

G U R P S[®]

MARS

The Red Planet

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STEVE JACKSON GAMES

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About GURPS

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Page References

Rules and statistics in this book are specifically for the GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition. Any page reference that begins with a B refers to the GURPS Basic Set – e.g., p. B102 means p. 102 of the GURPS Basic Set, Third Edition. Page references that begin with CI indicate GURPS Compendium I. Other references are BIO for GURPS Biotech, CY for GURPS Cyberpunk, U for Undead, and WWi for GURPS Who's Who I. A full list of abbreviations can be found on p. CI181, or see the updated web list at www.sjgames.com/gurps/abbrevs.html.

Dying World vs. New Frontier

Over the years writers have imbued Mars with all kinds of symbolism. Is it a new home for humanity, an unspoiled Eden, or a dead world?

At one end of the dial is the idea of Mars as the New Frontier, the American West lofted into space. This Mars is just waiting for human settlement. Realistic treatments of the New Frontier vision are often terraforming stories, as in *Green Mars* or *Martian Rainbow*. The examples in Chapters 4 and 5 implicitly follow this view. Romantic versions of the Martian frontier include Heinlein's *Red Planet* and Moore's "Shambleau." If there are Martians, they fill the role of Apaches or possibly East Indians under the British Raj – either primitive savages or decadent ones.

One notch over is the notion of Mars as an Eden which shouldn't be sullied by human beings. C.S. Lewis was explicit on this point in *Out of the Silent Planet*, in which the inhabitants of Mars live in direct contact with God and only Earthmen are sinful. Amore secular and hard-SF approach is the attitude presented in Brian Aldiss' *White Mars* or that of the Preservationists in *GURPS Transhuman Space* – the lifeless natural beauty of Olympus Mons or the Valles Marineris shouldn't be turned into a poor imitation of Earth.

Ever since Percival Lowell, Mars has been depicted as a dying world. Beyond the concept of Mars as unspoiled Eden is the idea of Mars as a once-great world now in its last days. Often this includes a warning to humans about the potential fate of the Earth some day (as Wells noted in passing in *The War of the Worlds* and elsewhere). Dying, decadent Mars may be home to civilizations wiser than humanity, or may have nothing but the ruins they left behind. A ghost of this idea lives on in the continuing fascination with the Face on Mars beloved of pseudoscientists.

Twisting the dial all the way over, a dying world may be dangerous if the Martians aren't ready to go extinct just yet. The Martians may decide to look for a new home somewhere else, in which case it's *Earth* that is the New Frontier – and humans are the oppressed natives. Or perhaps the microorganisms which manage to survive in the tough Martian environment become a killer pandemic on Earth. More realistically, Mars could turn out to be a lethal dead end for human explorers, simply by virtue of being more hostile than they expect. The greenhouse plants die from toxic trace elements in the melted ice, dust causes respiratory illnesses and fouls up the vehicles – and no help can arrive for six months.

MYSTIC MARS

Mars has powerful mystical connotations. After all, it's named for a god, and a pretty high-powered one at that. Mars was one of the chief gods of the Romans, a protector of crops and patron of the army. In some versions of the legend of the founding of Rome, Mars was the father of Romulus.

Throughout ancient Italy he was known variously as Mars, Mavors, Maurs, Mamers, Marmar, Marmor, Mamurius, and Marspiter. The month named for Mars, Martius (our March) was originally the start of the Roman calendar, before reforms moved the new year to January. The Ides of March (March 15) was the chief festival of Mars, marked by horse races on the Campus Martianus and processions by the Salian College of priests. (The fact that military leader Julius Caesar was assassinated on the Ides of March puts an interesting mystical spin on his career: was Julius somehow a sacrifice to ensure that the Empire's legions would be victorious for the next three centuries?)



The Salians carried a sacred shield called the Anchile, which fell from heaven at the feet of the early Roman king Numa. (A midget flying saucer?) To keep anyone from stealing the shield of Mars, Numa had eleven duplicates made, which the Salians kept. The genuine Shield of Mars would be a swell MacGuffin for some Indiana Jones-style archaeology in Fascist Italy, with Mussolini's Blackshirts as villains instead of the Nazis. Otherwise, it could be yet another item for Warehouse 23. The powers of the Shield of Mars weren't clearly specified, but it would certainly be appropriate for the God of War to give victory to the side bearing his shield.

The horse was sacred to Mars, and his bird was the woodpecker. Trees sacred to Mars included the oak (even today, majors in the Army wear an oak-leaf insignia), fig, dogwood, and laurel. Besides being a tutelary god of Rome, Mars was also the patron of Florence. Mars' consort was Bellona, a terrifying goddess of war and death, worshipped by ex-gladiator priests who wounded themselves in her honor. She was depicted as a wild-haired woman in armor holding a bloody lash.

The Greek god Ares closely paralleled Mars, but lacked his identity as a patron of agriculture. Ares was a pure war-god, and as such was much less attractive. In early Sparta, prisoners of war were sacrificed to him. The cock, the dog, and the vulture were his animals. He was the brother or husband of Eris, and like all Greek gods had liaisons with several other women and goddesses. By the princess Astyoche he had twin sons, Ascalaphus and Ialmenus, who fought at Troy. With Aphrodite, Ares had several children, including the minor gods Phobos, Deimos, Anteros, Harmonia, and Eros. Through his liaison with the maiden Chryse, Ares was the grandfather of the hero Pirithous, and the ancestor of the Centaurs. In the later Roman Empire, Mars and Ares were essentially combined, and Mars increasingly took on his Greek avatar's boastful and semi-comic personality.

In the pre-Olympian cosmology of the Greeks, the Titans Dione and Crius presided over the planet Mars. Crius is something of a cipher, but Dione was a goddess of moisture and the oceans, whose name may be a cognate of Diana. This can be taken as an indication of the "Venus-dominated" tone of myths in the Age of Taurus (see the section on Astrology below). In a particularly mystic campaign, characters might be part of a "theological terraforming" project to exorcise the life-destroying influence of Mars and restore the planet to its watery, hospitable identity under Dione.

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