



**CLASSICS TO GO**

**DATELINE MARS  
AND THREE MORE STORIES**

**RICHARD WILSON**

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# Dateline: Mars

Scott Warren snapped off the vision screen and sat down in front of his typewriter. Through the glass side of the building he could see the lights of the celebrations whose sounds he had just silenced. He lighted a cigarette and started to type out the final edition of *Today on Mars* for transmission by Interradio to the New York bureau of the Galactic News Service. He started the news roundup:

"IOPA, MARS—(GN)—Events on Mars were at a snailspace today, the midpoint of the traditional three-day Landing Day holiday...."

Scott rolled the paper up in the carriage of his typewriter and jagged a line through what he had written. Four "days" in the same sentence might get past the night desk, but the New York bureau chief would send him a memo about it in the morning.

He started again.

"... Landing Day celebrations on Mars are at their midpoint tonight, with both Earth people and natives...."

He x'ed out "natives" and substituted "Martians," remembering the memo he'd got about *that*.

"... both Earth people and Martians forgetting their political and physical differences to take part in planetwide carnivals. Business houses, government offices and stores have been closed down since Friday, and Pleasure is king. The two great cities on Mars—Iopa and Senalla—are ablaze with light, from their desert outskirts to the quarter-mile-high government buildings that mark the center of each. Parades, speeches...."

Scott snubbed out his cigarette, shoved his chair away from the desk. He looked out over Iopa toward the government building, spotted in searchlight rays from all sides of the city. It was bad enough writing this stuff—bad enough grinding out a routine night lead, to be later dictated to Interradio for transmission across space to Earth, simply because the news schedule demanded two daily Mars roundups—

But it wasn't even the truth.

The truth was that both Earth people and Martians were observing Landing Day with the usual fuss—but that it was all a big masquerade. The oldtime distrust of Terrestrials that had come with the first spaceship was still there. It had never been completely wiped out. The only ones being taken in were the people back home, who knew nothing about Mars except what they were told by people like Scott Warren, and who usually saw it only as a red pinpoint in the sky, if the weather happened to be right.

When he got to thinking this way, Scott Warren felt more like a propagandist for World Government than a newsman—the chief of the Mars bureau of Galactic News. He wished he could tell them the truth, a truth not dictated by Policy. Some day he'd write a book. That was what all newsmen said, wasn't it? The truth would have gone something like this:

"The distrust Martians have for Earth people—yes, that includes you, dear friends of the reading, listening and viewing audience—wasn't completely wiped out even when World Government corrected its first monumental blunder. Oh, yes, W.G. has made blunders, and the first was a whooperdoo, ladies, gentlemen and prodigies, a whooperdoo of the first order, a dilly whose details still are skirted when we talk about it, because they're very, very embarrassing.

"The first spaceship, you see, dealt naturally enough with those who had seemed to be the rulers of Mars, if not the duly elected representatives of the pee-pul. And so did the

Earth emissaries who followed. These Martians in the welcoming party were a crafty race, stockily built with oversized heads like granite, hard-bargaining and double-crossing. Rockheads, we called them, and still do, underestimating them.

"As our politicians point out with pride, there has been no colonization of Mars—as such. Not even despite the cries of the imperialists back home. And there has been no war, you will remember, although for a while it was touch and go.

"Among the first to come from Earth were the World Government commissions. C.E.A.—exploration and assessment. C.E.D.—economic development. C.I.I.—industrial integration. C.H.W. came later—health and welfare. And so did C.I.E.—information and education.

"It all worked very smoothly. Mars, you remember, was the goal of space-flight for half a century, ever since the pioneer hop to the icy rock of the moon; and the planning commission had it all set up, in advance, from Martian Relations right down to War Planning (top secret in the "if necessary" category).

"But Earth muffed it, and good. The Rockheads of Mars who met the spaceship, and whose delegations worked with the Earth emissaries, were intelligent people, true—but they were the fascists of Mars. What World Government didn't know, and couldn't have known, was that there had been a military revolution on the red planet a short ten years before the first spaceship landed, and that in that revolution the democratic government of the planet was overthrown and its leaders killed or banished!"

Scott Warren took an imaginary sip of water and paced up and down his imaginary lecture platform. He pointed a finger at his imaginary classroom.

The big shots of W.G. had found out about it, of course. It didn't take them too long. Only about two years went by before they were convinced of what had happened, and they had had suspicion of it long before. But it took W.G. twenty years to do anything about it. Twenty years, mind you, when the average lifespan of a Martian is forty.

Of course there were reasons. Good, sound, diplomatic reasons. In the first place, it would have been embarrassing to act sooner. There had been such hoopla and ballyhoo during the first negotiations with the Rockheads, so many grandiose statements and telepix of interplanetary amity, that to have confessed then would have been diplomatic suicide—or so they thought. So the fiction had been maintained. Not only maintained, but magnified and distorted.

So bad did the distortion become that the people back home had almost no inkling of the difficulties in negotiation, of the many concessions Earth had to make to Mars' totalitarian rulers. They didn't know how many insults the Earth envoys had to swallow, or of the innumerable conferences that ended in deadlock because of the Rockheads' impossible demands—demands made to impress their own subject people with their might—or of the W.G. investigators who were imprisoned because they had stumbled across some particularly noisome secret of the corrupt Martian government.

Scott was getting quite wound up. He was pointing a finger again when the door opened. His finger paralyzed in midair.

The thing that entered was taller than he. The entire upper half of it was a face. An idiotically-grinning, white-toothed face. Its eyes were outlined in black and its lips were an oversized red. A caricature of a woman's face, with a great mass of blonde hair coiled fantastically above.

"What the hell," said Scott.

The figure bent forward, and the huge mask came off.

"Hello, Scott," a girl said.

"My Terrestrial aunt," said Scott. "Ylia."

She was a Martian, the daughter of one of the subcommissioners of her government. Ylia wasn't pretty by any Earth standard. She had the big head of her race, the stocky body and the flat face. But she was esteemed by the Martians as attractive, as far as looks count on that planet.

"Why the mask?" asked Scott. "I didn't think you went in for all this brothers-together nonsense."

"Everybody's masked tonight," she said, meaning all the women. "I had to see you, and I thought I'd attract less attention if I wore one, too."

Scott knew what the masks represented. They were brought out every Landing Day and worn in the streets for the traditional celebrations. The masks were all of women—Earth women. Few Earth women had come to Mars, but Earth's advertising had come as soon as the planet was opened to trade. And with the ads had come the art which hadn't changed in centuries. A pretty face, it was reasoned—if there was any reasoning—ought to sell as much soap or cigarettes on Mars as it had on Earth. Hence the masks, representing Earth's greatest contribution thus far to the culture of its neighboring planet—advertising and the female face.

"What's up, Ylia?" Scott asked.

"We're having a meeting, sort of, and Father would like you to come, if you can."

"Why sure," he said. "When is it?"

"Anytime you get there. You see, you're sort of part of it."

"Will there be anything I can use in the roundup?" Scott asked. "There's nothing in it so far except color stuff on