

# The Outer Space Men

## Chapter 1

### ALPHA 7

#### THE MAN FROM MARS

By Francis McGrath



*Everyone knows there are no little green men living on Mars.  
They live several kilometers below the surface.*

Mars is a dead world.

There is no water on Mars. The atmosphere is so thin that the air is unbreathable and the climate uninhabitable. Everything is covered in red dust. The most beautiful canyons in the solar system are found on Mars, but they are completely empty. Beautiful mountains tower high above the horizon, but no living thing can appreciate them. Not even single-celled life forms exist here.

Mars is a dead world.

Below the surface is a huge labyrinth of caverns. They weave for kilometers in every direction, some descend deep, towards the core of the planet. Housed in these caves, barely clinging to life are the only two living species *in* Mars: the green Martians and the blue mushrooms that grow on the stalagmites. Sadly, it could be argued that the mushrooms live a fuller life. The green men, with their lightbulb-shaped heads, pointy ears, big eyes and antenna might have the most pathetic civilization in the galaxy. They are so overcrowded that reproduction is all but illegal for fear of destroying the delicate balance they have with their few natural resources. Perhaps it's the small supply of oxygen, the ever decreasing supply of water or the lack of room, but the Martians choose to barely move and to do as little as possible. When they do have to do something, it's usually harvesting the mushrooms - their only food. Ninety-nine percent of the population could be considered harvesters. There are no cooks. Any creativity or desire for flavor has been replaced with slothfulness. The mushrooms are just consumed raw.

When not harvesting, the Martians sit in their homes. "Home" is too generous of a word. Their homes are tiny rooms made centuries ago by cementing rocks to the cave formations, affording them a tiny amount of privacy. Every dwelling is about the same size and virtually indistinguishable from each other. The only differentiating characteristic is how deep the cubicle is, and thus how warm it is.

Each Martian sits in their cubicle and watches their media projector. The images they watch are even more pathetic than their miserable lives. There are no grandiose stories of romance or adventure. The most popular program, called "The Cubicle Show", showcases a Martian watching his projector, for a very long time. After a slow zoom, the viewer sees that on his projector is another Martian. As we zoom in again, we see that that Martian is watching yet another Martian. This recursive show has been broadcasted for so long that no one knows how it started or how long it has been going on. And since no one has ever taken a census, no one knows how many Martians there are so no one knows how much longer the show could go on.

The highest honor on the planet is to be chosen to be a "star"; to be recorded watching your projector. The most common debate is how the show will end: "Will there be an end?" "Will it start over with the first Martian and then repeat forever?" "Does it ever repeat?" The planet's vast communication system is hardly used, except to discuss issues as mundane as this. There is a separate program that discusses these questions and interviews the Martians who work on the show. In reality, no one is actually in charge of the show. There is a group whose sole purpose is to keep making new "episodes", but even they don't know why. They most certainly don't think more than one episode in the future.

The government is little better than the show. If it serves a purpose at all, it is to make sure that nothing changes. Leaders are chosen based on the size of their antenna. They then move to the deepest cave and are recorded watching their projector.

Mars is a dead world.

No one knows how long things have been this way and sadly, most Martians don't even care. But there are a few scientists and philosophers on the planet who aren't content with watching other people do nothing, and when Martians apply themselves, they really are quite intelligent. This tiny minority is always looking for answers.

The idea that life was always like this was quickly dismissed by the philosophers. The working theory is that they are descendants from a highly technological race. There must have been something more to their people at one time. Their pathetic way-of-life would not lead them to invent the magical machines that enhance their lives. Besides their coveted projectors, they have powerful generators, air purifiers and water recyclers. There are also caves full of devices that no one understands, warehouses of a forgotten past. The current intelligence of the population is barely sufficient to keep the machines running, so where did they come from?

Some even hypothesize that their ancestors lived somewhere other than the caverns, perhaps in caves below them where it is warmer. Maybe there are other Martians in other caves who could explain why there are no other creatures and no other plants.

While some Martians ponder and discuss these issues, an even smaller minority is actually making an active search for the answer to "Where did we come from?". Most of the planet would regard these explorers as freaks, if they regarded them at all.

Over many decades, the explorers have attempted to map all the lesser used tunnels, hoping they lead somewhere. Most search the tunnels that go below their homes. Since each subsequent tunnel is warmer than the last, there must be a warm center far below. Others explore to the sides, supposing that even if they don't find their origin, perhaps the caves are circular or spherical. An even smaller group looks for the answers in the cold caves above where the desperate poor live. For the longest time they found no answers. Every expedition was either a dead-end or circled back to the main caverns.

Then one day, a very clever Martian named Alpha 7 found answers to questions no one thought of asking.

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Alpha 7 was regarded as a strange child from early on. He was much more active than a well-behaved, green baby should be. Growing up, he frequently heard that he was using up all the air. He didn't care. He neither cared what other people thought nor what they did. He wasn't going to be a good boy and watch the projector. As he got older, he wasn't content to be a harvester. He was very excited when he discovered the philosophers who also questioned the ways of the world, but he was quickly disenchanted by their inane discussions on the origin of life since there just wasn't enough evidence to support any theory. He was more intrigued by the explorers, but he wasn't going to tread down the same tunnels that many others had gone down before.

One day, he bundled himself with every article of clothing he had ever owned and headed up. He passed through the Martian ghetto and found tunnels leading up into colder and colder caverns.

Few explorers had gone this way. It was bitter, darker and more dangerous than the tunnels below. There were few maps for him to start with, so he mostly started from scratch. Tunnels would ascend to huge chambers, so tall that no light could illuminate the roof. Alpha 7 became a journey-martian climber, exploring each gigantic wall looking for new tunnels that would lead to new rooms that would lead to more climbing. He learned to use ropes to catch himself if he slipped. He could tie up a hammock and sleep on the side of a wall when he got tired.

Every new discovery took him to colder, darker places. Before long, he discovered routes that took him so high that it was hard to breathe. Alpha 7 was strangely encouraged by this, every great mystery is always shrouded with the impossible.

He would explore for days and only return to his cubicle for rest and more supplies. What he needed most was help, but there was no one to ask. So he turned to his ancestors and started exploring the long-ignored storage caverns. Cave after cave was filled with strange devices. Few Martians knew about these caves and no one knew what these machines did. Several were marked as being exceptionally dangerous. As he rummaged, he was once again filled with panicky questions like those that drove him from an early age: what are these things, where did they come from and why doesn't anyone else care?

Eventually he found a strange, silver suit with a portable breathing device. Besides letting him breathe, it also kept him warmer than regular clothes. It was so strong and thick that it actually protected him from the regular bumps and bruises he was so used to getting.

He started alternating his days between the caverns in the roof and the warehouses of the past. Among the useful devices he found were grappling hooks, sonar devices, jetpacks and a portable medical device that could fix a broken bone, even through his suit (which he used on several occasions, most notably on his first test flight of the jetpack.)

He uncovered many accessories for his suit, including a utility belt and a lantern that mounted on his helmet. He had a hard time getting used to that helmet. Besides making everything look a little curvy and sound a little muffled, it rendered his antenna useless. Eventually he found it was a problem that had already been solved. Someone had invented metal rings that he wore on the tips of his antenna, so even with his helmet on, he could still sense things.

His favorite device was probably originally designed to be a weapon. Shaped like a gun, it shot an invisible, finger-like projection of energy which felt solid to the touch. If it was shot at a Martian, it would probably feel like a very hard punch, though he never tried it out on anyone. He was tempted to on several occasions, but never did.

Using his gun with his newly discovered sonar, he coaxed the caves into sharing their secrets. The sonar could tell him when a wall hid a tunnel or another cave and even how big it was. If it looked interesting enough on the sonar, he would use his gun to punch a hole through the rock and crawl in.

As time passed, each new device and new tunnel inspired him. Till one day when he was convinced his sonar was broken. While scanning a ceiling, it registered absolutely nothing above him. Assuming there couldn't be a cave too big for it to map, he returned below to run diagnostics on it.

Test after test told him his device was working correctly. What did all this mean? Exhausted, he tried to sleep, but questions kept nagging at him. What if the answers he'd been searching for were in an enormous cave? Or what if the rock was so solid that it confused the sonar and punching through it would collapse the cave for kilometers in every direction. Whether it was these questions or an ancient subconscious nagging at his mind, he couldn't sleep. Deciding to risk death rather than face perpetual wonder, he returned to the cave.

Standing back as far as he could, he shot a thin beam of energy into the ceiling. A small hole was made and thankfully, no rocks came crashing down. Encouraged, he widened and extended the beam then fired again.

This time, something came out of the hole: light! Brighter than every portable light held by every Martian. The tunnel became clearly lit and slightly warmer. Through some ancient forethought, his helmet automatically darkened to block some of the rays. Without this protection, Alpha 7 would certainly have been blinded. He had been a cave dweller his whole life and had never seen anything so radiant, even through his shielded helmet.

One more shot and he had a hole big enough to crawl through. There was no fear. He had to know what was up there and what was creating so much light.

To his amazement, he crawled into a wide open space that was too large to be a cave. Instead of a rocky roof above him, there was a blue dome that seemed to go on forever. There was red dust and rocks extending in every direction. There was a giant, yellow ball floating above him giving off heat and light.

Comically, as he climbed onto the planet's surface, his first thought was "Wow, my sonar isn't broken after all." Then as he took in the red landscape, the mountains, the canyons, the sky and the sun, he knew his people would be changed forever. He had new answers but needed help finding the right questions.

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In some ways, making the discovery was easier than sharing the discovery. No matter how hard he tried to persuade his fellow Martians, no one would come look at the planet's surface. The masses didn't care. The philosophers wouldn't abandon their dogma. The other explorers wouldn't entertain the possibility that they were exploring in the wrong direction.

Frustrated beyond words, Alpha 7 came up with a desperate plan. He found the production schedule for "The Cubicle Show" and went to watch them record a new episode. While the crew was taking a mushroom break, he calmly grabbed their projection-recorder and took off running. They chased him for a while, but gave up when they realized they could take the rest of the day off since they didn't have a recorder anymore.

He took the recorder up to the surface and made a projection of the landscape. Then he brought it back down, broke into the projection central office and broadcasted his discovery. It was the first known guerilla show in the history of Mars.

Overall, the effect was very positive. Martians saw the images, then turned off their projectors and were concerned with something larger for the first time in their lives. Some did go back to their lives as if nothing happened. There were a few suicides by those who couldn't accept the clash of ideas. At the other end of the spectrum,, some explorers doubled their searches of the lower tunnels, refusing to give up their quest.

But Alpha 7 found hundreds who wanted to see for themselves. Since the surface was too cold and the air unbreathable, searches were made for more explorer suits. After finding every suit they could, they found a machine that made suits so they started mass producing them. Every day hundreds would climb to the surface and start exploring. At first they were limited to walking, so they only could explore a few kilometers in every direction

More searches were made of the storage caves and controlled experiments were conducted on the devices held within. The most useful discoveries were wheeled vehicles and flying craft that let them explore the surface more quickly. Their "new" planet was immense, so much bigger than their caves. Exploration went on 669 days a year, year after year. (Though it took their new astronomers many days to figure out what a day was, much longer to figure out a year.) Overall, it was a period of rebirth and the Martians were reclaiming the

knowledge and advancements of their long-forgotten ancestors.

Eventually someone's scanner picked up a strange object buried a half mile below the sand. After digging down they found a concrete wall that must have been part of an ancient building. It was flat on both sides and a 20 centimeters taller than the average Martian. It was covered with markings that matched some markings on their new devices. It now seemed likely that their ancestors lived on the surface and tunnelled down when the surface could no longer bear life. No one could even guess how many years ago that must have been.

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Rather than resting on his laurels, Alpha 7 was at the forefront of the surface exploration. He became one of the first air pilots and he adored his ship. Looking at it from above or below, it was circular, like a plate. On top, in the center, was a bubble that housed the pilot and all the controls. It was very cozy and a lot of fun to fly. He was the first Martian to circumnavigate the planet (proving it was round). He inspired others to explore and become pilots. So while it wasn't he who found the polar ice cap or determined which mountain was the tallest, he felt an almost parental pride for those who did.

But it was Alpha 7 who eventually made the second-most important discovery.

One day, several years after they came out of their caves, he was testing a new radar that had been found. The device beeped when it detected something unusual. The readout indicated the presence of a metallic object on the surface. He gently let his ship descend and did several slow passes over an object that was larger than his ship. Still unable to determine what it was, he landed close to it and got out for a closer look. Under a pile of red dirt was a six-wheeled vehicle. It had markings unlike those he had seen before and it did not resemble any vehicle he had ever seen. It was not nearly as old as the ancient walls they found but the amount of dust on it indicated that it had been on the surface longer than Alpha 7.

And right then, Alpha 7 had the strangest experience of his life.

*In that moment, there was no wind  
In that place, there was no craft  
In his mind, there was no dialogue*

*On the red sand, a figure in white  
On its body, a suit clear as glass  
On its head, a radar spinning*

*Floating through space, or was the planet moving?  
Drifting in time, or was time flying?  
Visiting a friend, had they met before?*

*An immense being, three Martians high  
An eminent being, terrific and terrifying  
An ancient being, but gone in a heartbeat*

At the time he thought it was a hallucination and adjusted the air percentages in his suit in case he was about to pass out. For years he dismissed it, denied it, pretended he didn't see the creature. He never told another Martian about this giant, white figure. Alpha 7 would wonder if he had gone crazy, but those fears would finally

be put to rest when he encountered this alien again.

The vehicle he discovered was a big enough mystery for the time being. He wondered if this vehicle belonged to the white visitor, but that didn't feel right. For one thing, it didn't appear to work anymore and the visitor seemed to travel without movement. Besides, this was clearly an unmanned rover and would also have been too small for that huge creature. When Alpha 7 shared the discovery with the rest of Mars, their collective curiosity was amplified. Martian after Martian volunteered to be trained. Ship after ship was rolled out of their recently built factory. Soon, the air above Mars was filled with crafts circling the planet, searching for more clues. It didn't take long for them to find another, similar craft. And another. Soon a half dozen different vehicle and machine were found on their planet. They were the only artificial objects they found and all had matching markings: fifty white stars on blue, red stripes, white stripes and strange characters. There was considerable debate over these markings, mostly on the significance of 50 stars of equal magnitude in straight lines. None of their astronomical observations had detected a pattern like this anywhere in the sky. None of the vehicles resembled any other vehicle or machine stored in their caves. They must have been from somewhere else. Their new astronomers had something else to investigate and about the time they built their first settlement on the surface, they built their first observatory.

Each discovery and each revelation jump started their collective psyche. They quickly went from watching their boring programs to charting the whole solar system and correctly guessing these machines must be from their nearest planetary neighbor, the third planet from the sun. When a daring pilot found that their flying ships could actually leave the atmosphere and travel in space, they started talking about expanding their exploration efforts.

Scientists, astronomers and explorers united together to form the Martian Armada. They tested their ships performing different tasks out of the atmosphere. Some brave Martians performed spacewalks while others did endurance tests to see how long they could live in space. Several expeditions were sent to their newly discovered moons.

The astronomers tried to learn everything they could about the new planet. There was considerable excitement when they saw how blue it was. Could two thirds of the planet be covered with fields of mushrooms or other plants? Extensive scans were made for audio and visual signals coming from the planet. Either there were none or the range of their equipment was too limited. So in the end, they knew very little about this new world.

After they felt they had learned enough to balance the risks, one ship was outfitted with every gadget that seemed useful. Because the ships were so small, there would only be enough room for one traveler and enough mushrooms to go there and back.

For the planetary exploration, there would be four mission goals: study the inhabitants, determine if Martians could live on this other planet, ascertain if they had water, and analyze the plant life for new foods. While the planet was being scouted, they would try to develop larger ships that could take more passengers to a new home or transport back large quantities of food and water.

Bringing back food and water was more important than most Martians knew. For centuries the leaders knew that there was a food and water shortage but didn't want to panic anyone. Previously, they encouraged an effortless lifestyle as a method of conservation. Now that their people were active, they ran a huge risk of extinction. They needed new sources of food and water.

Though the risks were high, thousands of Martians volunteered for the mission. There were tests, physicals,



practice missions and rigorous mental challenges placed on the candidates. Every week they eliminated hundreds of candidates. But from the start, everyone knew who was going to get to go. They owed everything to one Martian and this mission was his for the taking.

He took it.

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Just eighteen Martian years after Alpha 7 saw the sun for the first time, he entered the Earth's atmosphere. Actually, he was not excited to explore a new planet, he was just excited to land somewhere, anywhere. For the last 90 days he had been alone. The flight actually took 95 days, but the first five were still within signal range of Mars and he could talk to someone. Communication range would have to be improved for future expeditions.

Back home, when he was exploring the frozen caves, he never felt lonely. He knew his neighbors were nearby and he could return home anytime he wanted, then continue his mission later. Even though he never really wanted to talk to his neighbors, at least he could. But this time there was no going back to take a break.

Even though he had the weight of a planet on his shoulders, for 3 months, there was nothing for him to do. The ship didn't need him. The course was plotted and everything was on autopilot. Even though the computer monitored all the system, he frequently ran diagnostics. He would take apart non-critical systems and put them back together again, just for practice. Once a day, we would take a space walk. For no reason at all, and with the aid of a mirror, he practiced antenna tricks. By the end of the trip he could rotate one clockwise while the other rotated counter-clockwise.

As he approached Earth, he tried to scan the planet. There were massive amounts of electromagnetic waves flying around, but his equipment couldn't make sense out of any of it. The alien communications did not seem to be compatible with Martian technology. While his ship had a telescope, it was not powerful enough to reveal any details on the planet or its moon. The one discovery he did make was that there were many artificial satellites orbiting the planet. If these beings could put machines into orbit, surely they could have sent probes to another planet. He was hopeful that this was the planet that had sent the rovers to Mars.

Having learned very little on his approach, he was understandably nervous about entry and landing. His fears were quickly justified. While he had practiced reentry on Mars hundreds of times, he was completely unprepared for the Earth's atmosphere. It was thicker. The heat was more intense, the time to pass through it was longer and piloting was nearly impossible. By the time he had levelled out, he had several cuts and bruises from being slammed around the cabin.

At this point he should have flown around and observed for a while, but he was so stir crazy that he just needed to land and get out of his ship. He lowered his ship down over one of the monstrous, blue fields. He wasn't sure what was growing there, but he knew it wasn't mushrooms. The field swayed with the wind the way sand flows on Mars. As he made a slow, gradual descent, he visualized the blue plants giving way to a red or brown surface. Instead, splashdown caught him completely by surprise.

Water! Two thirds of this planet was covered in water. On Mars, the water recyclers only handled five thousand liters at a time. Five thousand liters is the most water any Martian had ever seen. The Martian language didn't even have a word for drowning, but Alpha 7 quickly realized it was a possibility. Luckily, his ship floated and he avoided doing anything else stupid, like opening a hatch.



Alpha 7 had wanted his landing to be historic. Instead, it was a controlled crash. Upon landing, he planned to film himself saying something historic. Instead, he fell to the floor and vomited. The swaying of his ship on the ocean had given him unexpected motion sickness.

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On every planet of every star, greatness boils down to one trait: the ability to try again. Alpha 7 found this inside himself years ago. He had practiced it enough to know it was time to get up, wipe off his face and get to work

In retrospect, after his horrible entry and botched landing, Alpha 7 was lucky to be alive. He wised up and used methodical, scientific research to better understand his surroundings. His ship was equipped with sensors that could analyze the environment without him leaving the cockpit. An analysis of the air revealed he couldn't breathe on this planet. While this didn't come as a surprise, it was certainly a disappointment. He recorded projections of the ocean: this much water had to be seen to be believed. When he took and analyzed water samples, he was shocked to discover they had a high saline content. This planet had billions of liters of water, but it was all undrinkable. Perhaps their recyclers could be modified to make it drinkable. He would take several liters for further analysis.

After several hours of analyzing the ocean, he fired up the engines and started flying around the planet. He promised himself he wouldn't land again till he had a better understanding of his surroundings.

After a few orbits, he had learned much. The other third of the planet appeared to be land. Billions of creatures lived there, spread out all over the globe, but mostly concentrated into large cities. He hoped to find more rovers like the one on Mars, but these beings seemed to prefer four wheeled, enclosed vehicles. They also had giant airships, and while they were fast, they weren't near as fast as Alpha 7's. He recorded as many images as he could, but since he still didn't know much about them, he decided it would be best to avoid the aliens for the time being.

There was also more than one type of being on this planet. He recorded over a dozen other creatures. These did not appear to be intelligent. While their appearances were varied, they all walked on 4 legs. There were short ones, tall ones, fat ones, some with long noses, some with long faces, and many with horns instead of antenna.

There also appeared to be a huge assortment of plant life. It was all green and brown and came in many sizes and shapes. He didn't see a single blue plant.

Geographically, there were many fascinating locations he longed to explore: deserts that reminded him of home, rolling hills, and large mountains. And while the giant oceans seemed to hold the land, the land held water in smaller pockets and long, winding strands. He was drawn to these and decided to explore them first.

He flew to the night side of the planet so he could land undetected. With water as his main goal, he found a secluded pocket of water and descended slowly and professionally, worthy of an interplanetary traveller. His landing was textbook but he no longer felt vain enough to record a speech. He recorded several images, took soil samples and scanned the area for aliens.

When he felt confident with his surroundings, he put on his helmet, turned on the heat in his suit and stepped outside for the first time. He was once again tempted to record himself and say something profound, about

how he was the first modern Martian to walk on another planet, quite possibly the first ever. Instead, his first words were, "Boy, it's hot." The temperature was something else that he hadn't accounted for. When night fell on Mars, temperatures could drop to a hundred degrees below zero. The caves were cold. Space was cold. But this planet was quite warm, even at night. As he walked to the water, he humbly turned off the heat in his suit and was thankful he didn't record himself.

He marvelled at all the plant life along his walk, but went straight to the water, which was quite impressive. Though it was night, there was enough moonlight to show ripples in the water and plants on the far side. It was the most beautiful sight he had seen. He took some samples of the water and was thrilled to find it had a much lower saline content. It was full of microscopic creatures, but standard purifiers could clean those out. There was enough water in this one place to save his people. Reminding himself of his priorities, he postponed more exploration in favor of filling every tank he had on his ship. After a few hours of work, he climbed back in his ship. He ran some water through the scrubbers and took long, deep drinks and felt no guilt. He even washed his face and hands and felt thoroughly refreshed.

He exited the ship again to collect as many plant samples as he could. He knew he wouldn't dare taste anything. These plants needed to be researched and tested back on Mars and he wasn't going to poison himself on a distant planet. The mission and his mood had really picked up. He was so happy about the water, about the plants, about being out of the ship that he didn't notice the half dozen aliens who snuck up on him.

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While he tried observing the planet and its inhabitants secretly, he had been seen. His ship was seen over several major cities. Unknown to him, many people on the planet were debating whether the lights in the sky belonged to a spaceship or something terrestrial. He had created an interplanetary incident.

While Alpha 7 had tried to find somewhere deserted, he didn't know everything to look for. He didn't know that sometimes the aliens would forego their technology and sleep in tents. Someone had seen him land. Someone who called his friends. And they came looking for trouble.

When Alpha 7 finally noticed them closing in on him, they were only several meters away. They were tall bipeds, as tall as the white alien he saw on Mars. They weren't wearing space suits like he was and while their skin color varied, they were mostly peach colored with hair on their head and no antenna. He might have studied their appearance and clothing more, but he was too concerned with their long sticks that reminded him of his own gun. He really hoped they weren't weapons, but all the aliens were pointing them at him.

They started speaking and yelling things at him, but he couldn't understand. He stood motionless and watched as one of them came closer. This must be their leader and for the first time, Alpha 7 noticed his clothes. His white shirt had blue, white and red markings identical to the ones found on the rovers on Mars. And just as he made the connection with the shirt, the situation became stranger.

*As if on cue, as if the sun rolled out of a cloud  
A white figure watched from the distance.  
Behind the Earthlings, beyond his understanding,  
A white figure that only he could see.  
Without words, without conscious thought  
A white figure communicated.  
No recognition, no rekindling*

*A white figure who hadn't been to Mars yet.  
Lost in the moment, then lost in space  
The white figure disappeared again.*

Alpha 7 tried to keep himself together. The white visitor had come and gone, no point worrying about that now. Should he ask the Earthlings about it? No, he couldn't, they seemed to intent on hurting or capturing him. He just needed to figure out how to communicate with them first. He needed to ask them so many questions about their planet, about their probes on Mars, about their food, about their water. Where should he start? Should he raise his hand in greeting, should he bow, should he pull out his own weapon?

In the end, Alpha 7 decided to lay down after he heard a deafening sound and felt excruciating pain in his left arm.

He didn't know which one shot him, but he quickly decided he didn't want to be shot again. With his good hand, he pulled his own weapon and shot the nearest one right in the chest, right in his field of white stars on blue. Beyond expectation, the gun's finger-like energy beam launched the Earthing backwards over 5 meters, into two of his friends.

Though he was bleeding and scared, Alpha 7 chuckled at the realization that he had established communication with another planet. Sadly, his first message was "You all need to back up out of my business," but it was effective. As the others retreated, Alpha 7 let off one more shot; the most remarkable shot of his life. Because he was so much shorter than the alien, because the alien was just turning to run away, because the gun was set to send a projection one centimeter in diameter, and because of marvelous and unfortunate luck, Alpha 7 hit the alien directly in its anus. The sound was a strange combination of the energy weapon, the victim's scream, and ripping fabric.

Alpha 7 took advantage of the ensuing confusion and ran for his ship. His arm was in tremendous pain and soaked with blood. It wouldn't take long for him to bleed out. Halfway to the ship, he fell over and vomited for the second time that day, this time from the pain and this time in his helmet. He could hear the aliens regrouping so he forced himself up and into his waiting ship. All pilots joke that they can fly their ship with one hand tied behind their back, but flying is much harder when one arm is uselessly dangling at your side. Miraculously, he got the hatch closed and got the ship off the ground, leaving the aliens with a fantastic story about "little, green men" who travel in flying saucers and subject humans to anal probing.

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There were too many things to do at once. First he had to put the ship into orbit, high orbit so he wouldn't collide with any of the artificial satellites. This was remarkably hard to do with one arm and a helmet so full of barf that he could barely see out. Once he had the ship stable he got the helmet off and cleaned himself the best he could. Next it was time to find out how good his portable med kit was. He knew it could fix bruises and breaks, but he never had anything as severe as this. He attached the machine to his arm and quickly felt a wave of euphoria splash through his body. He knew the med kit could administer local anesthesia to numb up an area, but this time it injected him with something that made him feel like he was floating in space. Which he was. Maybe he was now floating above space? Or below it? Outside of space! That was it. He was now floating outside of space. And space is so pretty. The blue/white globe of Earth beneath him. The stars and the patterns that rule the sky. The warm, yellow orb of the sun. The giant spaceship flying towards him. The crater covered moon. Wait a minute...