have searched the star clusters as we have searched the planets. Everywhere there would be worlds, but they would be empty or peopled with crawling, mindless things. Such was our own Earth, the smoke of the great volcanoes still staining the skies, when that first ship of the peoples of the dawn came sliding in from the abyss[26] beyond Pluto. It passed the frozen outer worlds, knowing that life could play no part in their destinies. It came to rest among the inner planets, warming themselves around the fire of the Sun and waiting for their stories to begin.

Those wanderers must have looked on Earth, circling safely in the narrow zone between fire and ice, and must have guessed that it was the favorite of the Sun's children. Here, in the distant future, would be intelligence; but there were countless stars before them still, and they might never come this way again.

So they left a sentinel, one of millions they scattered throughout the Universe, watching over all worlds with the promise of life. It was a beacon that down the ages patiently signaled the fact that no one had discovered it.

Perhaps you understand now why that crystal pyramid was set upon the Moon instead of on the Earth. Its builders were not concerned with races still struggling up from savagery. They would be interested in our civilization only if we proved our fitness to survive—by crossing space and so escaping from the Earth, our cradle. That is the challenge that all intelligent races must meet, sooner or later. It is a double challenge, for it depends in turn upon the conquest of atomic energy and the last choice between life and death.

Once we had passed that crisis, it was only a matter of time before we found the pyramid and forced it open. Now its signals have ceased, and those whose duty it is will be turning their minds upon Earth. Perhaps they wish to help our infant civilization. But they must be very, very old, and the old are often insanely jealous of the young.

I can never look now at the Milky Way without wondering from which of those banked clouds of stars the emissaries are coming. If you will pardon so commonplace a simile, we have set off the fire alarm and have nothing to do but wait.

I do not think we will have to wait for long.

26. Here, *abyss* (ə bis′) refers to the immeasurably vast reaches of space.

Vocabulary

sentinel (sent′ ən əl) *n.* someone or something stationed to guard against and warn of danger; guard

emissary (em′ ə ser′ ē) *n.* a person or agent sent, often in secret, on an official mission

Responding to Literature

Personal Response

What does this story make you wonder about?

Analyzing Literature

Recall

1. Describe the setting of the story. Remember to include details about daily life, as well as about people's ideas and values at the time.
2. When the narrator makes breakfast, what does he see out the window? How do he and his crew members react to the vision?
3. Why did the narrator experience "a strange, inexpressible joy" upon making his discovery?
4. From the narrator's perspective, how and why, ultimately, was "the sentinel" nestled in the mountains of the Mare Crisium?
5. What is the effect of the atomic blast the scientists used against "the sentinel," and what does the narrator think will happen next?

Interpret

6. What can you infer about life on the moon from the setting's details?
7. "A scientist must not be afraid to make a fool of himself," says the narrator. How does this sentiment set him apart from his crew members?
8. Early in the story, the narrator states, "There is nothing hazardous or even particularly exciting about lunar exploration." Given his discovery, explain the **irony** in this statement. (See page R7.)
9. In your opinion, why did the scientists try for twenty years to crack the shield surrounding the machine?
10. What lines or details in the story indicate that the future is in jeopardy?

Evaluate and Connect

11. How might the narrator respond to the Reading Focus on page 906?
12. Clarke once wrote, "The only way of discovering the limits of the possible is to venture a little way past them into the impossible." In your opinion, do the narrator's actions and thoughts support this point of view? Do yours? Explain.
13. In your opinion, was the use of atomic power against "the sentinel" appropriate, or should the scientists have left it intact? Explain.
14. Theme Connections If this story were true, would you find its hypothesis reasonable–that "wanderers" from other worlds left sentinels to watch over all worlds that held the promise of life? Explain.
15. What adjectives would you use to describe this story?

Literary ELEMENTS

Suspense

Suspense is the growing interest and excitement readers experience while awaiting a climax or resolution in a work of literature. To build suspense, a writer may provide just enough information to keep the question *What will happen next?* burning in the reader's mind. Another technique for building suspense is the use of foreshadowing, which provides clues to future events and allows readers to guess at the outcome.

1. The narrator is cooking breakfast on the morning of his discovery. What specific events and details in this scene add to the suspense of the story?
2. Several times in the story, the narrator says that he and others believed that nothing "strange or unusual" would be found on top of the mountain and that intelligent life had never been on the moon. Why might these statements be considered foreshadowing of discoveries to come? What do they add to the overall suspensefulness of the story?

• See **Literary Terms Handbook**, p. R12.

Literature and Writing

Writing About Literature

How Great Is It? In his introduction to "The Sentinel" in the story collection *Science Fiction: Masters of Today,* Arthur Liebman writes that this story "did more to enhance the popularity of science fiction than perhaps any other short story of recent times. It remains 'must' reading for all science fiction fans." Write a critical review of "The Sentinel" in which you explain why the story might have made science fiction so popular and why you agree or disagree with Liebman's opinion that it is "must" reading.

Creative Writing

Keeping the Log Louis Garnett, the narrator's assistant, is responsible for keeping a log on the expedition to explore the Mare Crisium. From his point of view, write a log entry on the day the machine was first spotted in the mountains, on the day he climbed the mountain with the narrator, and on the day, twenty years later, atomic energy was used to reach the machine inside the crystal walls. Be sure to remain true to Garnett's character, and use details from the story in your entries.

Extending Your Response

Literature Groups

And the Future Is . . . ? With your group, discuss Arthur C. Clarke's vision of the future when he published this story in 1951. Does "The Sentinel" present the future as something to be anticipated or dreaded—or both? As you review the story, you might look for information about technological advancements as well as about human nature and social relationships. Make a list of details you find in the selection to support the viewpoints of your group members, and then share your conclusions with your classmates.

Interdisciplinary Activity

Science: Conditions on the Moon Clarke's descriptions of conditions on the moon were based on the scientific information that was available in 1951. List the physical details and scientific facts about the moon that he includes in his story regarding temperature, topography, gravitational force, degree of moisture, and so on. Then check those facts in current reference books. Report on any new information that was not available to Clarke when he wrote this story.

Performing

Do You Read Me, Houston? With a partner, create a skit in which one person plays the part of the narrator and the other person plays the part of a commander stationed at Mission Control at NASA headquarters in Houston. In your skit, present the dialogue that might have taken place as the narrator informs Mission Control about his discovery. Discuss together what should happen next: research "the sentinel" on the moon or make plans for transporting it back to Earth. Make sure that your dialogue is faithful to the story. For example, your narrator should express his caution about getting too close to the machine. Perform your skit for the class.

Reading Further

If you'd like to read more by Arthur C. Clarke, you might enjoy these works:

Novels: Two of Clarke's many novels, *The Fountains of Paradise* (1979) and *Rendezvous with Rama* (1973), have won both Hugo and Nebula awards.

Viewing: Arthur C. Clarke's award-winning 1968 movie *2001: A Space Odyssey,* a science fiction classic, is available on videocassette.

Save your work for your portfolio.