

# Knowing Mars: Chapter 1, “Introduction”

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## Preamble

Knowing Mars is a novella written by [tycho garen](#) in the fall of 2007 and posted to [CriticalFutures.com](#) serially beginning in the late summer of 2008. In addition to regular postings of newer material, we’re also releasing complete chapters in PDF format for download. These chapters are, like most of the work posted on [CriticalFutures.com](#) are available under the terms of a [Creative Commons, Attribution-Non-Commercial Share Alike 3.0 License](#). Please share this with your friends, translate it into additional formats, create new work based on these stories, just make sure you attribute tycho garen/critical futures, and don’t sell it commercially (without discussing it with to me). Contact me by email at [garen@tychoish.com](mailto:garen@tychoish.com) or find more information [here](#). Thanks for reading, and please visit Critical Futures for more [Knowing Mars](#), and other really awesome science fiction.

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## Location: ISA *Netspace*, American Consortia, Earth; 2541.

“Gus, I got it! Go! Go! Go!” Kyp managed to whisper and yell all at once. It was, of course completely unnecessary in the virtual privacy of their secret channel on the net. Kyp knew that this operation had taken too long, and he could *feel* that they were about to be caught. Pessimism or not, Kyp knew they had to get out, and get out now.

This was the net, though, and semi-classified government operated net at that. Kyp and Gus were telepaths on an operation to take back some surveillance data that ISA, or more correctly ISA Special Agent Thom Busby, had collected on them and some of their friends. Mostly, however, Kyp and Gus were just damn good net operators and hackers.

Gus was already running when Kyp’s message came. Well, not so much running as soaring, but it felt like running in the virtual environment. Leaving together was safer, if a bit more complex to arrange, but right now they had to get out of the system—with their prize. To do that they needed an access node, and there didn’t seem to be any around. *Crap*.

“Shit, Is Busby pulling the nodes offline? Where are they?” Gus said, turning around to survey the *netspace* for an open node. Nodes, among other things, managed log-on and log-off operations, and they ran on neutral-dedicated hard-

ware and were the only way that Kyp and Gus could get off the net right now without losing their prize. Escaping out, a disconnect without proper log off sequence would save their asses, but not the data. Escaping was seeming less untenable as the seconds dragged by.

It took Kyp a half instant to realize that Gus had stopped. “Keep going! Don’t stop! I’ll be there.” Kyp was worried. Their movement and speed was probably the only thing that kept Busby or his goons from getting a hook on them. Gus had to get out.

Kyp was worried that they’d be caught, more so than usual. This operation was a sting on the ISA, the g-d forsaken *International Security Association*, the cops, the feds, whatever they were, this was a much bigger job than Kyp and Gus usually undertook. The attack had probably been more brute-force than necessary, and it had taken too long. ISAs net was too far off common areas on the net.

Everything about this operation was too messy. Starting with ISAs database of participants and sympathizers the telepath movement was more organized than the telepaths’ database of themselves. The leaders of the movement, in consultation with Kyp and Gus, decided that they couldn’t beat ISA at their own game. So they started a new game: steal the database and use whatever it contained before ISA could.

And now they were terabytes deep in ISA’s *netspace* with stolen data, and no good way to get offline.

Gus had, on Kyp’s insistence, stayed back during the operation, no use in letting the young-or at least the younger—take a fall for you, Kyp figured. If anyone was looking at the logs latter they’d just see Kyp, still this wasn’t the time for self sacrifice.

“Faster,” Kyp sent to his colleague, even though he couldn’t keep up with Gus as it was.

“There aren’t any *goddamned* nodes, I’m trying!” Gus snapped back.

“Exit on different nodes? You can escape out if you want.” Kyp was trying. He could sense that someone was on his tail. Shit. He didn’t turn back to even look. “*Faster*” he muttered to himself.

The ISA agent on his tail was wasn’t telepathic, probably. No. Sure as hell, the ISA agent wasn’t telepathic, and even if the agents were, they couldn’t use the edge without attracting attention to themselves, and ISA agents hated drawing attention. Telepaths had an edge in cyberspace, always had, probably because they were so used to thinking outside their body. At least that’s what Kyp always figured. No one knew why for sure, yet. He kept running.

And then he passed a node, that he missed on his first sweep. Shit.

“Gus, where are you? I found one.” Kyp circled around, not daring to slow down anyway. Catching the node was going to be tough, but it was probably the quickest way to get out.

“Three minutes from you, and probably about seven to the public node and civilization, though blending in at this speed won’t work.” Gus said, even his voice in the channel cracked and he sounded breathless.

“Damn. I have an ISA flock of bots and an agent on my tail, and its good,” Kyp managed to eek out: he didn’t know this for sure, but it seemed like a fair bet, and he didn’t want to quibble over such things. He couldn’t turn back and fight with all the data in his buffer, and he could only barely manage to say ahead of ISA with a full buffer.

None of it was real, of course, Kyp tried to remind himself on the theory that the less “real” he could make it seem the easier it would be to bend the constraints of the system.

Kyp was hooked up to the net in a room, not three feet away from Gus, and his breathing was probably a little elevated, but otherwise he was perfectly safe. Kyp couldn’t escape-out of *netspace* without loosing the data in his buffer: the prize. The net was a perversely designed system, in this respect. The engineers could probably come up with a better design today if you asked them, but infrastructure is hard to change, so this is what they had, and they didn’t have much choice in the matter.

“Ok, I have all the data for sure, and there’s the node. Gus, Escape out and I’m going to come out hot–full speed. You’ll be there to keep me together?”

“Of course, don’t hurt yourself,” Gus sent and then blinked out, safely offline.

“See you in a second kiddo,” Kyp muttered. He caught a glimpse of the flash as Gus escaped out and back to reality. There hadn’t been any confirmed reports of cyberspace related brain-injury in at least a decade, and he had all the latest classes of hardware. He was probably pretty safe. Coming off hot wouldn’t be pleasant, but he’d live. He did, however, make a note to reconsider *how* he was living when he was off net. He’d almost certainly been made. As he soared, he wondered if his identity was safe; if he’d be up to doing jobs on the net again.

Kyp yelled as he made a final pass around the node. All of his attempts to beat out the ISA weren’t getting him anywhere. They were probably only twenty seconds behind him, and thankfully they weren’t gaining on him, but he wasn’t gaining on him either—twenty seconds weren’t enough to do anything but log out and scramble the node almost.

“Here goes,” he muttered, and flagged the node log-out protocol and closed his eyes and began the wait. He uploaded a script to scramble the node codes as he was logging out. He wasn’t looking forward to the headache or the body ache that was for sure.

The connection dropped, the buffer was downloaded and he was offline. He opened his eyes.

Then there was nothing but heat. Hot pain. The room was cool, for the equipment, but it had been warm in node space, and sweat erupted from Kyp’s skin before his body realized that it was cool again. He screamed in pain and gasped for air, and squeezed his eyes shut. He could feel Gus kneeling over him, a firm hand holding his shoulder, and another holding his left hand, as Kyp thrashed around trying to get through and pull himself out of the shock of coming out of cyberspace hard.

He started to calm down almost instantly but Gus didn’t move, and stayed there breathing slowly and steadily. Skin to skin contact was hard for Gus—it

was like electricity to his telepathy—but it grounded Kyp in reality, and made the hot transition easier. When his breathing returned to almost normal, he opened his eyes and looked up at Gus, and tried to talk. His voice was horse, more horse than he had expected, “files safe?” he asked.

“Yes, we got it all. You were great.” Gus’ voice was calm and soothing.

“How long?”

“The op? Total? 6 hours, you were running for an extra forty minutes almost. I was worried.” Gus reported.

“Wow.” After so long, Kyp still couldn’t do the time dilation (or was it concentration?) calculations on the fly. “Thanks. You were great.” Kyp managed to squeeze Gus’ left hand in appreciation. He was about to ask Gus to disconnect him, but then realized that cables weren’t connected to the contact-points near his ear.

“Pull our connection to the net and start the encryption process, we’re going to have a lot to deal with in the morning.” Kyp still couldn’t move much, but he finally regained the ability to form sentences. Getting the systems discontented and encrypting their signature so that ISA tracking scripts couldn’t get a trace on their systems when they went back up was crucial.

“Working on it, we’re going to have to pack up, aren’t we?” Gus was smiling in spite of his obvious disappointment.

“You should stay here. I have to leave, I can’t imagine that I’ll be safe here.”

“ISA’s everywhere, you can’t get away from them, where would you go, and besides you’re safe now,” Gus argued, finally letting go of Kyp’s hand and slowly standing up as Kyp started recovering.

“Not on Mars.”

“What?”

“Mars Colony.”

“Wow.” Gus couldn’t think of anything else to say.

“Not now, insertion point isn’t for a while, but once we get word, and the database, to Taban and Kalian, I think I better go.”

Gus was still speechless. It wasn’t every day that your best hacking partner announced that he was moving to Mars. Allowing for a bit of denial, Gus handed Kyp a glass of water. “Drink some of this, and we’ll talk about it when you wake up.”

Kyp took the water, which was needed, but the water was refreshing, and he did indeed need to sleep a little if he wanted to recover properly.

Kyp stared, and there was a long silence. Thoughts didn’t pass between them, but they might as well have. “Ok, sleep now, but we’ll have to talk about his later,” he relented as his eyes fluttered shut. *Sleep glorious sleep*, Kyp thought loudly enough for Gus to get a sense of it, as Kyp gracefully slipped into unconsciousness.

## Taban Morgan and Kalian Morgan

There have been a number of biographies and studies of Taban and Kalian Morgan in the last several years that attempt to use Taban and Kalian merely

narrative devices to explain one of the most–admittedly–fascinating historical moments of recent times, and in a certain respect this volume cannot avoid falling into this very trap. At the same time, I hope that this project grows out of a very different place, grows out of a desire to understand not the recent history of governments and politics, but rather the Morgans themselves: the projects that were most important to them, their motivations, and values. In this direction, the politics and contexts of their–our–era have become a backdrop for my understanding of what Taban and Kalian have come to mean for me, and I hope to you as well.

Taban and Kalian Morgan were *different*, I can think of no other way to articulate this. They both had small frames, and while they had a way with words on the page–and occasionally could be encouraged to orate in proper situations–they were for the most part very soft spoken. No one described them as imposing, but they had a curious charisma that almost radiated from their presence. After telepathy came out, and they became leaders in the telepath community–or at least were recognized as such by the population at large–many dismissed their widespread popularity and success as being the result of their “charisma” which could only have been the result of their telepathic abilities. I feel fairly safe in maintaining that the telepathy and the charisma came from different places in side of them. When I first met them, very early on, before they had begun to develop and “train” their minds, their personalities and charisma were as vibrant as it was during the height of their success: the two attributes seemed to be distinct.

I initially attempted to separate Taban and Kalian from the story of Mars, but have since given in to the impulse to tell one story. Although, particularly in the time since Taban and Kalian, my personal reputation has been tied very closely to the contemporary history of Mars, this world has become my home. Understanding what Taban and Kalian mean, in the largest sense, requires knowing Mars.

I fear that in several years I’ll be remembered only for my work as an elder statesman of the Mars Republic, with my involvement with Taban and Kalian Morgan a footnote in my own story. But in truth, I am on Mars because of Taban and Kalian. I have stayed here because of their work.

The complex web between myself, the Mars Colony, Taban and Kalian, the rest of the telepaths, ISA, and Thom Busby–now, there’s a name that I’ve banished from my memory for years, but we will get to him later–has lead me to construct this story in a specific direction.

It’s my hope that the story of Mars, the story of Taban and Kalian Morgan, my own story will all compliment each other, and lead to a more complete understanding of the time for you dear reader. Though I certainly can’t assume that you’re as interested in my life as I am at this point! In any case, I feel that complete disclosure of my position within these moments, is preferable to any of the other methods at hand to tell these stories.

As part of my own journey through memories of the time when I knew Taban and Kalian, I was amazed by the distance that human society has come to accept telepathy–or at least grudgingly tolerate them. Situations remain complicated,

of course, but before Taban and Kalian in the common experience telepathy was the thing of stories and myth.

Indeed telepathy remains the province of stories for many humans, of course due to population densities, and the the disproportionate number of telepaths on mars these days, it's not difficult to avoid encountering telepaths in day-to-day life. And though many contemporary stories about telepaths are indeed fictional, they have long since lost their fantastic edge.

Although telepathy is no longer a laughable notion, the often apparent hostility that telepaths endure belays the fact that many still find it completely fantastic, perhaps more so now that it's no longer simply the province of imagination. While this story could never supplant the writings of Taban and Kalian—which remain required reading for any student of telepathy or telepaths—my hope is that this story will expose what remains fantastic in these memories after all these years.

*Matthew Connor, MD*

*Mars, 2597*

## **Mars, Morgan Residence, 2542**

“It’s so *big*,” Taban Morgan said, when he saw the “house” for the first time. There was more space on Mars relative to the population, so accommodations were a bit larger than on Earth, particularly for the “sparsely employed.” In truth there weren’t houses, or even buildings as such on Mars, but rather a large complex of structures that had accommodations and work space, recreation space, food production and waste management: everything necessary to support a human community. It would probably feel cramped in a few months, when figured out that that this was all there was, but it was big for now.

But regardless of the sophistication the complex was on Mars, which meant dust. Lots of red dust, no matter how much they worked on the problem, many had just accepted the fact that even sealed, mars was dusty. “It’s so *dirty*,” Kalian retorted after stepping inside and getting a sense of the place.

Some of their belongings had arrived before them and were stacked in crates in one of the corners, more would arrive in the next couple of days. The essentials were packed in bags that were strapped to their backs: a change of clothes, a few books, computer security gear, data stores, various input devices, and mess of cabling. After a quick survey of their new home, Taban and Kalian began setting up their gear in the office space.

“We have mixed up priorities,” Kalian said, after the busied silence had lingered a touch too long.

“What, instead of sleeping after a long trip, or something? You could, I’m just a bit too antsy still.”

“I suppose. But I figure we’ve been cooped up for so long that it’s good to be able to get something done. Finally.” Taban puzzled for a moment over a connector, before remembering its purpose and continuing with the task at hand.

“No, I feel the same way too. Clearly. But I sometimes wonder how much of the things I take for granted as ‘normal’ is completely alien to everyone else,” Kalian said.

Out of curiosity Kalian idly dragged a finger across the desk top, and removed very slight red film from the surface of the desk. Kalian made a face and began to wipe the dust off, which was largely futile, because the entire world was coated in the stuff. The colony kept it out, mostly, but the quarters were particularly bad.

“Well, that’s why we’re here isn’t it? Do you have the data pendant?” Taban changed the subject: there would be plenty of time to document their move to Mars, from beginning to end, but he wanted to get the systems set up before calling it a night.

“Of course.” Kalian stood and pulled on the leather strap around her neck that the pendant hung from.

“Good.” Taban stretched, stifling a yawn unsuccessfully. Kalian saw Taban’s matching pendant. Each pendant held a distinct half of an encryption key, that they would need to initialize the system, once all the custom gear was hooked up.

“We’re almost ready to fire it up,” Taban said when he regained composure.

“You know, it’ll still be here in the morning, and,” Kalian said, after yawning, again. “And maybe sleep wouldn’t be such a bad ting.”

“We should get a message on its way to Matthew, first. We promised.”

“Can’t we just do that on the open? You know ‘we’re here, setting up, no travel incidents, nothing suspicious,’ and be done with it.” Kalian yawned again.

“Is it worth it? Busby has had months of our silence to figure out that we’d left Earth, and Mars isn’t that big.” Taban would have offered to finish up alone, but they both had to activate the encryption system together, or else it wouldn’t work.

“I hate it when you’re right.”

“Besides, we’re almost done.”

“Right. Ready?”

“Aye,” Taban said, grinning. Taban started a final once over of all the connections between the apartment’s computer system, their enhancements and the hardware encryption that made the system *go*. Kalian took a deep breath, and started to double check all the connections as well.

When it looked done, Taban just flipped the switch without much warning. The system was probably going to work, and stressing over the mess of wires was probably not a good idea.

Kalian exhaled sharply, and said “Ok then.” A moment later, the system—working normally—requested their encryption keys. Dutifully they inserted their encryption pendants into the encryption processor. Once initialized, unless they rewired the encryption system, only one of the pendants would be enough to grant them access to the system, but this was a somewhat jury-rigged system, and it was always something of a guessing game every time they had to break it down and set it up again.

“It looks like we’re good,” Kalian said as the blinking cursor prompt appeared in the corner of a couple of screens<sup>1</sup>.

Taban ran a couple of systems tests and sighed when everything came back clear. “Lets get this recorded, and on its way: we have a big day tomorrow.”

Kalian idly entered a command. “It’s still today? Damn.”

“I suppose it’s too late to take back saying ‘if only there were more hours in the day?’” Taban yawned for the first time.

“Probably so. And it’s only forty minutes.” Kalian laughed. “You ready?”

“Yeah. Hit... that,” Taban entered a series of commands and then pointed to a command button. “You start?”

“Ok, sure.” Kalian staved off a yawn and then thumbed the command button. “Hi Doc–Matt. We’re here, we have the space and it’s great. Bigger than your place! There’s a bit of dust around though... Anyway, we have the computer in order, it looks like,” Kalian looked away from the recorder unit to Taban, who gave a quick nod. “Yeah, a lot of our stuff is here, there should be a few more coming. But you probably know all this stuff. We’re well... but tired.” Kalian blinked a couple of times and looked at Taban for another cue. Getting the message out was so important an hour ago, and now that the work had been done Kalian couldn’t remember what was so important to say.

Taban moved closer to Kalian and continued, “Any new information you have on what Busby has been up to would be great. I think we almost ran into one of his staff at the space yards on Earth, but I don’t think they were on the transport with us, and we’ve been clear since then. Though I suspect you all back home were a little nervous over it, radio silence was really great idea, and after the initial shock I think we enjoyed the break.” Taban chuckled. “Since we’ve been offline for so long, I’m curious to see whats happened; I know it isn’t your thing, but I’m still worried about whats happening on the nets Earthside, I can’t imagine that there’s anything good happening here, what with the population what it is but we’ll have to wait and see. Kyp should know more.” Taban realized that he was rambling. The main point of this message was just to check in to send back some of the data and to write what they had worked on in transit. He paused and looked at Kalian for a continuation.

“Anyway, we hope you find the drafts and documents that we worked on during the trip, interesting or helpful. In any case we’ll be in touch as we get settled in.” Kalian raised a hand in a lazy wave in farewell. “Be well.”

Taban, smirked and threw a lazy salute, and stopping the recording. Their system already had scripts in place to handle the encryption and routing to Matt, and unless there was a bad solar flare, the package would be encrypted,

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<sup>1</sup>To be fair, it was one screen. Many of the accommodations on the Mars Colony–Taban and Kalian’s included–had brilliant displays incorporated into the walls of the apartment. Though the connection wasn’t entirely secure, particularly with the encryption box for the time being it was good enough. In any case, Taban and Kalian had always opted for more, rudimentary computer interfaces: although we all had access to voice-activated and highly visual displays, they opted for pure text interfaces because it was quicker, and allowed them to work in the same room. Telepaths or not, they were incredibly skilled computer users, and quite particular about their systems.

routed, and on Matt's desk by morning. " *Well, morning somewhere, at any rate,*" Taban thought, not really wanting to do the time conversions.

"Ok, time for bed." Kalian said. Finally.

"First day on Mars wasn't so bad..." Taban said, taking the encryption pendants from their ports on the computer. Taban handed one to Kalian, and although tired they spent a moment refastening the pendants to the straps around their necks.

"Thanks." Kalian, said. "The day was a little bit long, you have to admit."

"Only forty-minutes," Taban protested as they stumbled awkwardly towards their bedroom. They hadn't even explored this far into the apartment yet, but beds, unlike computers, didn't require a lot of custom setup.

"Thirty-nine and a half, and you're the one who wanted the longer days," Kalian said laughing as they reached the bedroom.

"Fine fine," Taban said. "Lights out?"

"Sure," Kalian said, and then it was dark. They were asleep inside of ten minutes.

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## About Knowing Mars and tycho garen

Knowing Mars is a novella written by [tycho garen](#) in the fall of 2007 and posted to [CriticalFutures.com](#) serially beginning in the late summer of 2008. In addition to regular postings of newer material, we're also releasing complete chapters in PDF format for download. These chapters are, like most of the work posted on [CriticalFutures.com](#) are available under the terms of a [Creative Commons, Attribution-Non-Commercial Share Alike 3.0 License](#). Please share this with your friends, translate it into additional formats, create new work based on these stories, just make sure you attribute tycho garen/critical futures, and don't sell it commercially (without discussing it with to me). Contact me by email at [garen@tychoish.com](mailto:garen@tychoish.com) or find more information [here](#). Thanks for reading, and please visit Critical Futures for more [Knowing Mars](#), and other really awesome science fiction.