

Mars or Die background notes

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Okay, first, sometime about 1870, some smart guy discovered **GRAVITE**, a rare mineral able to be used to make flying machines and even spaceships.

About 1875, some Europeans went to Mars.

There they discovered **OXYGIUM**, a yellow rock that burns like coal, and which releases oxygen as it burns, that could be used in small portable masks to allow **EARTHANS** to more easily survive the thin martian atmosphere. Humans can survive for about 15 minutes if active even without extra oxygen, and for up to an hour at rest. Masks can be removed for shouted commands, briefings, bugle calls, eating, etc.

Of course, they also discovered various forms of martian life, and even intelligent races. Red martians, called **ROUJEENS**, lived in towns and city-states on or near the canals; they possessed small skyboats, or flyers, and primitive firearms. They were quite civilized in their own way.

The roujeen skyboats were lifted and propelled by the fantastic martian insects known as **SMACKERS**. These small but amazingly powerful creatures always fly toward a source of sunlight, whether direct or reflected. In their natural state, they attain great heights in a day, only to drift marsward at night. If properly contained, they can be used as a source of power as they continually crash into a screen or window, bounce back, and then hit it again and again. Cages on the skyboats containing smackers allow the vehicles to fly, but with decreasing efficiency as exhausted and self-battered insects die as the flight continues. The ships cannot be used at night, as the insects are not attracted by moonlight or starlight.

The **MURKS**, a green race completely different than the red martians, also lived on or near the canals, and had a primitive and brutal society. Their cavalry rode a shaggy native animal called a **THRUT**. They were able to produce giant champions, **MURKLEEGS**, by feeding chosen murk **WUGLETS** (their young) with **SLOG**, a strange martian equivalent of the royal jelly used by earthan bees to produce queens. Murks used martian swords, spears, and bows and arrows, and murkleegs used huge versions of the same. Murkleegs were huge, powerful, and dangerous. They were especially disgusting to earthans by virtue(?) of their ability and inclination to perform horrendous belches. Murkleegs are always much larger than ordinary murks, but due to differences in slog, can be very different in color, shape, and number of limbs from one another and even the smaller members of their own clan.

Almost all life forms on Mars lived on or near the vegetated canal zones of the planet. This terrain often resembled open grassy areas of Earth, but there were hidden dangers like sucking moss and areas of obscuring mist produced by some plants. Near the poles, where limited exploration was conducted, the odd and deadly sandsquid lived.

There were only small amounts of metals available near the surface of Mars, but the rich red martian clay combined with canal water and moss made excellent stucco, bricks, and similar building materials. A roujeen or murk settlement could often resemble an earth village of the middle east or Africa or the American southwest. Larger roujeen cities had a variety of architecture that was often reminiscent of medieval earth architecture.

Horse and even camel breeding programs were established by earthans. Transportation to Mars was expensive and it made more sense to raise more of anything that could grow there rather than space it in (Herr Follicle, an early German settler and sutler, made a fortune breeding his original pair of horses). Usable metal ore was hard to find on Mars in large quantities, and thus there were very few of the land ironclads and other armored war machines used on Earth at the time. Heavy or specialized military weapons, such as cannon and machineguns, were almost all imported from Earth, and were considered very valuable. Roujeen flyers were adopted to some extent by earthan forces, but their limited carrying ability, range, and endurance (because of the limitations of using the smacklers) made them an exception on a martian battlefield rather than a rule.

Hardy and wealthy explorers, scientists, and entrepreneurs also went to Mars. They, and the contingents of various armies, tried to find commercial and military value on the planet. Many petty “wars” were fought between Earth powers, and roujeen and murk forces. The expeditionary forces from Earth were never on Mars in great numbers; indeed, no more than three regiments, about a brigade, from any nationality were ever there at one time. These soldiers were often volunteers, and perhaps elite, or they may have been “throw away” units that could be risked on such a long deployment. The qualities of infantry companies and cavalry squadrons on Mars often varied widely, even within the same battalion. Artillery and machinegun crews were usually better quality troops, having required more training and entrusted with the precious heavier weapons.

Battles on Mars often involved an earthan force and a roujeen ally against another earthan power with a different ally. Rarely would the murks ally with roujeens or earthers, but it happened occasionally. Most murk armies had at least one champion fighting with them. Earthans might have advantages from technology, and roujeens from local geographic knowledge. Murks needed vast numbers, which they often had, to carry the field.

In 1903, after more than 20 years of trying to make a go of various projects on Mars, it was mutually agreed by major powers that the planet was not scientifically, politically, commercially, or militarily vital or tenable. The depletion of known Earth gravite deposits and the loss of spaceships over time contributed to the decision. Leaving a few volunteers behind, along with many horses and camels, Earth abandoned Mars. Few today remember the exploration of Mars and the battles fought there, as they were considered just a side show to all the events on Earth during the last part of the 19th century and early into the 20th.

Someday, when present space travel technology allows us to revisit the red planet, we will see what became of the roujeens, murks, and the few humans who stayed behind.

Scientific note: Due to mission requirements, no unmanned lander to Mars has been set down near any previously known inhabited areas. No photos of the planet from orbit have ever shown traces of the martian cities. Or at least, none have been released.

- ✎ Well, there you have a basic background of sorts, which explains the type of games the Mars Or Die rules are concerned with, and the miniatures Regiment Games will be producing for Victorian Science Fiction gaming. Our miniatures can be used for other rules systems, and many other types of units may be included in our rules by adding some house rules of your own. Have fun!

Notes on figures and materials

18mm figures are not that common, but there are some great ones that can be used with our figures and with these rules. I don't use everything that other folks make for my "martian universe," but you can certainly add whatever combination of forces/vehicles/creatures you like for yours! There are other fine manufacturers of 18mm figures and "large" 15mm figures that could be used, as well.

- Black Hat Miniatures: makes 18mm red martians, giant green martians, and British on Mars. I use the British and red martians. They also make martian cavalry animals and some tanks and flyers. Their giant green martians work for murkleegs.
- Eureka Miniatures: makes 18mm Crimean War figures, among many other things. I use their French Chasseurs d'Afrique for cavalry and the Russian artillery and gunners. They also make 15mm orcs, infantry and cavalry, which I use for murks.
- MageKnight, HeroClix, Heroscape, etc.: Some of these figures can be used as murkleegs. Orc-type figures are probably best. One of my murkleegs is based on an Incredible Hulk figure.
- 28mm white metal wargame figures: These can also be used for murkleegs, as they are supposed to be close to twice as tall as regular murks, roujeens, and earthans. A variety of creatures can be used, as murkleegs can be quite different from one another and from (whatever you use for) murks.
- Litko Aerosystems: makes thin plywood bases in many shapes and sizes. This is where I got my 1.5" square bases.