

THE MARTIAN DIARIES

BY

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A sequel to The War Of The Worlds

VOLUME 3. GATEWAY TO MARS

The Martian Diaries: Vol. 3 Gateway To Mars
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This is a work of fiction. Any similarities to real people, places or events are entirely coincidental.

Author's Note

In this final volume of *The Martian Diaries* trilogy, the narration of the story is

taken up by Jack Stent, the son I created for the H.G. Wells character, Julian Stent, who was killed outright by a Martian heat ray blast in *The War Of The Worlds*. In my story, in an alternate timeline, the first space mission takes off for the moon in 1945 with Jack Stent on board. Readers of volume 2, *Lake On The Moon* will understand how this came about. It has always been my intention to closely follow H.G. Wells' style in my continuation of his storyline and in this third book of *The Martian Diaries* trilogy, I hope to have brought *The War Of The Worlds* to a satisfying conclusion.

PART 1

1945

Prologue

Between today and tomorrow lies a better future, and the imagination to acquire it.

Those who thought it impossible that humans could navigate to the moon were simply unwilling to adopt the rigorous and unrelenting mindset of a Martian. They were therefore dumbfounded when Avenger, Excalibur and The Ogilvy blasted off from Jodrell Bank in 1945.

Chapter 1

Trapped

Somehow I knew what was about to happen since the many coincidences had a curious, yet disturbing familiarity. Final proof that the premonitions were real came when Ogilvy appeared to read my mind. He raised his arm and, pointing up at the black sky, began to recite word for word what I knew he would say. Then after a pause, he remarked that he much preferred the heavens to be blue in colour, especially at mid-day. My mother Elizabeth and stepfather George seemed equally concerned, as they contemplated the apocalyptic strangeness of the sky, and yet I was certain that all of this had happened before.

Ogilvy was right of course: it was a supernatural event. Only the sun shone in the blacked-out heavens. There were no stars, moon or any hint of colour in the cloudless, pitch-black above us. After a while I detected a subtle change to the sky: it was turning lighter and continued to improve to a more natural blue. I had no particular reason to sit here with these three apparitions, except out of a sense of loyalty or love, but deep down I knew that Ogilvy was long since dead—and perhaps all three of them were. It came as no surprise to me when they disappeared—one by one.

I stood up then, determined to reach the distant lake that gleamed and sparkled beyond the white desert sands. However, after about fifty paces towards the oasis, I noticed that not only were my footsteps silent, but the sand remained undisturbed under my feet. I hurried back to my starting point, searching for even the slightest imprint along the way, but there were no visible footprints. I crouched down to examine the sand and discovered that

my hands, and indeed the rest of my body, were just as transparent as the three apparitions had been. An awful dread engulfed me, since it was more than likely I would vanish too.

Then I became aware I was not alone: my mother and George sat close to me as before and they smiled at me, just as I knew they would. The sky darkened dramatically, but this time, before Ogilvy moved his arm, it was I who pointed upwards and directed him to look closely at the sun. His mild expression of surprise turned to one of confusion, and then to a mask of fear. "What has happened to the sun?" he barely managed to say, and after a scathing comment about my obvious lack of interest in what he saw, Ogilvy urged my parents quickly to their feet and hurried them away.

An enormous sun glared down at me from the black sky. It seemed to react to my every movement with fierce scrutiny, which suggested that the monstrous thing had a cunning mind, and worse still, the determined instinct of a predator. I froze, not daring to breathe or to make the slightest movement.

As large as a house, the eye seethed with a dim, eerie phosphorescence. Above it in the black gloom, the rock walls arched up into a ceiling canopy of boulders, suspended like bombs. I could see no way of escape from this unearthly dungeon. Not only was I trapped, bottled up in this dark, dank hole, but with a growing melancholy, I sensed death. As if on cue, a sizeable rock dislodged from high up on the circular wall, clattering noisily as it fell. The monstrous eye did not flinch at the commotion, but remained steady—solely focused on me.

A sudden and terrible pain in my left arm took me by surprise, and such was the depth of my amnesia, I had no memory of when or how this injury had been inflicted. I cradled my wounded arm, then tentatively examined a

substantial tear in the fabric at the back of my spacesuit sleeve. Blood oozed from damaged flesh beneath, and I could feel either jagged bone or something sharp lodged in the centre of it. Fearing infection, I decided it was better to leave the injury alone and sat uncomfortably, braced firmly against the uneven rock wall. All the while, the huge eyeball considered my every movement with malicious intent.

The situation was as dark as it was bleak, and it was clear that only God could help me now. I prayed grudgingly and half-heartedly for a miracle, but expected nothing. A sudden and blinding flash of white from deep within the eye's pupil momentarily blinded me and caused my heart to jolt in a spike of fear, far greater than any dread of the hideous eye. Fully awake from my stupor, I felt compelled to say something: "Forgive me," was all I could mutter as my mind pulsated with confusion, convinced that God himself was close by.

Feebly I got to my feet then staggered away from the rock wall to study the pupil of the eye. The mysterious thing was the colour of true darkness—something I had never before seen so perfectly portrayed. A sudden draught brought with it a brief smattering of water droplets, and seemed to emanate from the eye. Then followed another flash from inside the pupil's cold stare.

I noticed the cylindrical shape of my discarded air tank lying on the ground and I wondered how I was able to breathe without it. Then I was distracted when my boot struck something solid buried in the soil. Glancing down at my feet, I became instantly dizzy and collapsed to the ground, as a flood of memories came at me quickly, all at once. Some of them were recent occurrences, while others were nightmare segments of disjointed dreams that made little or no sense, and yet all competed for my immediate attention. With a growing sense of unease, I was convinced that something of

significance had occurred right here in this cavern.

Using the heel of my boot to snag the straps of the empty air tank I managed to pull it closer. It was covered in a thin layer of black dust—the same as everything else in the cavern. I reached out and unbuckled the straps from the tank and used them to make a crude sling for my arm. It was then I noticed a glint of metal in the soil. I dug around and soon a yellowish-silver pyramid, about eight inches high, emerged from its resting place. Further digging revealed an identical one, buried right next to it.

For some reason, the size and shape of the artefacts were familiar, but it was obvious that both metallic structures were incomplete. I felt certain that the missing parts were somewhere in the soil and after poking around, I located one and then the other missing top. I peered inside the pyramids: there seemed to be tightly rolled papers crammed inside and they were impossible to dislodge with my fingers. I picked up a sliver of stone to probe inside one of the artefacts, and after several attempts, I managed to tear off a strip of paper. Even in the semi-darkness I recognised Ogilvy's distinctive handwriting. I examined the other pyramid in the same way, and to my surprise the paper fragments from it confirmed that the documents inside the artefacts were from the Martian Diaries.

In that instant I remembered the purpose and function of these small pyramids: they were sleeping chambers for dormant Martian infants. Sickened, I shoved the alien artefacts from my lap, wary that the blood-sucking parasites could leap out at me at any moment. Then I realised there was no room for any Martian inside the pyramids and, reluctant to damage the paper contents further, I placed both lids firmly into position. Each top rotated down on its own until the pyramids were complete and I felt a glimmer of satisfaction and, for some reason, a sense of hope.

My improvised sling, made from the straps and buckles of the air tank, worked far better than expected. With my good hand I reached for a tiny ball of crumpled paper that must have come from one of the pyramids. Dusting it off, I tried to smooth away the many creases, and with confusion I recognised my own pencilled handwriting. Then I was distracted by a cut on my hand, but unable to apply the necessary pressure to stop the bleeding, I focused instead on reading the note:

'There has been a long tradition of exploration within my family and now, on the final approach to the moon, it means a great deal to be here, and in command of this rocket ship. We are all in this together and we must never forget, not even for one moment, the reason for this mission or how it came about. This endeavour is only made possible by the countless sacrifices of others, and under my leadership—even when things are difficult—you must carry on. Failure is a form of carelessness and the hardest of ways to learn from mistakes...'

I stopped reading what I had recorded of his speech in mid-sentence. "Utter rubbish, Captain," I muttered, and wrapped the sheet of paper around the cut on my hand until the bleeding stopped, annoyed that I had bothered to read the words at all. Then I decided the paper could be useful, so I cleaned off excess blood in the dry moon soil, before folding and tucking it away into my top pocket.

Another spray of water droplets caught my attention and I had a sudden thought. I picked up a small stone and tossed it towards the steady gaze of the eye; the projectile vanished into it. Then, I threw a small handful of rock fragments at the eye—but with unnecessary vigour. Instantly, I regretted the

decision as the sudden movement was too much for my wounded arm and my body filled with mind-numbing pain. Most of the stones passed into the darkness of the pupil as before, but those that missed were transformed momentarily into specks of light as they were absorbed into the white phosphorescence of the eyeball.

I noticed a familiar object in the soil: it was my talisman—a small childhood souvenir from the first Martian invasion, which I usually wore on a chain around my neck. The intermittent green lights on it no longer flashed as they used to so I believed it was broken, but it gave me an idea. I focused my mind on the talisman and the green lights came on for a few seconds, shone brightly and then died. Unable to put it back on since the chain was missing, I slipped the talisman into a pocket.

It occurred to me that this eye, rather than being part of a creature, was an inanimate object or perhaps a machine, and could be manipulated by the essence of thought. To confirm this idea, I focused my mind and found that the huge eye looked up and away and then back down again directly at me—simply because I willed it to.

However, any elation at being able to control the eyeball was short lived since I had a growing sense that I was entirely responsible for my current situation. Although it was completely irrational, I had an overwhelming compulsion to enter into the pupil of the eye. I glanced at the pyramids and decided to take them with me, but they would be awkward to carry in one hand. I had no choice but to propel myself on my stomach along the ground, pushing the pyramids in front of me towards the eyeball.

My clumsy movements caused a lot of dust to rise, and as more fine particles plumed upwards from the powdery soil, the eye's white phosphorescence

soon turned to a murky yellow. The strange dust made my eyes and nose sting and I questioned if moving the artefacts was worth the struggle and discomfort. Yet it was the distinctive shape of my abandoned space helmet, lying in a dip below the eyeball, that finally halted my inefficient advance across the cavern floor.

Leaving the pyramids where they were, I altered direction in an attempt to retrieve the helmet, but I was suddenly seized by a deep coughing fit that jarred my wounded arm. I rolled onto my back in agony, as my chest heaved again and again for air; I was certain I had been exposed to a pocket of poisonous gas that must have emanated from the soil. Exhausted by waves of continuous pain, I was eventually forced to sit up to find fresher air. As I did so, the side of my head grazed the phosphorescence of the eyeball and the pungent odour of singed hair filled my nostrils.

The fact that the eyeball floated freely off the ground made it impossible for me to crawl into. So, directing it with nothing more than the essence of a thought, I waited for the entire thing to lower to the ground. I then picked up the pyramids one at a time and placed each artefact directly into the eye's pupil—before letting go. Then, with trepidation and all the courage I could muster, I dragged my body into the darkness of the eye.

Chapter 2

Visions

My eyes were immediately drawn to a tiny but bright blue dot. As I inched towards it, my vision filled quickly with the warm glow of the sun on Earth's atmosphere. The turquoise oceans of liquid water and the green colours of life were vibrant, and I recognised Africa, Europe and even England as my view became clearer. Then, as I cautiously crawled farther, I became immersed in a strange, soft light that appeared to move continuously in all directions.

The dust-filled cavern was behind me now as I pushed the two small pyramids towards the darkness at the end of a transparent conduit. A slight tingling sensation in my legs and feet ceased once they, too, were inside the strange tube. However, the most surprising thing of all was that I no longer experienced any form of pain in my injured arm.

If I wanted to, it was possible to turn my body and sit upright inside the wide tube that appeared to be made of a thin, glass-like material. I crawled towards the open end, still pushing both pyramids, but the artefacts suddenly fell out into the darkness beyond. I edged closer to the opening to see what had happened to them and was relieved they had not fallen far, but had settled onto what looked like sand. Surprisingly, my arm tingled with what felt like crawling insects, as I reached out to pick up one of the pyramids. Then, my spacesuit sleeve was caught in an unexpected breeze and fine dust billowed from it like smoke. The strange, tingling feeling stopped once my arm rested again beside me, and I wondered if an invisible threshold existed at either end of the tube. The front of my suit was heavily caked in grey moon dust and as I moved my arm outside the tube again, more of the powdery particles were released into the air. Some of the dust drifted back inside and still, I did not cough or struggle to breathe.

Now I could no longer ignore the remarkable performance occurring directly in front of me, in the vastness of the ambient glow outside my tube.

Something swirled in beautiful and hypnotic murmurations—and it was not a flock of birds. A single fragment settled on the tube close to my head, and I glimpsed within it, a rapidly repeated moment of time; and all the while it glowed in a kaleidoscope of shifting colours, more radiant than anything I had seen before. Then the time fragment melted to invisibility and became a part of the tube's structure. Yet another time fragment touched the outer surface, but lifted again and swirled away with countless others.

As I watched, I became aware that other conduits existed within the background light. Each one was just as transparent as mine, all beautifully cylindrical with no common length, and yet every one of them spanned the glow. I examined the tube I was in, but I was unable to learn anything of its composition: I could not tell if its surface was rough, smooth, hot or cold, or even if it was real. Caught up in pure silence, without thirst or hurt, it was the perfect place to be.

Five human figures came towards me slowly as if they walked on solid ground, but there was nothing that could be described as a floor beneath them. At their feet was a mist of light that brightened as they drew closer. My enthusiasm to engage with them was cut short when I recognised them as four versions of the astronomer Ogilvy, and one of my stepfather, George. They grouped together, scrutinising me as if I was an exotic creature held captive in a cage. It soon became obvious that I was safe from them inside this conduit made of time fragments, as their friendly greetings evaporated. One of them struck the thin, clear wall of the tube with his fist, and although I was unable to hear anything, his meaning was perfectly clear: I was being ordered to leave the time tube. I knew from George, my human stepfather, that these five entities were anything but friendly; all were Martian

manifestations, and as such, I disregarded their instruction and remained where I was, much to their annoyance.

The Ogilvys became extremely agitated when tiny points of green light began to dance in the mist far below as if on a huge, circular table top. While I was mesmerised by the spectacle, the five apparitions melted away. The dots intensified and elongated upwards into numerous light beams. I concluded that this green energy was likely to be Martian, according to Ogilvy's account in his diaries. Suddenly, the light beams became an enormous vortex that erupted upwards as if it had broken through a barrier. It projected its intense brightness high up into the glow above me, and I could feel the tremendous power in the huge tornado of light. It twisted furiously, agitating the time fragments into a swarm that engulfed the whirling vortex. Soon the green energy dissipated and a sense of calm and order returned; in its place, a large, transparent structure was revealed. The hush in the silence was palpable as a different type of glow illuminated the top of the colossal, glass-like column. It was sunlight.

Like demons rising from a pit, a line of tripods suddenly appeared inside the enormous time tube. It was only by tilting my head that I could make sense of what was happening inside the structure, and it seemed as if the tops of the tripods slid up the column, like mercury rising in a thermometer. The machines marched in unison along the tube and, as each tripod reached the sunlight, it glistened momentarily before striding out of view. Alarmed by their considerable number, I was glad of the dust they created inside the column, hoping it made me invisible to them.

I wondered if these tripods were from the great Martian comet of 1913 that was last seen heading towards the moon, almost thirty-two years ago. My stepfather George would surely like to know that he was right about a Martian

colony on the lunar surface. As the last tripod advanced into the daylight, I could see an enormous mushroom-shaped object that gleamed in crystal, standing tall above the red sands of an alien landscape. Then the sunlight faded just as the towering column collapsed and disintegrated into a deluge of time fragments.

I hope you enjoyed reading this sample of The Martian Diaries: Vol. 3 Gateway To Mars. You can get the rest of this story as an ebook here:

<https://books2read.com/gatewaytomars>

Or perhaps you might like to check out the award-winning audio versions of this series, featuring original music and sound effects. Described as 'a movie for your ears' by some, they will enhance your immersive experience and take you to another level of enjoyment. Entered together, these two volumes won five awards in the Los Angeles Science Fiction Film Festival 2020–Audio Drama category. You can hear samples, find out more and purchase all my books at a variety of digital retailers via the links on my website:

<https://www.martianidiaries.com>