

Mars or Die

The French Foreign Legion and Others on the Red Planet

Victorian Science Fiction Rules for 18mm Figures
©2005 by Steve Carroll

31 July 2005

These are the very basic rules for *Mars or Die*, which has been in playtesting for more than six months. There is much “fleshing out” yet to be done. These are presented here to give some simple rules that can be used with our figures and others. As updates to the rules are made, new files will be posted and announcements made on regimentgames.com and The Miniatures Page (TMP).

Figures, units, and basing

This game is designed to be used with 18mm figures as produced by Regiment Games and others for imaginary battles on the planet Mars in the later part of the 19th century. An infantry unit has four 1.5” square bases with three figures on a base. A cavalry unit has four 1.5” square bases with two figures on a base. A machinegun is based on a single 1.5” square, along with its crew. An artillery piece is also on a single 1.5” square base, with the gun or its crew separate and able to be turned around on the base to signify when the gun is limbered. A murklee (giant green martian champion), best represented by a single 28mm figure, is also on a single 1.5” square base. A lone scout or sniper is mounted on a ½” washer. A flyer can be based on whatever size stand is necessary, but smaller is better so it can be paced on the table without disturbing whatever is “below”, so keep flyer models small and elevated no more than about 6”.

An infantry unit of 12 figures on four stands represents a company, with each stand representing about a platoon. Artillery and machinegun stands represent one or possibly two guns, and a cavalry unit represents a troop or squadron. Multi-stand units move together and perform the same actions in a turn, but fight and are hit and destroyed individually. One stand may be separated from the rest of a unit to guard a terrain feature, not expected to move for the course of a game; assume a “square” facing all directions even for a non-earthly unit. When a four-stand unit gets to one stand, it may fight on, but only moves at the line movement rate.

Game setup

There is no specific setup for this game, as any scenario, or specific situation, can be played. A game with about eight units on each of two sides can be played in about 90 minutes. There is no points value assigned to units, so scenarios must be balanced based on the situation and comparative abilities of opposing forces. Typical scenarios include a meeting engagement, with roughly equal forces confronting each other in the open, and a defensive situation with a powerful force attacking a weaker but well fortified enemy.

Initiative and turn sequencing

Both sides roll 1D6, with the loser from the last time adding 1 and winning a tie. For the first move, dice until a winner, or first move may be stated in the scenario. Winner acts with any of his desired units, from none up to all. Loser acts with all units. Winner acts with the rest of his units, if any. The winner's first group of units may be marked in some way to help players remember which have acted.

Actions

These are the possible "things" that a unit can do. A unit can also do nothing, or just a portion of its allowed amount of movement.

- Change formation and move half (this is for infantry and cavalry, formations are line and column)
- Move half and change formation
- Move (including charge distance move into immediate melee)
- About face and move half
- Move half and about face
- Wheel 90° for infantry, or cavalry wheel 90° and move 3"
- Limber and move half (for artillery)
- Move half and unlimber (for artillery)
- Fire
- Fire and limber (for artillery)

Movement

	Move	Charge
Green Martians (murks)		
Infantry	3"	5"
Cavalry (on thruts)	6"	9"
Champions (murkleegs)	4"	7"
Red Martian infantry (roujeens)	4"	6"
Earthans		
Infantry	4"	6"
Cavalry	7"	10"
Machinegun	2"	N/A If does not fire, may move 2" on firing phase
Artillery	1" unlimbered, 5" limbered,	does not charge

All measurements are for line. Add 2" for being in column.

Formations are line, column, square (earthans only), and disorder.

One machinegun stand may be attached to an infantry unit, and may keep up during a turn as long as there is no firing or charging.

Interpenetration of friendly units for movement is allowed.

Firing strengths

	Attack	Range	Defend
Murks			
Spears	2	3"	4
Swords	0	-	4
Archers	4	8"	4
Melee murkleeg	0	-	6, 2 labels
Archer murkleeg	7	12"	6, 2 labels
Roujeens	5	10"	4
Earthans			
Infantry	6	12"	4
Cavalry	5	9"	4
Machinegun	8/6	15"	6, 1 label
Artillery	10/7	24"	5, 1 label

Firing is from individual stands, at individual stands. Platoons from a company (not including an attached machinegun) may combine fire, but lose 1D6 for each platoon over one firing together. Being within a terrain feature adds one die for a defender. Being on a hill adds 2" to range, and subtracts 2" from range of those firing from below. Units may shoot at murkleegs behind other units (enemy or friendly), and may be shot at by the green martian champion archers. Units may shoot 45° left or right of straight ahead.

Machineguns and artillery get a second shot if the first shot is a hit. The first shot is made with the number of dice shown to the left of the slash, and the second shot is made with the number of dice shown on the right. The second shot is at an adjacent stand, or is a second shot at an undestroyed stand.

The labels referred to in the chart are simple stickers or tape on the bottom of a stand. When a unit with labels is hit, remove one label. This means the stand can take multiple hits before it is removed from play. "Ordinary" stands can take just one hit, and they are considered killed and are immediately removed from play.

Melee strengths

Murks

Spears	3, or 4 against non-champion non-spear or non-bayonet
Swords	3
Archers	3
Melee Champion	7
Archer Champion	5

Roujeens

4

Earthans

Infantry	4
Cavalry	5
Machinegun	3
Artillery	2

Melees are resolved immediately after charge moves are made and are considered part of those same actions. "Square off" opposing units so it is clearly stand against stand. If there are opposing forces immediately facing each other at the end of the melee, then fight another round next turn; the entire units are locked in melee. If they are not immediately opposite, both sides back up 2", except defender at a terrain feature does not. Add one extra die first round for defending a terrain feature. A victorious attacker may advance into the defender's position after a melee.

Since melees are fought immediately as part of a movement action, it is possible for a unit to be involved in multiple melees in a turn.

If a unit of the player who does not have initiative charges at and melees a unit of the player with initiative that did not act yet that turn, that defending unit gets an extra die per stand in the first round.

Combat resolution

All combat is by opposed die roll. Either it is a shooter attack roll against a target defense roll, or it is opposed melee rolls.

In shooting, the attacker must have a die (even just one) that is higher than ANY of the defender's dice.

EXAMPLE: The attacker has a 6 and the defender's highest die is a 5, so the defender takes a hit (and is removed from play, unless a labeled stand).

EXAMPLE: The attacker has four 4's, but the defender has even just a single 5, so the defender is okay.

BUT if they both roll some number of dice with the same highest number, then the attacker must have more of that particular high number.

EXAMPLE: The attacker has, among other dice, two 5's, and the defender's two highest dice are also 5's, so the defender is not hit, since the attacker did not have more.

EXAMPLE: The attacker has three 5's and the defender has two of them...bye-bye defender.

Don't forget that all shooting is from individual stand against individual stand.

Now, for melee, the procedure is about the same, but EITHER side (but not both) can be hit in the roll-off:

EXAMPLE: Player A has a 6, and player B has two 5's. Player B is gone.

EXAMPLE: Both players have a single 4 as their highest die roll; both stay.

It is useful in play for each player to simply state out loud what his highest roll was, and how many he got (assuming you trust your opponent; it's much easier not to have to look at his dice as well as your own). Some typical play might go like this.

ATTACKER IN SHOOTING: I got a 6.

DEFENDER: I got a 6, too, so I'm okay.

OR

DEFENDER: I got three 5's!!!!!!! That stand's gone!

MELEE PLAYER A: Two 3's.

MELEE PLAYER B: One 4. I win that one.

Generals

A general is a mounted figure mounted on a 1" washer, or perhaps on a 1.5" square if you want some staff with him; it really doesn't matter. Add one die to any/every combat action the unit attached to does (shooting, defense, melee). The unit also adds 1" movement. A general may unattach, move up to 9", and attach to a different unit and then the new unit can do its action. The general may not help the movement rates of two different units in the same turn, except for a machinegun that is also attached to an infantry unit.

Flyers

The small skyboats, or flyers, that might occasionally appear over a battlefield are often more nuisances than serious threats. These will be called for by the scenario being played. They are only used by roujeens or earthans. Typically they will be armed with a machinegun or a stand of infantry with rifles. Flyers have a special action: place and fire. Place the flyer anywhere on the battlefield desired. Then the MG or infantry may fire at any enemy in range (there is no bonus for elevation due to the flyer's unsteady platform) from the front of the flyer. Further, due to fear of bombing (more a morale breaker than troop killer), enemy troops within 12" of the front of the flyer, and 45° to either side must roll 1D6 per unit. Add one to what is actually rolled if the unit is in some kind of defensive position.

Murks	6
Roujeens	5
Earthans	4
Murkleegs	3

If the unit does not roll at least the number indicated, it must move away from the flyer's position for its next action, unless it is locked in melee. It cannot shoot, or even remain in a favorable position. It must scatter away from the flyer.

To be rid of a flyer, the enemy must put up the proverbial "wall of lead" to destroy the flyer or drive it from the battlefield. To represent this concerted effort by all units as the flyer moves (theoretically) all about the battlefield, all units on the whole table that are not fleeing potential bombing must do nothing for their action in a turn; they are busy shooting at the flyer or maneuvering to escape its projected path or to support those that are firing. Basically the enemy can do nothing for a turn, and then the flyer is immediately gone. If a flyer delays entry onto the table until a decisive time, the enemy must endure the disruption and limited attacking ability of the flyer, or forego any progress for a turn.

Cards

The special event/ability cards that are included in this game can make for a more fun and interesting game, as they can change a predicted movement or attack into something else entirely. The card rules file gives special rules for what the cards mean and what to do when one is played. The number of cards and the specific ones that a player receives should be determined by the scenario. Basically, a player may use any card or number of them during his turn. Only one card may be used to influence any one movement or combat, however. Other "countering" cards may be played at appropriate times. Murk cards are printed in green, roujeen in red, and earthan in blue. There are some blanks for creating your own, and of course you may print multiples of various cards. With a big enough deck, cards can be dealt randomly, and players can only play cards for their force (of the proper color). The cards should print nicely to business card forms for computer printers, or they can be printed to plain cardstock and cut out.

A word about premeasuring

Sure.

More details and your input

Many details have not been included here. There may be situations that arise that are not covered, and this can be simply solved by dicing off and continuing the game. Maybe you will need to write a house rule for special situations that you encounter. Most experienced gamers will want to modify these rules and have no difficulty in deciding how to do so.

Right now there are no advantages for attacking from behind, for shooting at a column, for having superior troops (although that is slightly accounted for by different stats for different races/worlds), or other situations that many rules sets include. Some of these many possibilities have been playtested and found wanting, others have not been tried yet. If you play these rules and see changes that need to be made, and can write up a good rule for the same, please submit it to us at regimentgames@yahoo.com. Perhaps it will be included in a future version of the rules. Thanks.