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ON MARS WE TROD

By Eando Binder

**Some people say Alexander Graham Bell wasn't
really the inventor of the telephone. Here
is a story of the first man to reach Mars —
and who, like Bell's unknown rival, didn't get
the credit — until he came back from the dead!**

Illustrated by Lawrence

MIRACULOUSLY, the victim was alive! Excited, Mark Allison gave him a stiff shot, followed by hot soup. At last the man stopped shivering and a pink glow drove away the deadly blue of his skin.

The crisis was over. Death withdrew.

"Hello," said Allison, feeling foolish at the trite word, but somebody had to say something first. "Feel all right? Wonder if you knew you were floating in space, frozen? Sometimes it happens too quickly — they just black out. Was your ship wrecked? Blasted open by a meteor? You were thrown clear probably. No chance to put on a space suit. But luckily, you got space-frozen instead of dying. It happens often enough. And lucky, too, I spotted you

here, on the Mars-Earth run. Who are you, friend?"

But the reporter only got a puzzled stare in return, from the revived man. Why didn't he understand plain Sol? It was the universal language of the Solar System in 2273, formerly the English-American language of Earth.

But the man only shook his head, and gibbered back in queer accents that baffled Allison.

Allison squinted thoughtfully, then, at the torn clothing he wore. Now he noticed how odd they were. Not a special style of any planet, but a style that reached across another dimension — time!

"Those old-time movies of ancient days," Allison breathed. "The people wore outfits like yours. Pilots anyway. You're from the past, my friend. You've been



"You're from the past, my friend! You've been frozen for centuries!"

space-frozen for maybe *centuries!*
Great Orion!"

But then, there was no strict limit to how long a man might stay unharmed in the deep freeze of space. Once frozen properly, he was perhaps good forever, or at least a thousand years. He wouldn't "spoil," anymore than food would spoil in any deep freeze.

Listening intently, Allison began to understand the man speaking back. After all, it was just an archaic form of modern 23rd century Sol-English. And by slowing down his own staccato accent into a drawl, Allison made himself understood by the other. They spoke the same language really, and only had to bridge the gulf of several centuries of change between their two "dialects." After that, it went smoothly.

"The year 2273?" said the survivor finally, getting that clear. "It's that far in the future — my future, that is? I'm from 1970!"

Allison whistled. This broke all records. Some space frozen men had been found and revived as late as 87 years after their accident. But no recorded case was on file of a survivor of 303 years. He was really *ancient!*

The man looked sad now, as if looking back down the dim corridor of time to the lost age which he could never again see. He was suddenly forlorn, pathetic, a lost soul.

But Allison was too excited for pity, at the next thought he had.

"Let's see — space travel didn't begin until 1968. Then you must be among the early *pioneers* of space. Maybe your name is even *famous* in interplanetary history, as one of those renowned space trail blazers."

The man looked startled. "You mean I might be part of *history* now? My name known and recorded?"

"Why not?" Allison nodded. "Frobisher — Hackinwell — Kobawska — Bergdorf — Wentworth. Are you any of those?"

The man from 1970 shook his head. "John Henry Gregg."

Allison filed through his memory. It was all past history, those early pioneering days of space. Every kid learned it all by heart in school these days, about those famous, thrilling maiden flights to the Moon, Venus, Mars and all the other planets.

Allison frowned in disappointment, seeing a headline slipping from his grasp. "John Henry Gregg? Sorry, it's not familiar."

The other's face fell too. But then he shrugged. "Naturally not, come to think of it. I *failed* in my flight. Never got back to Earth. History would only remember the *successful* space flyers. So I'm unknown."

"That's it of course," Allison agreed. "There were dozens of poor devils like you who bravely

set out to conquer space and set foot on a new world — and never made it. Martyrs. But of course all the glory goes to the guy who makes it."

John Henry Gregg of 1970 nodded. But it was a nodding droop of fatigue. He almost slumped to the floor before Allison caught him and bundled him in the bunk.

For a moment Allison feared he might be passing into eternal sleep, unable to survive his 300-year ordeal in frozen space. But a grin came to his lips at an unmistakable sound.

"Snoring," Allison muttered. "Poor guy is just dead tired. He'll be all right after a long sleep."

Allison plotted headlines before he dozed off himself. He would come back to Earth with something far better than the Flower Show on Mars.

In fact, something quite sensational. . . .

The next morning, Earth time, Gregg looked refreshed at breakfast, a vigorous young stalwart, obviously one of the finest physical specimens of the 20th century. But despite his powerful build and rugged face, he had strangely soft brown eyes that brooded, tabbing the sensitive mind behind. He could be the man of action — or the thinker too.

Allison looked him over with a preparatory twinkle in his eye.

"You don't look a bit your age, friend — 303 years."

"Don't feel a day over 200 myself," Gregg quipped back. "Actually, I'm 30. Or I was, back in 1970."

Allison resumed where they had left off. "So you tried for some planet and cracked up in space in 1970. Which planet?"

Gregg answered bleakly.

"Mars or bust. Do or die. I was going to be famous as the first man to step foot on Mars. A Columbus of Space — that sort of thing. Dozens of us in those exciting days were filled with the wild spirit of adventure. Ships had reached the Moon and returned, in 1968, opening up space. When Kobawska reached Venus a year later, the world went into a frenzy. Then everybody tried for Mars. That was the next big goal. Mars or bust —"

His voice went down.

"For me it was bust. I saw it coming at my ship, but too late — the meteor. All went black until I woke up here in your ship. That parade down Fifth Avenue — the cheering millions — the big headlines with my name — all that was wiped out in one crashing moment."

Allison pitied him. He had risked all for fame, even his life. His life had been miraculously restored to him, three centuries later, by a quirk of fate. But now what was he, here in 2273? Just

one of those failures of space pioneering. Unknown and unsung.

How many daring mariners had sailed toward America, before Columbus — and never been heard of again?

"You wouldn't know this," Allison told him gently, "but it was James Wentworth who first reached Mars, in 1971, a year after you tried and cracked up. His name of course ranks today with the greats of history's explorers and discoverers, both terrestrial and interplanetary. We have a Wentworth Day, like Columbus Day, on August 15, celebrating the day that a man first trod the red sands of Mars. Too bad you didn't beat him to it, Gregg."

"But I did," Gregg returned quietly.

Mark Allison twisted a finger in his ear. "Funny, I thought I heard you say you did beat him to Mars."

"I did," Gregg repeated.

"You're confused, friend," Allison said impatiently. "A while ago you told me you cracked up in space."

"On the *return* trip from Mars," nodded Gregg. "Not on the way there."

Allison sat down. All his muscles had turned to rubber. He choked out words. "Now look, friend. I've got a heart murmur and not-so-steady nerves. I'm prone to nervous breakdowns.

Please — *please* don't kid around with me. Now let's start all over. Answer me slowly and carefully. You got in your spaceship, right? Just answer yes or no."

"Yes."

"You headed for Mars?"

"Yes."

"You did *not* hit that meteor on the way to Mars?"

"No."

Allison wetted his lips. "You hit said meteor on the *return* trip from Mars to Earth?"

"Yes."

Allison looked like he was praying now. "Now — the jackpot question — did you just *circle* Mars without landing?"

"No."

Allison could hardly spill the words out fast enough then. "You landed? You set your foot" — he stopped and pointed at Gregg's right foot, dramatically — "that very foot down on Martian soil? The first human foot to ever do it?"

"No."

Allison jerked as if stabbed. "But — but —?"

"It was my *left* foot," Gregg returned seriously. "I remember it all so clearly — you know, etched on my memory. . . ."

Allison took up breathing again. "Good heavens, man," he bleated. "Think of my nerves. All right, you set your *left* foot down on Mars first. And in 1970? One year before James Wentworth?"

"Yes."

There was dead silence in the spacejet for a long moment, as the two men stared at each other. Gregg got uncomfortable under the fixed eyes of Allison, for they shone now with awe — infinite awe.

Then Allison jumped up to take a stiff slug of Medicinal Purposes from the medical kit. "I needed that," he said, straightening up but still trembling all over. "When I explode this story on Earth, it'll be like a thousand atom bombs going off at once. The biggest headline of a century — UNKNOWN SPACE PIONEER BEAT WENTWORTH TO MARS! And then I give 'em the second barrel — ALIVE TODAY! HEAR HIS STORY IN PERSON!"

Allison was babbling. Gregg sat paralyzed.

"Don't you see, man? That puts you in the Hall of Fame of Interplanetary History. The first man — the *true* first man — to reach Mars!"

Gregg struggled out of his shock. "I'll — I'll become famous for that — *today*?"

"Famous?" Allison spat out the word as if it were obsolete or totally inadequate. "They'll take you on parade to Mars and Venus and Ganymede and Titan and all the rest. Nine planets and 33 moons, all inhabited today. You'll be shown off to them all, not less

than a billion people by the time they finish the tour of the famous space hero who first set foot — his *left* foot — on Mars, back in 1970."

Gregg looked a bit frightened now. "I — can't we just settle for one parade down Fifth Avenue? Nine planets . . . a billion people. . . !"

Allison gripped his shoulder.

"Steady, man. Keep your nerve. Yes, it'll be an ordeal, all right. Steel yourself for it. You can't get out of it. You can't disappoint millions upon millions of people who will idolize you, worship you, cheer you day and night. Good thing you slept 303 years. You won't get much sleep from now on."

Gregg was already wilting, wiping his moist face. "I almost wish —" He stopped.

"You almost wish the meteor had finished you off?" grinned Allison. He sobered. "I'm sorry, Gregg. I know your type. You wanted a little acclaim of course, but not oceans of it. It's going to be tough on you, friend, tough. But sheer up, it'll be over in a year or so. After it all simmers down, you can relax and start living your own life again."

"Live my own life again," echoed Gregg, more happily. "I guess I'll just have to grit my way through it till that day comes. Then I can —"

His face clouded. "Then I can

— what? What can I do in this far future — my — future — displaced from my times? I'll probably be like a hillbilly here in your advanced times. Allison — can you understand? *That* scares me too!"

Allison nodded in sympathy. "I know. It won't be easy, adjusting to our modern age."

Broodingly, Gregg pursued the topic. "To be quite practical, how can I earn my living here in 2273? I was just an ordinary rocket pilot of my time. You must have millions today, far better trained. How will I *compete* in your economic system? Earn my daily bread? Make money?"

Allison stared. "But Gregg, don't you remember —?" He smote his own forehead. "Stupid me! How could you remember or even *know*? But you don't have to worry about money, Gregg. You'll be one of the *richest* men alive today."

Gregg's face reflected only blank incomprehension, as if Allison had suddenly switched to ancient Sanskrit.

Allison sat down, lit a cigarette, and explained slowly, taking pleasure in the surprise coming up for his guest.

"Here's the pitch. Back in 1971, a year after you were spilled into space and knew no more, the United Nations assembly of Earth met and put through a very vitally needed set of laws, govern-

ing the exploration and settlement of space worlds. Briefly, they *internationalized* all planets, which was smart, avoiding endless bickering and possible war. But then, they also decided it was only fitting and proper that the great men who first opened up space — regardless of nationality — should be rewarded for their daring. So in 1972 — again after you vanished in space — the *Planetary Prizes* were set up."

Gregg waited, wonderingly.

Allison finished. "According to the provisions, each man who *first* set foot on any new world was granted 1-100 of one percent of *all mineral rights* on said world, for his lifetime!"

Gregg gasped.

"Right," Allison agreed, "it takes your breath away. It sounds like a small percentage off hand, but think how *big* each world is. Frobisher, the first man to reach the Moon, was a millionaire in five years. The Moon was mined for silver, uranium, and endless quantities of copper. On Venus, a bonanza of diamonds was found, putting the Kimberley Mines to shame. Kobawska, the first man to plant a flag on Venus, died a very *very* rich man."

Allison paused, giving Gregg time for the next shock.

"The riches of Mars surpassed them all, when the dry sea-bottoms were found practically paved with gold."

Gregg rode out the shock. "Then James Wentworth got all that wealth —"

Allison cut in. "Wentworth died in 1972, one year after he reached Mars. He died — of all things — from a fall in his bathtub. He never collected a penny, since mining operations didn't start on Mars for years. His heirs would have inherited his Planetary Prize — only he had no heirs. But most important of all, he is disqualified anyway, being the *second* man to reach Mars."

Like a prosecutor pounding home his case, Allison pointed a finger at Gregg.

"*You* were the first man."

Gregg got his tongue working with an effort. "You mean, I — I —?"

"Collect?" Allison said. "Certainly. You'll be established now as the true winner of that unawarded Planetary Prize for reaching Mars first." He mumbled some figures. "Let's see . . . last I heard . . . 200 billion Sol-dollars per year . . . hmmmm . . . fifty years . . . uh . . . well, in round figures, you get a neat little pile of a *billion*. You'll be a billionaire, friend."

"I don't believe it," snapped Gregg, turning to stare out into space through the port. "This is all a dream. A crazy, cockeyed dream. I'm still floating in space . . . frozen . . . my mind wandering. It must be that." He

whirled. "Or else you're making this all up, Allison. Playing some kind of cruel joke on me, laughing up your sleeve."

"Joke?" grunted the reporter. "Try and laugh it off when they dump the first million in your lap and ask where to unload the other carloads waiting outside. . . ."

Allison's voice stopped dead. "Wait! I forgot something. Great Orion! What *proof* have you that you reached Mars? Now hold on — no offense. Sure, *I* believe you. You've proved it to me by your simple, sincere way of telling it. But the Planetary Prize Committee — they won't hand over a billion dollars on your *word*. They'll want *proof*. Have you any?"

Gregg shrugged. "I don't know. If it's still here —" He was fishing in the pocket of his torn leather jacket. "Yes, here. I stuck it in my pocket when I was on Mars."

He held out a stone of peculiar gold-red hue.

Allison took it, turned it over in his hand, then split the air with a war-whoop.

"A Martian *sea stone* — unmistakable — from the ancient dry sea bottoms. That stone is your proof, friend, beyond a shadow of a doubt. It's worth a billion to you!"

Gregg himself had a doubt. "But why will they take my word about the *year*? I have no proof

about that, that it was 1970."

Allison waved. "Don't worry about that minor detail, friend. You see, they did keep records in those days of all flyers lost in space. The names are unknown to the glare of fame, but they're down in black-and-white. Somewhere will be a record of one John Henry Gregg who was lost in space in 1970, Rest in Peace. Good joke on them, eh? But once more — are *you* sure of the year? Was it 1970?"

Gregg nodded firmly. "It was just a month after my 30th birthday. A person doesn't get mixed up about those things."

"No," agreed Allison. "A full year! You reached Mars a whole year ahead of James Wentworth! You're in, friend. In for the parades, and blazing fame, and that billion bucks! We'll land on earth in ten hours. Better get some sleep now. You'll need it."

On Earth, at Idlewild Spaceport, the spacejet landed.

Mark Allison swung open the hatch, letting a draft of cool fresh air in.

John Henry Gregg took a deep breath — his first of Earth air in 303 years — half in delight, half wincingly.

"I suppose there's a crowd waiting already," he gritted.

"I radioed ahead," nodded Allison. "Nothing for you to do now but face it, friend."

Gregg squared his shoulders' marched out.

He stared around, dazed. "The crowd!" he gasped.

Allison grinned tightly.

Gregg gasped again. "The crowd — where *is* the crowd?"

"What crowd?" asked Allison, quietly.

Gregg spluttered. "Why — why those cheering millions you promised. You said millions would idolize me, cheer me, parade me all over town. "But — there's *no* body here!"

"You sound pretty *disappointed*, friend," said Allison. "In fact, you sound indignant. But I'm indignant too, Gregg — or should I say enraged? — at your *scheme*!"

"Scheme?" stammered Gregg. "Wh-what are you babbling about? Are you mad?"

"Yes, very mad," snapped Allison, his voice rising in intense bitterness. "Boiling is the word. You hooked me, roped me in like a baby, building me up to the biggest newspaper scoop of all time, only to have it fall with a dull thud at my feet. All I've got now is a story of a cunning hoax. An attempted swindle, of the Planetary Prize for Mars. But that money isn't for you, friend. Nor the fame and honor and glory of a space pioneer. Nor the cheering crowds. There's no crowd here, only two men coming toward us — in uniform. *They're* your welcoming committee."

"Police?" Gregg stood paralyzed.

"You won't tell the true story so I will," Allison ground out. "Maybe I won't have all the facts quite straight but it'll be close enough. You simply jumped into space deliberately, a few days or weeks ago — not 303 years ago. Yes, you took a chance, a risk that you would *die*. But young and strong, you knew you had a 50-50 chance to be space-frozen *alive*. And you jumped out near the main Mars-Earth space lane, with a thousand ships passing a day. You took the calculated risk — and won. I picked you up and revived you."

Gregg was mouthing protests, but Allison charged on loudly.

"The other details were simple — buying a torn old 20th-century pilot suit — practicing the old-English accent of 1970 — schooling yourself to 'forget' all space history past that time. Elementary, too, carefully picking up a Martian sea-stone and stuffing it in your jacket. And cleverest of all, looking up old records and finding that one John Henry Gregg *did* lose himself in space in 1970, an unsung hero."

Allison went on with scornful admiration.

"Yes, you played the part to perfection — that of a man born 303 and more years ago, destined to be a space hero. And how did you hide that gleam of *greed* in

your eyes, when I told of the Planetary Prizes? Because of course that was your whole scheme — to claim the billion dollars for first reaching Mars."

The two uniformed men held Gregg by the arms now, as he struggled violently.

"It was all perfect, I assure you," Allison rasped. "You had me completely fooled — *completely!*"

As the handcuffs snapped shut, the wild man shouted madly.

"But then what tripped me up? If I fooled you, how could I *fail*? What tripped me? Tell me — I've *got* to know!"

The smile on Allison's face was almost pitying.

"One little thing betrayed you, Gregg — or whatever your real name is when the police drag it out of you. No, not a little thing — a big *glaring* thing. Sometimes the *obvious* escapes a person. You plugged all the little holes, but you left one hole big enough for an elephant to march through."

"What?" shrieked the man whose alias was Gregg. "What was my mistake?" And he no longer had a 20th century accent.

Allison looked in the sky toward space, with half dreamy eyes.

"The stars and planets wheel in their eternal orbits, eon after eon, never disobeying set laws — never. Think once, you poor fool. Earth's year is 12 months. The

year of Mars is almost 23 months, almost double. Thus the two planets only come close together, in conjunction, once every *two* years. Wentworth reached Mars in 1971, when it was at its closest to earth, only 36 million miles off. You said you beat him by one year — in 1970."

The prisoner staggered, in dawning comprehension.

"Sure," said Allison. "By the immutable laws of space, Mars in 1970 was in *opposition* with Earth!"

"1969 I should have said!"

screamed the man who called himself Gregg, as they dragged him off. "Why didn't I say 1969?"

"That's what I was wondering," mused Allison, "while you slept. Wondering why any man in his right mind would make a mad dash for Mars, in 1970, when it was way around on the other side of the sun, at its *furthest* distance from earth of 235 million miles! It didn't make sense."

He grinned.

"No, it didn't make *cents* — for you."
