***Arthur C. Clarke’s***

***Excerpt from* Rendezvous with Rama**

Sooner or later, it was bound to happen. On June 30, 1908, Moscow escaped destruction by three hours and four thousand kilometers—a margin invisibly small by the standards of the universe. On February 12, 1947, another Russian city had a still narrower escape, when the second great meteorite of the twentieth century detonated less than four hundred kilometers from Vladivostok, with an explosion rivaling that of the newly invented uranium bomb.

In those days there was nothing that men could do to protect themselves against the last random shots in the cosmic bombardment that had once scarred the face of the Moon. The meteorites of 1908 and 1947 had struck uninhabited wilderness; but by the end of the twenty-first century there was no region left on Earth that could be safely used for celestial target practice. The human race had spread from pole to pole. And so, inevitably

At 0946 GMT on the morning of September 11 in the exceptionally beautiful summer of the year 2077, most of the inhabitants of Europe saw a dazzling fireball appear in the eastern sky. Within seconds it was brighter than the Sun, and as it moved across the heavens-at first in utter silence-it left behind it a churning column of dust and smoke.

Somewhere above Austria it began to disintegrate, producing a series of concussions so violent that more than a million people had their hearing permanently damaged. They were the lucky ones.

Moving at fifty kilometers a second, a thousand tons of rock and metal impacted on the plains of northern Italy, destroying in a few flaming moments the labor of centuries. The cities of Padua and Verona were wiped from the face of the Earth; and the last glories of Venice sank forever beneath the sea as the waters of the Adriatic came thundering landward after the hammer blow from space.

Six hundred thousand people died, and the total damage was more than a trillion dollars. But the loss to art, to history, to science-to the whole human race, for the rest of time-was beyond all computation. It was as if a great war had been fought and lost in a single morning; and few could draw much pleasure from the fact that, as the dust of destruction slowly settled, for months the whole world witnessed the most splendid dawns and sunsets since Krakatoa.

After the initial shock, mankind reacted with a determination and a unity that no earlier age could have shown. Such a disaster, it was realized, might not occur again for a thousand years-but it might occur tomorrow. And the next time, the consequences could be even worse.

Very well; there would be no next time.

A hundred years earlier, a much poorer world, with far feebler resources, had squandered its wealth attempting to destroy weapons launched, suicidally, by mankind against itself. The effort had never been successful, but the skills acquired then had not been forgotten. Now they could be used for a far nobler purpose, and on an infinitely vaster stage. No meteorite large enough to cause catastrophe would ever again be allowed to breach the defenses of Earth.

So began Project Spaceguard. Fifty years later-and in a way that none of its designers could ever have anticipated -it justified its existence.

Intruder

By the year 2130, the Mars-based radars were discovering new asteroids at the rate of a dozen a day. The Spaceguard computers automatically calculated their orbits and stored the information in their own enormous memories, so that every few months any interested astronomer could have a look at the accumulated statistics. These were now quite impressive.

It had taken more than 120 years to collect the first thousand asteroids, since the discovery of Ceres, largest of these tiny worlds, on the very first day of the nineteenth century. Hundreds had been found and lost and found again; they existed in such swarms that one exasperated astronomer had christened them "vermin of the skies." He would have been appalled to know that Spaceguard was now keeping track of half a million.

Only the five giants-Ceres, Pallas, Juno, Eunomia, and Vesta-were more than two hundred kilometers in diameter; the vast majority were merely oversized boulders that would fit into a small park. Almost all moved in orbits that lay beyond Mars. Only the few that came far enough sunward to be a possible danger to Earth were the concern of Spaceguard. And not one in a thousand of these, during the entire future history of the solar system, would pass within a million kilometers of Earth.

The object first catalogued as 31/439, according to the year and the order of its discovery, was detected while it was still outside the orbit of Jupiter. There was nothing unusual about its location; many asteroids went beyond Saturn before turning once more toward their distant master, the Sun. And Thule II, most far-ranging of all, traveled so close to Uranus that it might well be a lost moon of that planet.

But a first radar contact at such a distance was unprecedented; clearly, 31/439 must be of exceptional size. From the strength of the echo, the computers deduced a diameter of at least forty kilometers. Such a giant had not been discovered for a hundred years. That it had been overlooked for so long seemed incredible.

**Please answer these questions on your own page:**

1. Could you write something like this? Why or why not do you think so?
2. What kind of a story would you write about? Summarize your story in a sentence.
3. Would your story be a Milieu, Idea, Character, or Event-type story? Why?
4. Write the very next sentence after Arthur C. Clarke’s introduction.