

Richard Heidmann

# A MA LERTE RS CITY

## ALERT IN MARS CITY



Ed2A

LA COLONIE MARTIAISE COMME SI VOUS Y ÉTIEZ !  
THE MARTIAN COLONY: BE THERE!

A hard SF novel about a future Martian colony, by **Richard Heidmann**, a space propulsion engineer, founder of The Mars Society French chapter.

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## THE STORY

*While founded a mere half-century ago, the Martian colony is yet enduring societal disturbances! Journalist Olivier Tranbec is sent on Mars to report about the reformist movement, which aim is the renewal of our civilization. Together with his Martian guide, Victoria, he happens to get involved in the adventures of the fight of Mars City for its survival and that of humanity, having to face the paranoiac plans of the movement extremists.*

## EXCERPTS

*(Translation: Felicia Inostroza, Benedicte Reynolds)*

### PROLOGUE

Olivier Tranbec is a French reporter and investigation journalist who has already carried out several journeys in orbit around the Earth, and he is 35 years old when he sets out on his first journey to Mars in 2143, for a thorough investigation on the colony. It turns out he lands there just in time to witness the dramatic events that have just occurred and to get involved somewhat in spite of himself. I knew of his adventure and conceived the project to write about it, which seemed to be an excellent opportunity to finally devote myself to the red planet, my lifelong passion.

Once contacted, Olivier Tranbec showed immediate interest and was ready to devote the necessary time to collect his testimony. Besides, we understood how his commentaries could help liven up the articles and interviews he had sent at the time to his magazine, World News.

He answered the questions, that could sometimes have made him uncomfortable, with great honesty and he showed a desire to describe the facts as accurately as possible. I take this opportunity to thank him once again. As for me, as I collected the information from this privileged witness and became aware of the dramatic intensity of what he had been through, I realized that this deserved far more than a work of fiction from me. What I needed to undertake was the story of his Martian adventure and of the terrifying scenario that would drag him through more and more critical situations, with his thirst for the truth never giving in.

Although he was quite reserved, Olivier Tranbec had indeed shown when telling his story the reactions and emotions he had felt while going through the events. It appeared to me that I had to try and give an account of it, at the risk of being accused of mixing fiction and storytelling, because it would help to give a more human vision to this episode of our modern history. I would like to point out that Olivier Tranbec agreed and had every possibility of approving the liberties that I was thus taking with the reality of what he had felt.

Paris, April 2149

Luc Delmann

# I

## **The journey. Who are these colonists?**

*(excerpt)*

This morning, as I was walking along the River Seine to my office at the World News, I felt it would be a pleasant day, perhaps even spiced up with some unexpected events. My intuition was soon confirmed when, after having exchanged a few jokes with my colleagues, I discovered on my desk a message asking me to contact the boss. It was probably nothing extraordinary, but after a moment of hesitation, I decided I might just as well call him right away, given that I did not get to work very early. His secretary told me I could go up, so I put back on my jacket, rearranged my hair without thinking (and uselessly), grabbed a pad and walked towards the elevator.

The atmosphere in the big company was supposed to be relaxed, serious but relaxed, which suited me perfectly. The boss, who was about eighty years old and incredibly thin for his age, with rare greyish hair, welcomed me cordially. But what was the reason for this unexpected summoning? Although I was ready to listen, what he told me straight out totally caught me unprepared for what seemed like ages. For many long seconds, I stayed there speechless, my heart beating hard because of the serious consequences his offer implied. My boss, this man with whom I had been working for eight years, was asking me no less than to leave for Mars, for a thorough investigation report on the colony!

I didn't consider myself as a novice of space travels. And yet, I had to admit that my two little trips in orbit around the Earth didn't represent much compared to this expedition to another world, for more than two years and hundreds of millions of miles away from the Earth... To be honest, the technical risks, breakdowns or accidents didn't worry me. Mankind had acquired enough experience about travelling to Mars to master unexpected occurrences reasonably well. No, it was more the proven existence, within the colony, of a reformist movement advocating a civilizational revolution which was said to lead to attacks, even though it was difficult most of the time to eliminate the hypothesis of mere technical accidents. Observing and being able to give a captivating report of this Martian civilization thus appeared to me as a difficult and risky task. But on the other hand, I suspected it was precisely this rather disturbed climate that had justified the World News' decision to start up this investigation, and therefore to offer me this costly opportunity.

All that troubled my mind for a few moments and that must have seemed very long to the person opposite. He was now leaning slightly towards me, his forearms resting on his glass top desk, in an impatient posture. Our eyes met... And suddenly, without giving it any further thoughts, I heard myself say yes.

"I knew it, Olivier" the man who had just offered me this incredible opportunity congratulated me.

"You know how attracted I am to Mars", I said, as to tone down the merit of such a swift decision.

I realized that not only would this mission allow me to get to the mythical planet, but also to observe at close range the development process of the colony, Mars City, that was already a city counting fifty thousand inhabitants.

Immediately, we stood up spontaneously and embraced each other. The boss took a bottle of fine aged Cognac and we drank right away to the success of my mission. Through the bay windows, the eternal view of the old Paris was sparkling. I was feeling a little light-hearted at the prospect of what it just opened up to me.

.../...

## **VIII**

### **Attack in the industrial zone**

*(excerpt)*

.../...

In reality, I was dying to visit this water production site. Victoria's arguments easily overcame my reluctance due to the threats of which I was the target. Two days later, early in the morning, we took an outdoor taxi which drove us there in record time. I must say that the site was linked to the colony by a high speed cemented road wide enough for two vehicles and regularly cleared from dust deposits left by the wind.

At first sight, it was less impressive than what I had imagined, but we were on Mars, not on the Earth! And there were only fifty thousand inhabitants in the colony. The zone's boss, Phil Stephen, a Martian whose parents had emigrated from Australia, welcomed us very cordially as we got off the taxi. When we got out of the airlock of the

premises, we opened our vizors, which allowed me to see his pale face with thick red hair and a proud moustache.

Before the visit, Victoria asked him for an interview, because we wanted to inform him of my situation, and, of course, that the threat had been sent from there.

Even though he expressed his regret and understanding for my worry, he admitted he did not quite know how he could help us:

“You know, the men here do an exhausting job. You probably won’t realize it, because normally, when everything goes well, they are casually sitting at the control desk of their robotized machines. But as soon as something unexpected happens, whether something is damaged or the ground suddenly becomes exhausted, it gets more physical. Do not forget either that they’re constantly wearing space suits. That’s why they take turns every four hours.”

“That’s exactly what I would like my report to show. I hope your workers won’t mind me talking to them...”

“It is a matter of tact, I think you understand. We are in the extreme of the extreme here, the men are rather rough, that’s true.”

“Do the inhabitants of the city consider them as citizens like any others, or as a separate community?”

“They are welcomed everywhere, not ostracized, but still with a certain restraint, I confess.”

“Would it be favorable grounds for sectarian reformism?”

“In a way yes, since it’s possible they don’t totally feel like Mars City citizens. But on the other hand, most of them don’t plan on

spending the rest of their lives on Mars. They rather consider themselves as mercenaries, selected for their physical and professional capacities and who came to enjoy very attractive wages. Thus, in principle they aren't likely to take up such projects."

To conclude, Phil Stephen assured us he would try to investigate discreetly. The message I had received obviously proved there was a problem in his zone... Victoria assured him he had the support of Security services.

The visit started with a short but dense technical presentation in a room. It gave me the impression that mankind had developed a maturity and a volume of impressive means in record time. There existed two other sites like this one, for a total daily production capacity of 750 tons, which meant excavating almost 8000 cubic meters of soil per day (4 skips per hour on each site)!

The process was not especially complex. Firstly, a powerful machine equipped with a kind of pneumatic drill would break the upper layers of the soil. Then, a mechanical shovel would pick up this mix of regolith and ice, and drop it into a skip. Once filled up, the skip was taken to the extraction oven. When full, this oven was heated up, which caused the water to vaporize. The steam would finally be condensed into water, then poured into big cans in order to be delivered to consumer areas.

It turned out seams of copper oxide had been discovered on the very same site, and they had immediately been exploited. Copper was indeed the ideal material for electric wiring; its substitute, aluminum, consumed far more energy and was not as good a conductor as copper.



But we could not wait to go on site. I was authorized to film and interview, but always and especially here with the usual precautions. We went first to the center of the zone, where the energy production unit was installed, on a vast surface. Phil Stephen was clearly proud of it:

“You have here in front of you the first fusion energy station to have been installed in space. It has six units, each one able to produce a hundred megawatts.”

I added:

“It’s almost equivalent to a unit in a power station on Earth! Is it the same technology?”

It was only after more than a century of intense researches and an exemplary international collaboration that nuclear fusion could become the main and unlimited source of electric energy on Earth. Indeed, for decades, efforts had been made towards solutions that had turned out to be dead ends because of their cost or the enormous infrastructures that would have been necessary. Then, towards the end of the last century, the essential discovery of an applicable “cold fusion” process had led to the new industrial revolution that we have just known and that boosts our development.

It was no secret that a Martian colony would have enormous energy needs. It was not seriously conceivable to keep on importing electronuclear fission generators. From then, means would have to be light, easy to maintain, and produce no waste. The invention of fusion generators was miraculous. Yet, there was still a difficulty to overcome: installing the “cold source” circuit that enabled the fluid to liberate the calories that hadn’t been used. Given the amount of “lost”

calories, the only solution was to use the underground as the cold source. Installing a generator therefore implied excavating so as to bury in the ground a whole network of pipes for the fluid.

After this first explanation, that was finally impressive not only because of the elegance of the chosen solution but also more profoundly because we were facing the actual heart of the zone, we got back on our rover and headed to one of the excavation spots that were presently in activity, at the North end of the zone. Despite the low atmosphere, we could hear perfectly the muffled and strangely distorted roaring of the machines' powerful electric engines. The nimble arms of those robots, that moved in a kind of uncanny way, danced frantically, and it felt as if every gesture was carefully monitored by their artificial intelligence. It was fascinating. I watched carefully one the operators up in the cradle of his machine; he looked perfectly relaxed and even waved at us.

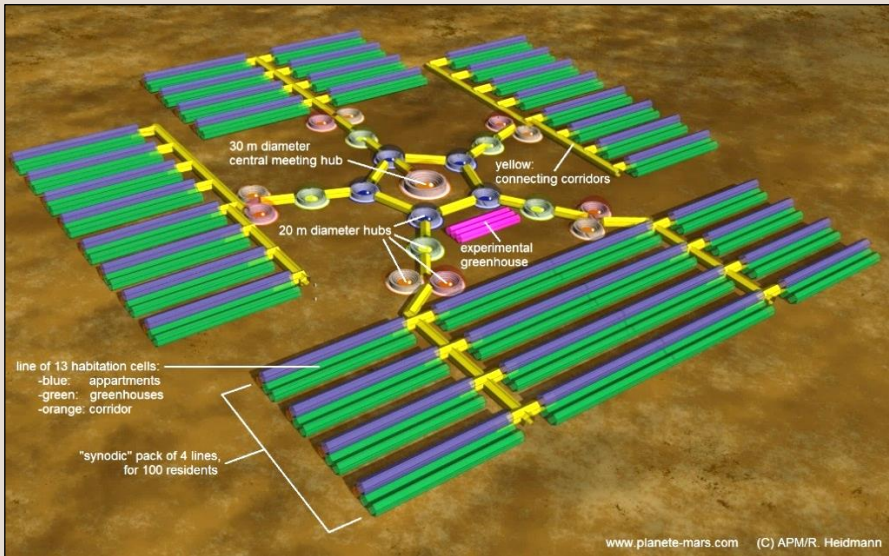
As we were listening to the boss' explanations and were about to go to another spot, I felt a violent blow on the right side of my bottom, as if some joker had just kicked me. I lost my balance and fell on all fours, without really understanding what was happening to me. I didn't feel any pain, but I suddenly realized that I was in a danger of death. Indeed, my suit had probably been torn because I felt a lack of oxygen. Was it because of an impact? Moreover, just before I became unconscious due to anoxia, I felt a hot liquid running down my thigh, and had the time to think: I am injured!

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This novel is an effort to bring to the reader an insider view of what could be a colony, based on the concrete findings of our studies, but devoid of arduous technical details and supported by a breath-taking narration.



Published in French...

***Looking for an English language publisher!***

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