

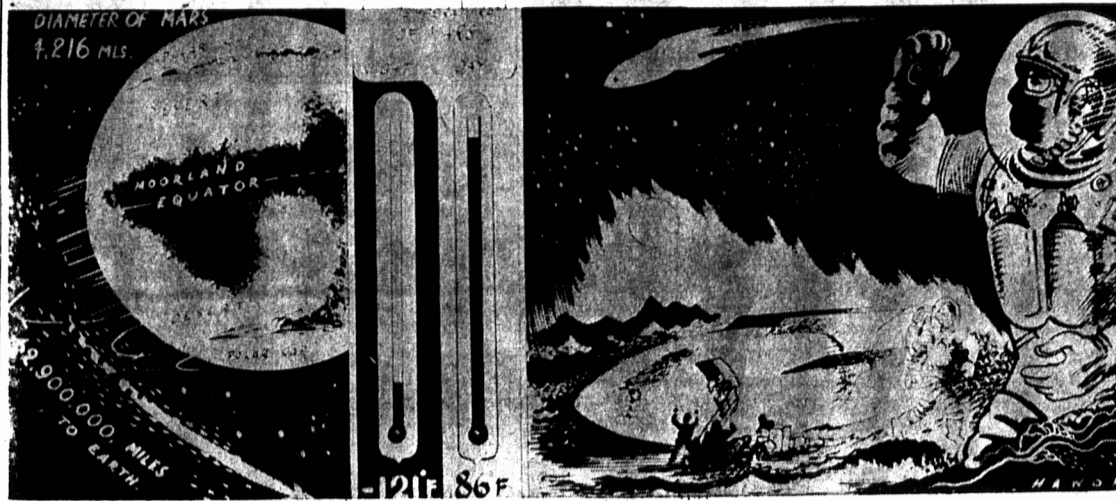
CHRISTMAS and NEW YEAR'S GREETINGS FROM KING'S COUNTY

Space Christmas

By William King

Although this is set in the future, it is based on the latest findings of research workers who are laying the foundations of interplanetary travel. The following is the text of the tape-recorded diary of a member of the British expedition which landed on Mars on December 24th, 1993. It is the only record of the

expedition so far recovered. 9900 Christmas Day: I have been struggling for an hour now to convince myself that this is really Christmas. The struggle is not merely a whim of mine. It is an order. For psychology is an all-important factor in an expedition like this. It is not easy to convince yourself that it's Christmas here on Mars. There are no decorations in a space-ship. There are no signs of the hustle and bustle to get the Christmas dinner ready. There is but much preparation necessary for dehydrated turkey. There was just the present from my wife — a tiny square box wrapped in tissue paper. We agreed not to open the presents until this afternoon — when we get back from our missions. But I held it in my hand and turned it over and over, trying to guess what was in it. You must forgive me if I seem to ramble — that is part of the orders. We have been instructed to keep talking into our microphones almost continuously from the moment we leave the ship to the moment we return. Here on Mars, a man can easily lose his grip. Talking — even to a tape recorder — helps a man keep a hold on himself. Let me tell you a little about Mars. Take a tract of the Sahara Desert, transport it to the North Pole, and lift it to the Stratosphere and you have a sound approximation of the conditions and the terrain. I am standing now in the middle of a vast red desert. It is thought to be composed of iron oxide — tiny shifting particles of rusty metal. Its exact composition is one of the mysteries we are here to solve. It is red because it has absorbed virtually all of the oxygen on the planet. There is now only the tiniest fraction of it left — at least here in the desert. That partly explains why I am wandering about in this cumbersome pressurized suit which looks rather like the things you used to see years ago in the drawings which accompanied science fiction. Of course, it is a good deal more flexible and less like a suit of armour than those — freedom of movement is all important.



The other reasons are that the suit is heavy and that it is relatively impervious to shifts in temperature. It has to be heavy. A man on Mars weighs only a tenth as much as he does on Earth and I should shoot high in the air with every step were it not for the weights in the suit. The temperature fluctuates from about 120 degrees below zero (fahrenheit) at night to close to 90 degrees above zero in the afternoon. But for the suit, life would be a continual shuffle from a Turkish bath into a refrigerator — or almost. Not quite, of course, because there is almost no water vapour here, either. Without the damp, the heat and the cold are much more tolerable. Anyhow, here I am, as I said in the desert — to be precise in the desert just south of the Martian north pole.

We landed, yesterday, near the pole because our biggest job here is to track the "canals" which lead from the polar regions where there is ice in the six month long Martian winter towards the equator. The "canals" are the long, straight criss-crossed lines which have fascinated astronomers ever since Lowell mapped them in 1890. No one has ever been sure just what they are. But they may be waterways — irrigation canals — dug by the "Martians" to preserve life on a dying planet. It is even possible that, in them, there is oxygen. It is even possible that there is something living in or near the "canals." It is almost certain, anyway, that there are plants growing near them — tiny lichen mosses. This morning, I hope to find out. My job is to find one of these "canals" and then report back to the ship as quickly as possible. We can spend just about three days here and then we must return. But to-day, I must find a "canal" and then get back. I hope to be back for the half hour in which we will have a real "Christmas" aboard the ship. 9900: I have been making good progress. If the astronomers' maps are right, I should reach the "canal" by noon. But a strong wind is whipping up. I have just radioed the ship and the men who headed north have been enveloped in a sandstorm — or should I say a metal storm? They have lost contact with the ship, for the moment, anyway. I couldn't get much information from the ship because they asked to cut off in order to devote all their frequencies to attempts to make contact with the lost men. The winds and the sands are our biggest enemies. The dawn is just breaking. The Martian night — with its stars a thousand times clearer than any stars you can see from an earthly desert — is the sort of night which might have inspired the men who watched on the first Christmas to believe a miracle was in the offing. But here the astral fireworks are another terrible hazard: meteors which burn themselves out on earth as they hurtle through the atmosphere are likely to come straight through here — like so many howling blockbusters from hell itself. But I must not dwell on things like that. I must try to think about Christmas. I must keep up a stout heart. But it is no good repeating the official slogans. It is hard to think about Christmas when all you have to focus your mind on is a tiny box in red tissue paper. It is a good thing that we decided not to open the presents, though. It's surprising how a little curiosity helps to keep a man going. 1000: The wind is growing stronger. I can hear the bits of iron oxide blowing against my suit. They sound like pebbles bouncing off a tin can. The ship is still searching for the men who went north. And something more ominous has happened: the man who went west — we must travel alone because we haven't enough men to travel in pairs — found a "canal". Then, suddenly, he went off the air. If I find one, I shall throw this record outside before I enter. I am moving as fast as I can. I must try to get back to the ship by four. The Christmas dinner — concentrated and dehydrated food — won't look much like the Christmas you'll be having back on Earth. But there will be the presents we brought from home — the presents which have stayed in their wrappers for nine long weeks while we seemed to hover motionless in space and were really hurtling through it at 70,000 miles an hour. I wonder what my wife decided was appropriate for a man on Mars? At least, it can't be a tie. A tie would have taken up too much room. Even a tie is bulky on a space ship. I'm sorry my mind keeps wandering back to that... a man's reflections on a Christmas present

on Mars must make curious reading. But, still, it helps. I get the feeling now and then that all this can't be real, that I'm just a figment in somebody's imagination. And that little box is the only reminder of reality. 1100: There it is. I can see a faint tinge of green ahead. There seems to be a depression behind. Wait. The wind is whipping up, the green has disappeared. I can no longer make much progress. I can't contact the ship, either. Sand in the radio gear probably. It's a little box, strapped to my chest and it's hard to get at. No, wait, there are sounds on it now. Static. But regular static. Could someone be jamming the radio waves? Or is it just another trick of the Martian atmosphere? The cloud of sand in front of me looks like a London fog, only it has this strange red colour. No nostalgia about that. I think the wind is dropping a bit. Yes, I can see the "greenery" again now. It looks like a bed of moss. But there is definitely a depression behind it. Here we go. 1200: There is a level stretch of smooth rock reaching away from one "bank" of the canal to the other and just below the tops of the banks. It looks a though, somehow, I think it is a depression behind it. Here we go. 1200: There is a level stretch of smooth rock reaching away from one "bank" of the canal to the other and just below the tops of the banks. It looks a though, somehow, I think it is a depression behind it. Here we go. 1200: There is a level stretch of smooth rock reaching away from one "bank" of the canal to the other and just below the tops of the banks. It looks a though, somehow, I think it is a depression behind it. Here we go.

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CHRISTMAS GREETING
And
HAPPY MOTORING
in '56
MacDONALD'S
Service Station
Irving Products
Souris Phone 23

GREETINGS
And
BEST WISHES
To
ONE and ALL
Ladies' & Children's Wear
Mrs. Ruth Poole, Prop.
Souris Phone 83

To All
A Very
Merry Christmas
H. P. MacDONALD
Building Materials
and Paints
Kingsboro Phone 5-31

MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND
HAPPY NEW YEAR
TO ALL
JAY'S GARAGE
Texaco Dealer
General Repairs
Morell Phone 8

A MERRY CHRISTMAS
May we take a few minutes
from the hustle and bustle
of every day routine to
wish you and yours un-
bounding joy for the Yuletide
Season.
N. H. RICHARDS & SON
Groceries — Meats and Confectionery

Holiday Greetings!
TO ALL OUR CUSTOMERS
May the Yuletide's every
blessing—
Fill Christmas Day for you
and yours.
DINGWELL & ROSSITER
General Merchant & Produce Dealers
Morell Phone 1

A wish for all
on this happy day—
for all good things
to come your way!
EASTERN PACKING CO.
Souris Phone 30

Our wishes for your Health,
Happiness and Prosperity
are unlimited. May you
have an extra share of all
things good this coming
year.
ST. PETER'S CO-OP
BUY — BENEFIT — BUILD
ST. PETERS PHONE 4

It is a pleasure
to extend to all
Compliments
of the Season
RUSSEL F CHING
Produce Dealer
Souris Phone 13

MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND
HAPPY NEW YEAR
TO ALL
LENNOX HOTEL
T. BATTERSBY, Prop.
Souris Phone 84

May Christmas bring the
very best
To you and yours and all
the rest.
J. F. STEWART
General Merchant
Five Houses Phone 13-1

We trust that the warmth of
friendship and family ties will
be yours to enjoy this Christ-
mas. May the New Year bring
Health and Prosperity to you
and yours.
VILLAGE DINER
Meals, Lunches, Maz-
azines and Confectionery
Morell Phone 26

HI FOLKS
Just a word of Greeting
and Good Cheer for
Christmas and The New
Year.
Thank you for past favors.
BANK'S
Jeweler
Souris

Good cheer!
Good health!
Good luck!
... our GOOD WISHES
to our many friends!
Matthew & MacLean's Ltd.
General Merchants
Souris & Bridgetown Phone 10

to all
our friends
Sincere
Wishes for
A HAPPY HOLIDAY
H. L. FOUCHERE
Groceries, Meats & Confectionery
Souris

CHRISTMAS GREETINGS
We wish you every happiness
For today and loads of cheer
To brighten every coming hour
of '56's New Year.
McKENZIE'S SERVICE STATION
IMPERIAL PRODUCTS
SOURIS PHONE 76

Best Wishes
To All
Our Friends
ROLLO BAY GROCERY
Mrs. Gertrude Deveau Prop.
Rollo Bay Phone 31-32

We're so glad at this time
of year to wish you a...
VERY MERRY CHRISTMAS
Aldius MacKenzie
Imperial Oil Dealer
General Repairs
Morell Phone 16

To all our friends
and patrons all
Good Wishes for
Christmas and 1956
Percy's Grocery
Groceries, Meats
and Confectionery
Souris Phone 37

To every friend near and
far
Our wishes follow where
you are...
MERRY CHRISTMAS
LESLIE BROS.
TEXACO DEALER
General Repairs
ST. PETERS

Cheeriest
CHRISTMAS GREETINGS
And
GOOD WISHES
in the
NEW YEAR
The STAR GROCERY
C. Roy White, Prop
Dist. CIL Paint, Souris
Phone 24

A Sincere
Wish
To wish you
The pleasantest of Christ-
mas.
And a New Year
Filled with zest and accom-
plishment.
MORELL CO-OP
Buy — Benefit — Build
Phone 4-1

For The Brightest
Christmas Ever
May Christmas candles light
your way
To greater joy and peace,
And every single New Year
Day
Your happiness increase.
R. L. SANDERSON
General Merchant
ST. PETERS PHONE 11

Best Wishes
We wish you and those you
love, all the happiness that
Christmas Day can bring.
Henrietta MacKinnon
Groceries and Dry Goods
ST. PETERS

Merry Christmas
A real sincere Old-fashion-
ed Christmas to you and
your friends.
FLYNN'S
Meats and Groceries
St. Peters Phone 13-12

It's a pleasure
to extend the
Season's Greetings
to all
EASTERN CHIPS INC.
Spud Island Chips
Souris Phone 86

IT'S CHRISTMAS TIME
May Christmas' gentle spirit
Fill your heart today,
And through the New Year guide you
Safely all the way.
SOURIS CO-OP
BUY — BENEFIT — BUILD

Season's Greetings
to all
CHEVERIE BROS.
Groceries, Meats
& Confectionery
Souris

Good wishes to our many
Good Friends.
Wheel Of Fortune Lodge
Mrs. Harry Francis, Prop.
Fortune Bridge
Phone 50-4

We couple with Christ-
mas and New Year
Greetings our Thanks for
past favors.
JOHNNY'S
Service Station
Imperial Products
Red Point

Season's
Greetings
To All
MEN'S & BOYS' WEAR
Est. W. B. Leard Reg'd.
Souris