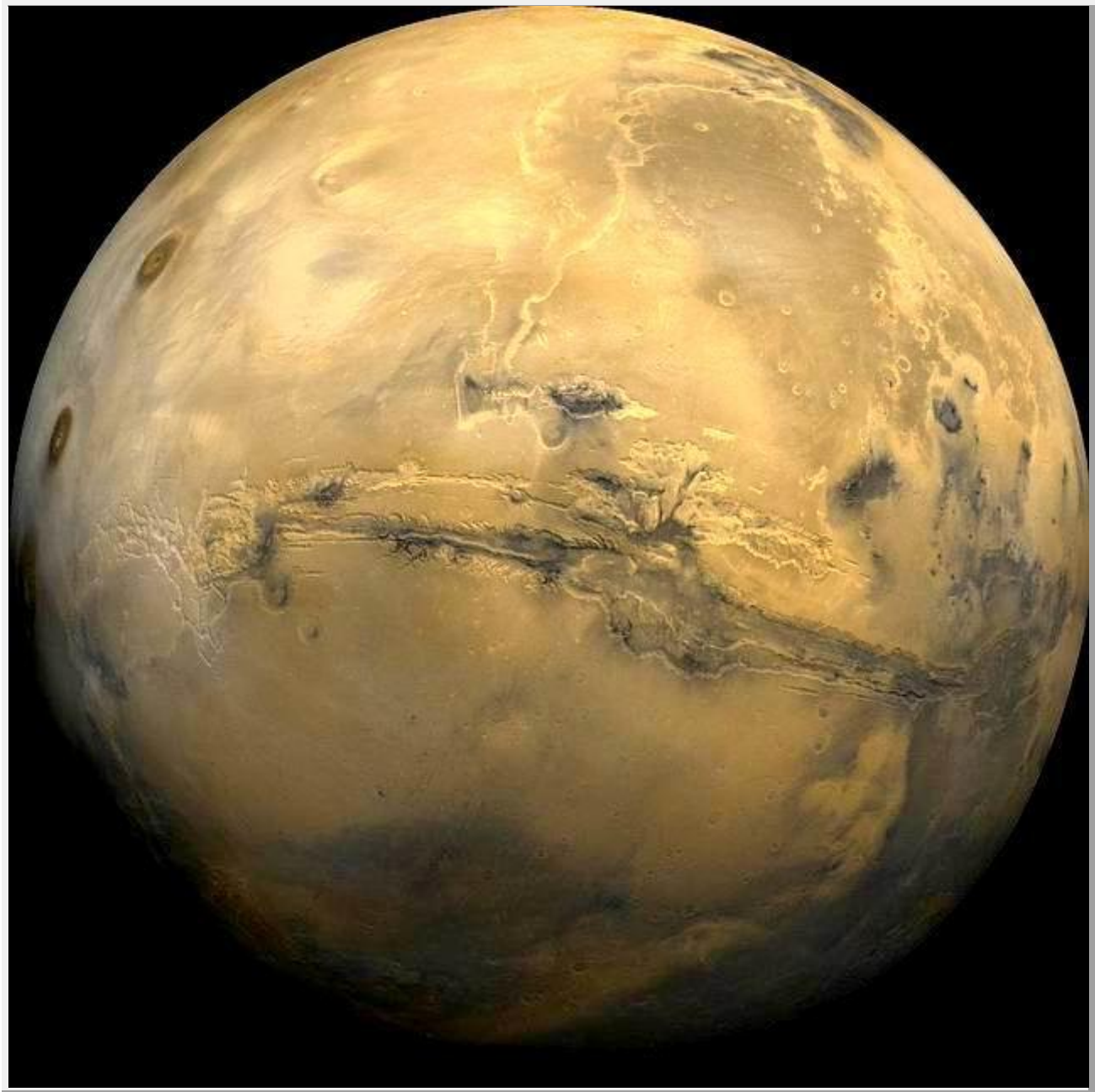


COSMIC SECRETS
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Explosion on Mars





Times Magazine

Monday, Feb. 06, 1950

For the last ten years, Astronomer Tsuneo Saeki of the Osaka observatory (90 miles from Hiroshima) has been keeping an eye on Mars. About 4 a.m. on Jan. 16, he saw a great grey cloud on the face of the red planet. It rose some 60 miles into the air, he estimated, and covered a roughly circular area about 900 miles in diameter. He watched it tensely for 30 minutes; then clouds in the earth's atmosphere cut off the view. When the weather finally cleared, the clouded side of Mars had turned away.

Saeki reported his observation to top astronomers in Tokyo, who hold him in high regard. It was no ordinary Martian cloud, he said, but must be the product of a "terrific explosion." He added that he was not certain that the explosion could be of volcanic origin.

The ominous "explosion on Mars" was reported throughout the world's press and stirred many an uneasy quiver. Some nervous folks thought of the hydrogen bomb and wondered whether the Martians had "got it" before the U.S. or even before the Russians. Others remembered that in H. G. Wells's War of the Worlds, the first sign of the interplanetary invasion was great explosions on Mars.

Since Mars revolves only a little more slowly than the earth does (its day is about 24½ hours long), a specific spot on its surface cannot be observed on the same night in both Japan and the U.S. By the time night comes in one earthly hemisphere, the Martian region visible from the other earthly hemisphere has turned away. So U.S. astronomers could not check up on Saeki immediately.

But by last week the part of Mars that Saeki had observed was visible from the U.S. Mars Authority Dr. Gerard Peter Kuiper of McDonald Observatory, Fort Davis, Texas, took a good look and saw nothing unusual. He thinks Saeki saw a cloud of ice crystals, not uncommon when Mars is far away from the sun. The "terrific explosion" could not have been volcanic, he said, for Mars is "a played out planet with no volcanic activity." That talk about a bomb? "Irresponsible," said Dr. Kuiper.

SOURCE: [TIME MAGAZINE Feb 1950](#)

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