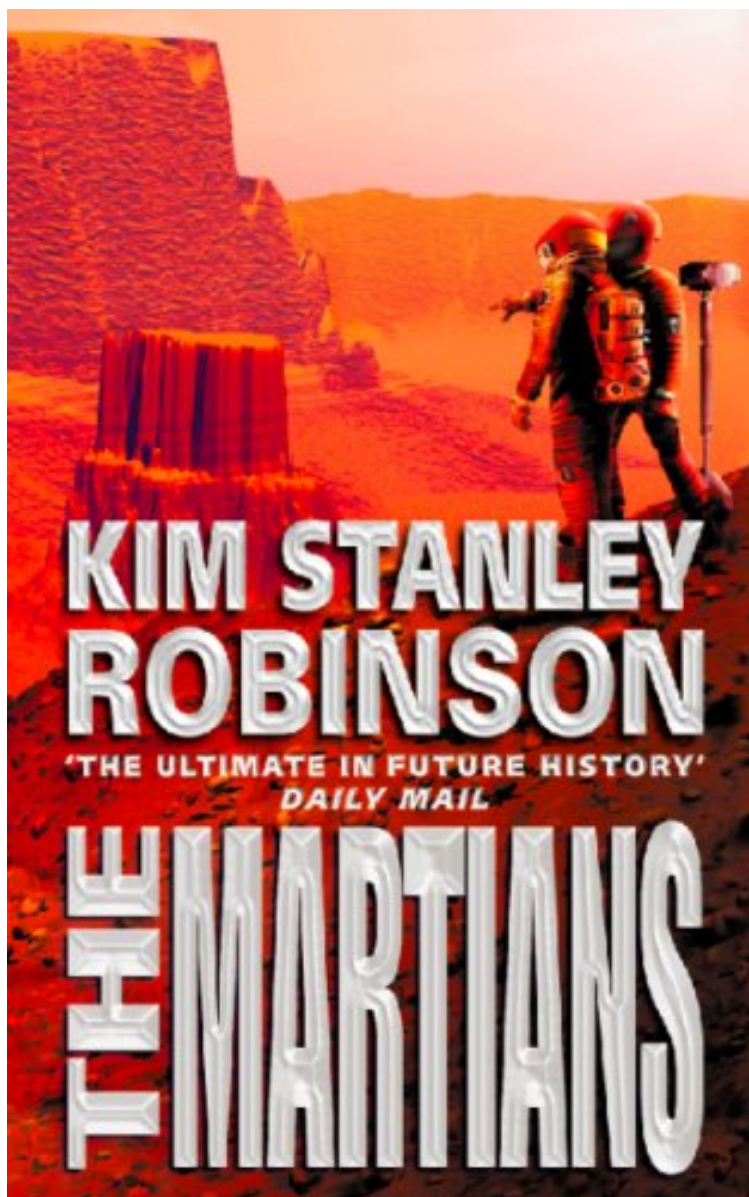


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The Martians



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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurA glorious companion volume to Robinsons world-wide bestselling trilogy.All Colours MarsRed Mars. Green Mars. Blue Mars.The Mars trilogy has rapidly assumed the status of modern science fiction classic, capturing the imagination of hundreds of thousands of readers around the world. Now, with The Martians, comes Kim Stanley Robinsons essential companion to the Mars series. New novellas and short stories head the collection, along with texts on the Martian constitution, maps and Martian inspired poetry.In short, The Martians is a unique collection of previously unpublished fiction, a fascinating addition to Robinsons oeuvre, and a must for all lovers of the red planet.ExtraitMichel in Antarctica At first it was

fine. The people were nice. Wright Valley was awesome. Each day Michel woke in his cubicle and looked out his little window (everyone had one) at the frozen surface of Lake Vanda, a flat oval of cracked blue ice, flooding the bottom of the valley. The valley itself was brown and big and deep, its great rock sidewalls banded horizontally. Seeing it all, he felt a little thrill and the day began well. There was always a lot to do. They had been dropped there in the largest of the Antarctic dry valleys with a load of disassembled huts and, for immediate occupancy, Scott tents. Their task through the perpetual day of the Antarctic summer was to build their winter home, which on assembly had turned out to be a fairly substantial and luxurious modular array of interconnected red boxes. In many ways it seemed analogous to what the voyagers would be doing when they arrived on Mars, and so of course to Michel it was all very interesting. There were 158 people there, and only a hundred were going to be sent on the first trip out, to establish a permanent colony. This was the plan as designed by the Americans and Russians, who had then convened an international team to implement it. So this stay in Antarctica was a kind of test, or winnowing. But it seemed to Michel that everyone there assumed he or she would be among the chosen, so there was little of the tension one saw in people doing job interviews. As they said, when it was discussed at all--in other words when Michel asked about it--some candidates were going to drop out, others would be invalidated out, and others placed on later trips to Mars, at worst. So there was no reason to worry. Most of the people there were not worriers anyway--they were capable, brilliant, assured, used to success. Michel worried about this. They finished building their winter home by the fall equinox, March 21. After that the alternation of day and night was dramatic, the brilliant slanted light of the days ending with the sun sliding off to the north and over the Olympus Range, the long twilights leading to a black starry darkness that eventually would be complete, and last for months. At their latitude, perpetual night would begin a little after mid-April. The constellations as they revealed themselves were the stars of another sky, foreign and strange to a northerner like Michel, reminding him that the universe was a big place. Each day was shorter than the one before by a palpable degree, and the sun burned lower through the sky, its beams pouring down between the peaks of the Asgaard and Olympus Ranges like vibrant stagelights. People got to know each other. When they were first introduced, Maya had said, "So you are to evaluate us!"--with a look that seemed to suggest this could be a process that went both ways. Michel had been impressed. Frank Chalmers, looking over Maya's shoulder at him, had seen this. They were a mix of personality types, as one might expect. But they all had the basic social skillfulness that had allowed them to make it this far, so that whether outgoing or withdrawn in their basic nature, they could still all talk easily. They were interested in each other, naturally. Michel saw a lot of relationships beginning to bloom around him. Romances too. Of course. To Michel all the women in camp were beautiful. He fell a little in love with a lot of them, as was his practice always. Men he loved as elder brothers, women as goddesses he could never quite court (fortunately). Yes: Every woman was beautiful, and all men were heroes. Unless of course they weren't. But most were; this was humanity's default state. So Michel felt; he always had. It was an emotional setting that cried out for psychoanalysis, and in fact he had undergone analysis, without changing this feeling a bit (fortunately). It was his take on people, as he had said to his therapists. Naive, credulous, obtusely optimistic--and yet it made him a good clinical psychologist. It was his gift. Tatiana Durova, for instance, he thought as gorgeous as any movie star, with also that intelligence and individuality that derived from life lived in the real world of work and community. Michel loved Tatiana. And he loved Hiroko Ai, a remote and charismatic human being, withdrawn into her own affairs, but kind. He loved Ann Clayborne, a Martian already. He loved Phyllis Boyle, sister to Machiavel. He loved Ursula Kohl like the sister he could always talk to. He loved Rya Jimenez for her black hair and bright smile, he loved Marina Tokareva for her tough logic, he loved Sasha Yefremova for her irony. But most of all he loved Maya Toitovna, who was as exotic to him as Hiroko, but more extroverted. She was not as beautiful as Tatiana, but drew the eye. The natural leader of the Russian contingent, and a bit forbidding--dangerous somehow--watching everyone there in much the same way Michel was, though he was pretty sure she was a tougher judge of people. Most of the Russian men seemed to fear her, like mice under a hawk, or maybe it was that they feared falling hopelessly in love with her. If Michel were going to Mars (he was not), she was the one he would be most interested in. Of course Michel, as one of the four psychologists there to help evaluate the candidates, could not act on any of these affections. That did not bother him; on the contrary he liked the constraint, which was the same he had with any of his clients. It allowed him to indulge his thoughts without having to consider acting on them. "If you don't act on it, it wasn't a true feeling"--maybe the old saying was right, but if you were forbidden to act for good reasons, then your feelings might not be false after all. So he could be both true and safe. Besides, the saying was wrong, love for one's fellow

humans could be a matter of contemplation only. There was nothing wrong with it. Maya was quite certain she was going to Mars. Michel therefore represented no threat to her, and she treated him like a perfect equal. Several others were like her in this respect--Vlad, Ursula, Arkady, Sax, Spencer, a few others. But Maya took matters beyond that; she was intimate from the very start. She would sit and talk to him about anything, including the selection process itself. They spoke English when they talked, their partial competence and strong accents making for a picturesque music. "You must be using the objective criteria for selecting people, the psychological profiles and the like." "Yes, of course. Tests of various kinds, as you know. Various indexes." "But your own personal judgments must count too, right?" "Yes. Of course." "But it must be hard to separate out your personal feelings about people from your professional judgments, yes?" "I suppose." "How do you do it?" "Well . . . I suppose you would say it is a habit of mind. I like people, or whatever, for different reasons to the reasons that might make someone good on a project like this." "For what reasons do you like people?" "Well, I try not to be too analytical about that! You know--it's a danger in my job, becoming too analytical. I try to let my own feelings alone, as long as they aren't bothering me somehow." She nodded. "Very sensible, I'm sure. I don't know if I could manage that. I should try. It's all the same to me. That's not always good. Not appropriate." With a quick sidelong smile at him. She would say anything to him. He thought about this, and decided that it was a matter of their respective situations: Since he was staying behind, and she was going (she seemed so sure), it didn't much matter what she said to him. It was as if he were dying to her, and she therefore giving herself to him, openly, as a farewell gift. But he wanted her to care about what she said to him. On April 18 the sun went away. In the morning it sparked in the east, shining directly up the valley for a minute or two, and then with a faint green flash it slipped behind Mount Newell. After that the dark days had midday twilights, shorter every day; then just night. Starry starry night. It was beyond Martian, this constant darkness--living by starlight with the aching cold outside, experiencing sensory deprivation in everything but one's sense of cold. Michel, a Provençal, found that he hated both the cold and the dark. So did many of the others. They had been living in an Antarctic summer, thinking life was good and that Mars would not be such a challenge after all, and then with winter they were suddenly getting a better idea of what Mars would be like--not exactly, but in the sense of experiencing a massive array of deprivations. It was sobering how hard it hit. Of course some did better than others. Some seemed not even to notice. The Russians had experienced cold and dark almost like this before. Tolerance of confinement was also good among the senior scientists--Sax Russell, Vlad Taneev, Marina Tokareva, Ursula Kohl, Ann Clayborne--these and other dedicated scientists seemed to have the capacity to spend great amounts of their time reading, working at their computers, and talking. Presumably lives spent largely in labs had prepared them. They also understood that this was the life Mars was waiting to give them. Something not that different from the lives they had always led. So that the best analogy to Mars, perhaps, was not Antarctica, but any intense scientific laboratory. This led him to thoughts of the optimum life history when considering inclusion in the group: middle-aged lab scientist, dedicated, accomplished; childless; unmarried or divorced. Lots of applicants fit the criteria. In some ways you had to wonder. Though it wouldn't be fair; it was a life pattern with its own integrity, its own rewards. Michel himself fit the bill in every respect. Naturally he had to divide his attention equally among all of the candidates, and he did. But one day he got to accompany Tatiana Durova alone, on a hike up the South Fork of Wright Valley. They hiked to the left of the flat-topped island ridge called the Dais that divided the valley lengthwise, and continued up the southern arm of Wright Valley to Don Juan Pond. Don Juan Pond: What a name for this extraterrestrial desolation! The pond was so salty that it would not freeze until the air chilled to -54 C; then the ice coating the shallow saline pond, having been distilled by the freezing, would be freshwater ice, and so would not thaw again until the temperature rose above zero, usually in the following summer when trapped sunlight would greenhouse in the water under the ice and melt it from below. As Tatiana explained the process it hovered in Michel's mind as some kind of analogy to their own situation, hanging right on the edge of his understanding but never coming clear. "Anyway," she was saying, "scientists can use the pond as a single-setting minimum-temperature thermometer. Come here in the spring and you know immediately if the previous winter has gotten below minus fifty-four." As it had already, some cold night this fall; a layer of white ice sheeted the pond. Michel stood with Tatiana on the whitish, humped, salt-crusting shore. Over the Dais the noon sky was blue-black. Around them the steep valley walls fell to the floor of the canyon. Large dark boulders stuck out of the pond's ice sheet. Tatiana walked out onto the white surface, plunging through it with every step, boots crackling, water splashing--liquid salt water, spilling over the fresh ice, dissolving it and sending up a thin frost smoke. A vision: the Lady of the Lake, become corporeal and thus too heavy to

walk on water. But the pond was only a few centimeters deep, it barely covered the tops of her thick boots. Tatiana reached down and touched the tip of one gloved finger into the water, pulled up her mask to taste the water with her impossibly beautiful mouth--which puckered to a tight square. Then she threw back her head and laughed. "My God! Come taste, Michel, but just a touch, I warn you. It's terrible!" And so he clomped through the ice and over the wet sand floor of the pond, stepping awkwardly, a bull in a china shop. "It's fifty times saltier than the sea, taste it." Michel reached down, put his forefinger in the water; the cold was intense, it was amazing that it was liquid still, so cold it was. He raised it to his tongue, touched gingerly--cold fire. It burned like acid. "My God," he exclaimed, spitting out involuntarily. "Is it poison?" Some toxic alkali, or a lake of arsenic--"No no." She laughed. "Salts only. A hundred twenty-six grams of salt per liter of water. As opposed to three point seven grams per liter, in seawater. Incredible." Tatiana was a geochemist, and so now shaking her head with amazement. This kind of thing was her work. Michel saw her beauty in a new way, masked but perfectly clear. "Salt raised to a higher power," he said absently. A concentrated quality. So it might be in the Mars colony; and suddenly the idea he had felt hovering over him descended: The ordinary sea-salt of humanity would be concentrated by their isolation into a poisonous pond. He shuddered and spat again, as if he could reject such a bad thought. But the taste remained. As the perpetual darkness stretches on it becomes hard not to think it permanent, as if we are lingering on after the local star has burned out. People (some of them) are finally beginning to act as if they are being tested. As if the world has indeed ended, and we existing in some antechamber of the final judgment. Imagine a time of real religion, when everyone felt like this all the time. Some of them avoided Michel, and Charles and Georgia and Pauline, the other psychologists. Others were too friendly. Mary Dunkel, Janet Blyleven, Frank Chalmers; Michel had to watch himself to avoid ending up alone with these three, or he would fall into a depression witnessing the spectacle of their great charm.

Revue de presse "As is the norm with Robinson's work, the stories are beautifully written, the characters are well developed, and the author's passion for ecology manifests on every page."-- Publishers Weekly, starred review

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