

MARS SAGA

The Manual

STRANDED ON MARS

The doors opened with a hiss and I approached the towering desk. The obese figure of Cornelius Wrak, Controller of Primus, didn't acknowledge my presence — instead, he tapped a few words on the keyboard to his side and gazed at the monitor. Checking my records, obviously. I was glad I'd paid that hacker to clear my police file, or they would've made me a permanent resident of Mars on the spot.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Jetland?" asked Wrak.

"My ship broke down," I said, "And I had to scrap her. Until I come up with some money, I'm stuck in this pit you call a city. I heard you Controllers are offering a shipload of credits to anyone who finds out why we've lost contact with Proscenium. As I see it, I need the money — you need a favor."

Wrak nodded slowly, eyeing me. "We do need a few skilled agents," he said, "but we're opening the investigation to all interested parties."

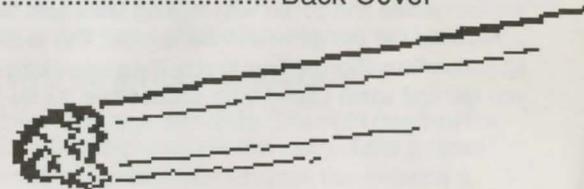
"Too bad," I said, "I hate sharing a reward."

Wrak's lips curled back into something like a smile. "Whether you share a reward or not depends upon how fast you can muster a few warm bodies and get to Proscenium. But let me warn you, Mr. Jetland, not to take this assignment too lightly. We don't know what dark fate has befallen Proscenium. You should worry more about coming back alive..."



TABLE OF CONTENTS

About the Mars Saga	2
How to Use This Manual	2
An Overview of the Game	3
Character Attributes	5
Character Skills	7
Items	9
General Options	10
Combat	12
Weapons	15
Martian History	16
Martian Environment	18
Screen Layout	Back Cover

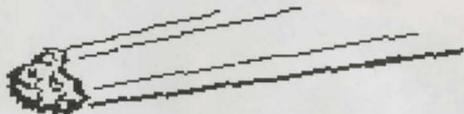


ABOUT THE MARS SAGA

The Mars Saga is a fantasy role-playing (FRP) game set in the future on the planet Mars. Humans have colonized Mars with convicts in order to mine the planet for its valuable minerals. Like other FRPs, you create and control characters that explore the computer's fictional world. The object is to try to develop your characters in various ways — increase their abilities and wealth, for instance. You also try to complete a task. Your task in The Mars Saga is to find out why all contact has been lost with Proscenium, the farthest outpost on Mars. Your success depends upon good logic in combat, using your character's skills to your best advantage and a touch of the sleuth in unravelling mysteries.

HOW TO USE THIS MANUAL

On the next two pages you will find an overview of The Mars Saga. The overview can be a quick start for players familiar with fantasy role-playing games who want to skip the formalities and get on with making Mars safe for humanity. It can also be a good introduction to the game for the novice. The rest of the manual consists of more specific information on how to play the game along with helpful hints. At the very end you will find some useful facts about Mars, its life-forms and history.



AN OVERVIEW OF THE GAME FOR VETERANS AND RAW RECRUITS

THE COMMAND SUMMARY CARD

Included in the game box is a Command Summary Card, which gives you instructions for booting up along with keystroke and joystick commands. The card also contains a legend for the symbols used on the auto-map screen.

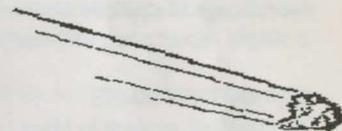
WHERE TO MEET PEOPLE

In your first incarnation you are Tom Jetland, a roguish individual who's a little shy on credits. You find yourself in a bar in Primus, the first city built on Mars. Here you can recruit people to help you get to Proscenium. If not very many people want to join your party in the beginning, it's ok. As you gain in experience, your reputation grows and more characters will want to join up with your group. If creatures get the best of you (literally) and you need more recruits, head to the nearest bar, restaurant, lounge or barracks.

WHAT TO LOOK FOR IN A PERSON

When you're in the bar, you will want to:

- Look for recruits.
- Choose the background of the recruit you seek (police, marine, etc.).
- Interview a recruit to find out his or her previous experience.
- Inspect a recruit to see his or her attributes and skills. The right combination of different attributes and skills makes for a successful party. Take a close look at a character's agility, since this attribute determines the distance a character can move and the number of things he or she can do in a turn. *See Character Attributes and Character Skills for more details.*



AUTO-MAP AND LEGEND

Once you step out into the big city of Primus, the auto-map will map the areas you visit. The auto-map is Window 2 on your screen (*see Screen Layout*). Use the auto-map legend on the Command Summary Card as a guide to the icons on your screen. When first beginning the game, don't be in too much of a hurry to rush out to the planet's surface or another city. Stay in Primus and map it out. The first city contains a lot of valuable clues.

SOME USEFUL ITEMS

You're going to need bigger weapons than the little pop-gun Tom Jetland starts with. If you need to explore the surface of Mars, your characters will also need 'vac-suits' that convert the planet's atmosphere into breathable air. To buy these things, you'll need experience and credits.

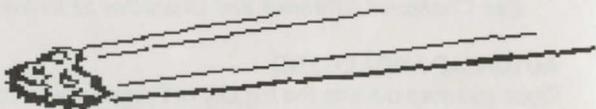
Experience is gained through combat and by successfully completing assignments. **Credits** are the medium of exchange on Mars and are acquired by:

- Successfully completing assignments or by bounty-hunting.
- Gambling. If you develop a good gambler, you won't have to worry about where the next assignment is going to come from.
- Selling items you find on dead foes: weapons, armor, etc.

Weapons can be bought and sold at a munitions store, vac-suits and armor at an armory. You can gamble in the casinos or check for bounties being offered at police stations (unless there's a warrant out on you, in which case you want to stay clear of police stations). Repair shops will pawn any items you have found. Repair shops are also good sources of information and gossip — *you probably won't want to miss a single repair shop on your journey. See Weapons for more details.*

COMBAT ON MARS

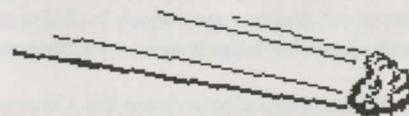
The combat system in Mars Saga can be as complex or as simple as you like. You can control every character's every move (a *tactical combat*), or you can let the computer run the whole show (a *non-tactical combat*). It's a good idea to let the computer run your first several battles. Even players adept at strategy can gain information watching the computer. However, don't entrust your characters to the computer all the time. Although the computer plays out battles to the best of its ability, the tactics it uses may be quite different than the tactics you would use in a given situation. *See Combat for more details.*



Now you know enough to get started. It's a good idea to build up your character's attributes and skills, not to mention their firepower, before heading off to the surface or another city. Primus represents an excellent place to develop characters.

CHARACTER ATTRIBUTES

Games that simulate people must find ways of representing qualities that humans have. Character attributes are just mathematical representations for qualities that real people possess — intelligence, strength, agility, etc. The levels of these qualities vary among real people, and fantasy characters are no different. As depicted on your monitor, attributes range from low to high on a horizontal bar scale. In the Mars Saga, attributes are not fixed numbers. Attributes can be raised in personal development centers and in universities if a character has enough experience and credits. There's no way of knowing if you have enough experience to increase an attribute, but you'll be told if you can't advance any further for the time being. Attributes are as follows:



Might: A measure of strength, might determines what weapons you can use. Strong characters can wield heavier weapons than weak characters.

Agility: Your accuracy and speed. *Agility is a critical attribute* in that it determines the number of moves you get in a combat turn.

Stamina: The amount of physical punishment a character can take. Characters with high stamina don't tire — or die — as quickly as those without.

Wisdom: A character's perception and intuition. A high wisdom gives your character a slight edge in many different situations.

Education: A character's ability to learn academic skills. A character's education level may limit the amount he or she could learn in a field.

Charisma: Not only a person's good looks, but how appealing and convincing he or she can be. Charismatic characters might use a little charm to persuade a merchant to give them a bargain on some goods...

Health: "If you don't have your health, you don't have anything" — in short, you're dead. Health is the average of your character's might, agility and stamina, and

represents his or her condition at any moment. When a character gets wounded in any way, his or her health drops. In turn, might, agility and stamina decline along with a character's health — thus, a severely weakened character may suddenly find it impossible to lift even his shortsword.

The character's health is depicted as a bar on the right-hand side of Window 3 (see Screen Layout). A green bar means the character is at full potential. When the bar turns yellow, it means you have incurred some damage and need healing. A red bar means your damage level is critical and that first-aid should be administered immediately. *Pay attention to the health bar at all times.* If the red bar reaches zero, that character is dead. Life may be cheap on Mars, but an experienced character is hard to replace.

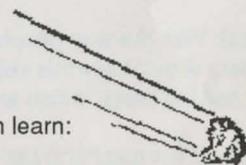
Sex: You know which one you are, hopefully. If you aren't sure, check your character summary. Your character's sex makes no difference for game purposes.

Age: This is the current age of your character. Obviously, older characters have been around longer and thus begin with more experience than younger ones.



CHARACTER SKILLS

Just like people in the real world, your characters have different skills and levels of proficiency. A newly generated character will already be proficient in some skills. For example, a character who has already served on the police force will have at least minimal skills in wearing battle armor and in using a handgun. To increase skills, characters must have two things: credits and enough experience to warrant their learning more. A variety of institutions on Mars (Combat Training Centers, Universities, Computer Centers and more) offer courses in different subjects. These institutions will train eligible characters in the skills they want to learn. You can increase a few skills, such as gambling, through experience alone (of course, learning to gamble has its own costs!). You can also pick up new skills. There are no limitations on what you can learn, except those that the Martian government sets. However, clever characters may even find ways around government restrictions...



The following is a list of the skills your characters can learn:

Admin: Administration is the ability to talk to others in a persuasive tone. This skill can be useful in talking to the authorities.

Arc Gun: The arc gun skill reflects your character's proficiency in the use of arc guns. What's an arc gun? Look under *Weapons*.

Auto: Auto skill is not how well you drive, but how well you handle an automatic weapon.

Blade: The blade skill represents how well-trained your character is in the use of any bladed weapons used hand-to-hand — from switchblades to shortswords.

Btllarm: It takes training to move in battle armor and remain agile enough to be effective.

Cudgel: Cudgel skill is how well you wield weapons such as bats, lead pipes and rubber hoses.

Electric: Your electric skill is your understanding of electronic hardware.

Gambling: The higher your character's gambling skill, the better his or her knowledge of the rules and odds of the games. Good gamblers can quickly raise those needed credits for the party.

Golum: A special armor used frequently by the elite police force, golum armor requires special training for proper functioning. It is said that each suit of golum armor is specifically molded for its user.

Handgun: The handgun skill determines how well your character can load, aim and fire all types of handguns. Raising this skill will allow characters to use more powerful handguns.

Language: Language skill reflects how many languages your characters can learn and how many accents and dialects they can understand and imitate.

Medical: With the way people tend to get hurt on Mars, at least one of your party members should have this skill. Higher medical skills allow you to purchase and use better healing items, which are always closer at hand than the hospital.

Mechanic: The mechanic skill reflects your ability to understand and repair mechanical items.

Melee: Melee is how well you fight with your fists.

Mining: Since the majority of the population is employed in the mines, most humans on Mars have some mining skills. Though their jobs are not very glamorous, miners are important: they can detect unsafe passages in mines and may even dig you out in the event of a cave-in.

Program: Program is your character's knowledge of computer programming. A high programming skill means a greater knowledge of computer systems and how they function. *It also means greater expertise at hacking.*

Rifle: Rifle skill determines how accurate your character is with any rifle. More powerful rifles are available to your character as this skill is increased.

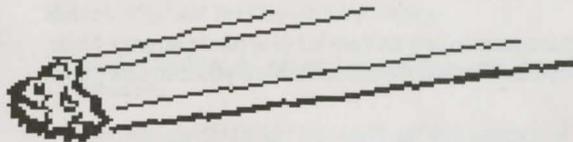
Strategy: Strategy is the effective use of military and political forces.

Street: The street skill reflects how street-wise your character is. When thugs approach you on the street, the street skill may help you talk your way out of a fight.

Tactics: Tactics represents how well your characters utilize the resources given them.

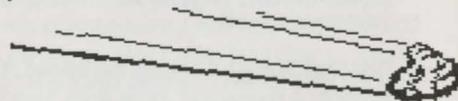
Throwing: Throwing is how accurately a character can throw an item or use a projectile weapon. It's often useful to throw a couple of Molotov cocktails before reaching for your uzi.

Hint: While it is true that large groups are more noticeable and attract more foes (possibly even worse ones), a large group allows you to have "specialists" — an excellent programmer or a character with a lot of medical skill. A skilled programmer is very important; he can dig deep into the system and discover a lot of important information.



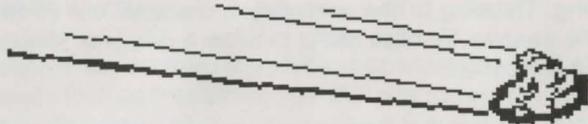
ITEMS

Attributes and skills reflect only the characters and their abilities, but there's more to it than that. A character possesses *items*, too. A character can carry up to nine different *kinds* of items. This doesn't mean that he can carry only nine items. For example, he can carry ten grenades and still have room for eight other types of things. Items are listed on your character summary.



GENERAL OPTIONS

A character can do things as well. You may choose any of the general options whenever your character is not engaged in combat or in a city building. To get a list of these options, simply press the space bar or the button on your joystick. The options available to you are listed below:



Continue Adventuring: Exits this menu and returns you to the action.

Inspecting A Character: Calls up your character summary showing your character's attributes, skills, credits and items.

Use An Item: Allows one of your characters to use an item in his or her inventory. Note that some items, like weapons, may have exclusive places where you can use them (i.e. in combat).

Group: A list of preferences has been added so that you can customize the game to your style of play. These apply to your group as a whole. They are as follows:

- **Exit:** Lets you leave the group options and return to the general options screen.
- **Combat Order:** Lets you change the order of your characters when they enter combat or the marching order for your characters when they are walking in underground tunnels, caves and mines.
- **Sound On/Off:** Toggles the sound effects on or off. **A Y** means your sound is on; **N** means your sound is off.
- **Music On/Off:** Toggles the music on or off. **A Y** means your music is on; **N** means your music is off.
- **Combat Speed:** Controls the speed at which combat takes place. This command accepts a numerical value from zero to nine (zero being fastest and nine being slowest). If you're a beginner, you'll probably want to view the combat slowly at first to learn strategy from the computer.

- **Save Maps:** Saves maps of the areas into which your characters have ventured. The options are **ALWAYS**, which always saves your maps for you without prompts; **NEVER**, which never saves your maps; and **PROMPT ME**, which will give you a prompt whenever you leave specific areas or save the game.

A list will appear at the end of the group options listed above. This list will include any items you may have picked up as a group, i.e., the codes needed to gain entrance to the mine shafts, etc.

View Map: Lets you see a full-sized map of the area you're traversing. An arrow will appear on the map indicating where you currently are. The joystick or keyboard scrolls the map in order to see the places you've explored.

Examine This Area: Select this command when you want to search an area up close. A close inspection of an area reveals things you may not have noticed otherwise.

Transfer Items: This command lets your characters trade items between themselves. You will first be given a choice:

- **Pool Credits:** All of your characters' credits will be given to the character you choose.
- **Distribute Credits:** Spreads all the credits in your party evenly among your characters.
- **Transfer Items:** You will be asked who you wish to transfer from. Once you select a character, that character's items will appear on the screen. You can transfer individual items or select **TRANSFER ALL** to transfer all of that character's items. Once you select the item to be transferred, you can then **TRANSFER** it to another party member, **DROP** the item forever, or **CANCEL** the transfer of the item. Note that forever means *forever* when dropping items.
- **Done:** This leaves all untransferred items with the transferrer and returns you to the general options screen.

Save Game: With this option up to five games may be saved on the player disk. All characters' current attributes and skills will be saved along with their items, credits and location. Maps may be saved optionally (*see Save Maps under Group above*).

Load Game: This option loads a previously saved game.

COMBAT

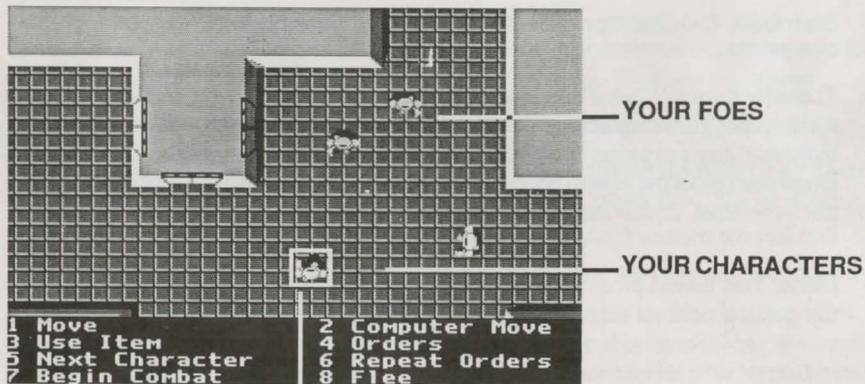
The combat system in The Mars Saga is one of the most interactive ever established on a microcomputer. Characters and their opponents act simultaneously, giving Mars Saga combat a very life-like feel. More importantly, The Mars Saga allows you to *choose* your level of involvement in the combat sequences through a variety of options:

Tactical Combat — If you choose NO: Once you are confronted by foes, you will be asked if you would like a tactical combat. If you answer **NO**, the computer will play out the combat as it sees fit, using the best items that your characters possess.

- **View Combat?:** Choose whether or not you want to watch the computer play out the battle for you by selecting **YES** or **NO**.

If you don't like the way the computer is running your characters in a non-tactical combat, press the space bar or the button on your joystick. This will return control to you on the next turn.

Tactical Combat — If you choose YES:



Move: Your character can move a certain distance per turn, depending on the level of his or her agility. Using the keyboard or the joystick, move the white box surrounding the character to wherever you'd like him to go and press the space bar or the joystick button.

- **Too far. Try anyway?:** This tells you that you've selected a destination that you cannot reach in that turn. If you decide to try anyway, the computer will plot a course for you over a series of turns. You may change this course at any time. **NO** lets you start over again.

If you move the white box onto a location where a foe is standing, you'll see a prompt:

- **This spot:** Choose this if you want your character to move to that location regardless of who's standing there.
- **This opponent:** Choose this if you want your character to pursue this opponent until close enough for hand-to-hand combat.

Computer Move: Allows the computer to control the character's action for *one* turn. If the computer starts to do something you don't like, you can take control on the next turn.

Use Item: Lets your character use an item (i.e. a weapon) he or she is carrying. More agile characters may be able to use multiple items in one turn. Some items, like armor, are always in use.

Orders: Shows you a current listing of previously given orders that your character will do this turn. Unless a character is continuing action from a previous turn, this display will be blank at the beginning of the turn. After viewing the orders you can choose

- **Orders ok:** You're satisfied with the orders on the screen.
- **Delete last order:** You don't like the last order on the list.
- **New orders:** Your character is really headed for trouble and you want to give him or her new instructions.

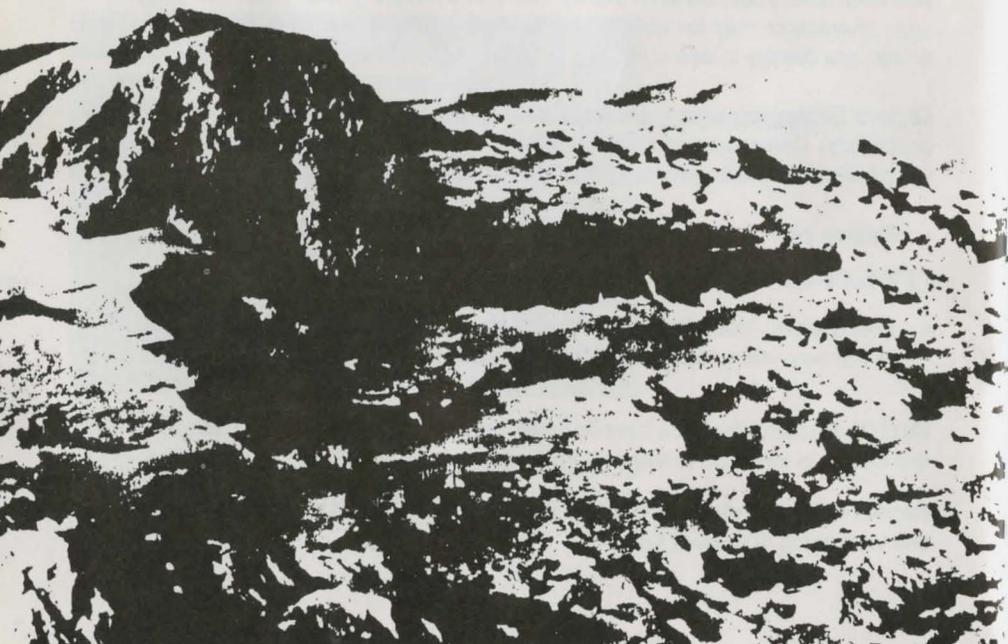
Next Character: When you have no more instructions for the present character, select this option to move on to the next character in your party.

Repeat Orders: Select this option if your character should continue whatever he or she was doing in the last turn.

Begin Combat: Once you have given orders to all the characters in your party, select this command to let the fighting begin.

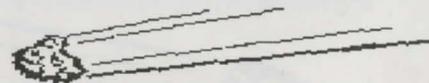
Flee: Run away as fast as you can! This may not be such a bad idea at times. There are many formidable foes on Mars whom you may wish to avoid fighting. Remember, he who fights and runs away, lives to run away another day! There will be situations, however, in which you won't be able to get away.

Hint: Your characters should work as a unit in all things, but especially in combat. Use logic and good sense when planning out battles.



WEAPONS

The Martian frontier is a hard place and just about everyone is armed with something more than his or her fists. The following is a list of the *types* of weapons your characters may possess or want to train in.



Arc Guns: Arc guns spray chemicals or chemical fire from the barrel of the weapon. The spray usually encompasses an area in front of the barrel which arcs out in a semi-circle.

Automatic Weapons: Firearms which use an automatic or semi-automatic mechanism that allows rapid fire from a magazine. Rest assured that all the fashionable auto-weapons are on Mars: uzis, model 10s and pulse lasers.

Blades: Swords and knives of all sorts including energy blades.

Cudgels: Short, thick blunted weapons used for inflicting crushing damage.

Handguns: Any of a variety of firearms designed to be held and fired with one hand.

Missile Weapons: Weapons which use a launching mechanism to propel an item at a group of foes. Bows, blow guns and grenade launchers are types of missile weapons.

Rifles: Firearms with a rifled bore that are intended to be fired from the shoulder. Sport rifles, sniper rifles and even the latest in laser carbines can be bought in the various cities of Mars.

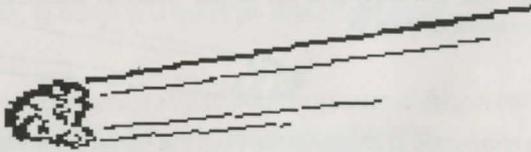
Thrown Weapons: Weapons which can be thrown or propelled by themselves without the aid of a launching mechanism. Grenades, Molotovs and knives are all considered thrown weapons.

*One last hint: Remember to **save early, save often**. If you end up watching your characters treat a creature to lunch, you can rest easy knowing that you can begin over wherever you last saved a game.*

MARTIAN HISTORY

DATA: 15.69885-08-78937 MARTIAN HISTORY

TEXT: Frisbee, B.S., *Colonization of Mars* (Progeny: University of Progeny Press, 2045), pp. 23.



In the mid twenty-first century, the private sector once again turned its attention to the red planet. Paramount Mining sent the first manned flight to Mars, consisting of a team of geologists and mining speculators. The tests they conducted reported a concentrated source of ilmenite — the source from which titanium is extracted — stretching from Alba Patera through Tempe Fossae and continuing to the southeast toward Kasei Vallis.

The good news of rich ilmenite deposits, however, was met with disaster. The geological team, along with the crew of the spaceship, issued a distress call and were heard from no more. Their fate at the jaws of Martian carnivores, up until that time completely unknown, is well documented. The shock to the people of Earth, however, was great. The U.S. government sent a military detachment to investigate. They discovered what many were not ready to believe: life on Mars. With sophisticated weapons and battle armor, the marines were capable of defending themselves from Martian predators. Equipment from the earlier expedition was found, but no survivors.

Though the risks involved in setting up a colony were great, Paramount went ahead with plans for mining the ilmenite reserves. It is a credit to human tenacity and will, not to mention ingenuity, that mining colonies have been successfully established on Mars without cost to human life. At first, small outposts were constructed using the latest robotic technology. This process, though admittedly slow, provided minimal shelter for human colonists without the danger of attacks by foraging predators. Once on Mars, colonists continued construction on their outposts, extending and fortifying them.

Mining proceeded but demanded a large workforce to provide the kind of scale that

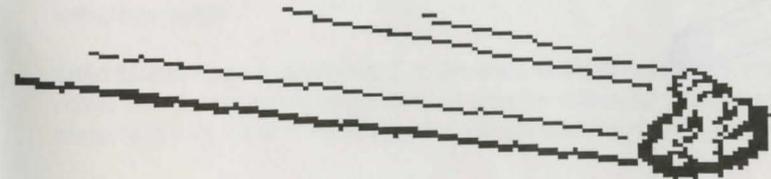
would make the Martian colony profitable. To alleviate this problem, the U.S. government offered to make Mars a penal colony, thus providing Paramount Mining with inexpensive labor and at the same time relieving an over-burdened prison system. Underground cities were created to house the growing Martian population, which is now made up of not only convicts and security personnel but merchants and service people as well. There are to date three established cities on Mars. The fourth, Proscenium, is being constructed and is currently in outpost stage. The following is a brief description of the cities.

Primus: Primus was the first city constructed on Mars. Like all Martian cities, Primus was built in former mining shafts, which gives it a much more irregular feel than an Earth city. Primus suffers from some of the lawlessness characteristic of urban Mars.

Progeny: Established after Primus, Progeny nevertheless now has the highest population rate of the three cities. The police force in Progeny is large and keeps a vigilant eye over its city. Progeny currently has the lowest crime rate.

Parallax: This newest of the Martian cities is still in the process of being fully secured for its citizens. Parallax is admittedly a very dangerous place. The police force is currently combating ruthless mobs and criminals, and there are even rumors that Nomads are being readmitted into the city to purchase food and arms, even though this is against the law. Surely Parallax will someday lose its reputation for being a "haven for thugs and cutthroats."

Proscenium: Proscenium is currently in the outpost stage. Plans show that the city will be the largest on Mars and will consist of multiple levels.



MARTIAN ENVIRONMENT

DATA: 8.23856-76-60029 MARTIAN ENVIRONMENT
TEXT: Waggle, Jakob S., *Martian Survival Guide* (Primus: Paramount Publications, 2052), pp.3, 45.

FACTS ABOUT MARS

Astromomical Symbol: ♂

Fourth planet from Sun

Mean distance from Sun: 227.8 million km

Closest distance: 206.5 million km

Farthest distance: 249.1 million km

Third smallest in mass and size

Mass: 6.423×10^{26} gm

Volume: 1.62×10^{11} km³

Density: 3.96 gm per cm⁻³

Velocity: 24.1 km per second

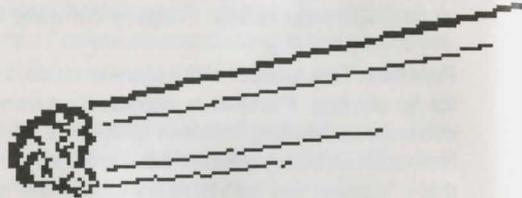
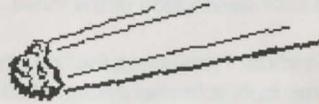
Surface gravity: 371 cm per sec⁻¹

Martian sidereal day: 24 hours, 37 minutes, 22.67 seconds

Martian solar day: 24 hours, 39 minutes, 35.23 seconds

Martian year: 668.6 Martian days (686.98 Earth days)

Atmosphere: carbon dioxide; slight traces of water in lower atmosphere and oxygen and hydrogen in upper atmosphere.



LIFE ON MARS

Martian soil is mostly comprised of oxygen, silicon, iron magnesium, calcium, sulphur, trace amounts ilmenite and some aluminum, chloride and titanium. Martian life is based at the first trophic level on a unique sulfur bacteria. The bacteria trap ice suspended in the planet's permafrost and maintain very small amounts of liquid water. These serve as the primary element in a food chain which includes larger burrowing animals and omnivorous predators. These creatures have sensory glands which are acute to water and moisture. Their glands act much like our sense of smell. It should be noted that humans represent a comparatively huge source of water for Martian creatures and thus are the objects of intense predation. *It is thus advised that anyone venturing out on to the planet's surface should stay close to the elevators that lead to the city.*

Since colonization, several lifeforms have been identified and studied. Below is a list of the known species and their common names. No estimates exist at the present as to the number of undiscovered species on Mars.

Crushers: Bipedal, land-roving creatures, ranging from one to two meters in length and characterized by a greenish to olive skin covered with a matt of thick, bristly hair.

Dust Worms: Brown sand-burrowing creatures between 2 to 5 meters long with a thick skin as hard as metal. Dust worms move just below the surface of the planet where they hunt smaller creatures. Crushing blows seem to be the most effective form of attack on these creatures.

Nomads: Humans that have been cast out of society and forced to live in the Martian wilderness. Nomads are given vac-suits that convert the Martian atmosphere into breathable air for themselves and recycle water that is expelled from their bodies. These suits also contain highly concentrated protein and vitamin injections which replace the need for food. These injections will provide nourishment for approximately one year. These humans have been given the name 'Nomads' due to their homeless status.

Sand Lions: Huge predators (1.5 to 2 meters at the shoulder) covered by flat, grey scales and distinguished by a powerful, anterior mandible capable of biting a small creature in half. Sand lions are the largest creatures known to exist on Mars.

Scorads: Large creatures approximately 2 meters long and 1 meter wide resembling giant purple lobsters. Scorads are capable of emanating a kind of electro-neurological wave that is painful to all within its radius. Scorads are thought to be the most intelligent of indigenous life on Mars.

Thrasher: Amorphous creatures resembling a large jellyfish with whiplike tentacles that have been seen to reach as long as three meters. The outer body is hard, but the underside is soft and porous and secretes a substance which leaves a noticeable trail.

Urchins: Echinoderm-like creatures about one meter in diameter with a hard shell and long, brittle spines. The urchin's spines are poisonous and can be fired with deadly accuracy. Urchins have a tenacious nature and are rarely the victims of predators.



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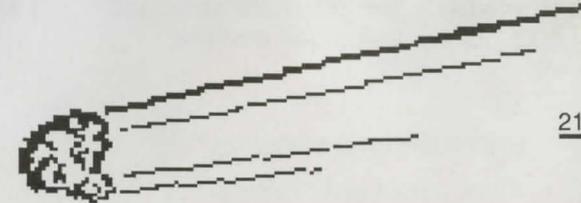
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SCREEN LAYOUT

CITY AND SURFACE SCREENS

Window 1: Three-dimensional view
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Window 2: Overhead view of your
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Window 3: Your characters' names and
their current condition.

Window 4: Text messages.

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