



Mars, A Savage Setting of Planetary Romance: A Review

by Karl Brown

Review and additional material for Mars, A Savage Setting of Planetary Romance from Adamant Entertainment by Lizard, Gareth-Michael Skarka, Walt Ciechanowski, Aaron Rosenberg, and Jess Nevins. A setting for the Savage Worlds system by Shane Lacy Hensley from Pinnacle Entertainment Group.

Page numbers for Mars, A Savage Setting of Planetary Romance are given as (M#), and for Savage Worlds Deluxe as (SWD#).

I am a long-time fan of the planetary romance genre and have read-though this book multiple times. However my experience with actual play is limited. Any feedback to improve this article is welcome.

From the book's Introduction:

Welcome to Mars!

Not Mars as it is ? airless, most likely lifeless, with only the faintest hints of what might have once been a damp, if not necessarily lush and living, world billions of years in the past. No, this is Mars as it should be and as it was once imagined to be ? an ancient, dying, but not yet dead world, a world where a vast canal network reaches from pole to pole, bringing water and life to vast and fantastic cities. A Mars where albino apes run a vast empire in the last surviving jungle, a world where warrior tribes of Green Martians raid the outlying cities of the canal dwellers, a world where, in places dark and quiet and forgotten beneath the surface, ancient and terrible intellects plan dark and dire deeds.

It is a Mars of sky-corsairs, of duels with blade and blaster, of vile plots, fantastic inventions, daring rescues, arena battles, and spectacular stunts. It is a Mars where ancient cities can be discovered and their lost treasures plundered, a Mars where a trek across the dry sea bottoms can yield amazing discoveries, where terrible monsters roam the rocky wastes.

It is the Mars of pulp fiction and Saturday morning serials.

It is now yours.

The genre of this setting is planetary romance, romance in its archaic usage to mean a kind of fantasy. Planetary romance is also called ?sword and planet?. This genre is pretty much dead but for the uninitiated the introduction above provides a pretty good taste of the exotic and adventurous stories of the genre and the kind of exciting games that could be played. I suspect that one of the reasons Pixar's John Carter film fell flat was because many viewers had little previous exposure to the genre and it's conventions.

The Judgment

If you're like me then you might be short on time and are going to skip to the end and read the judgment. Well to save

on scrolling here is it up front. I have a love/hate relationship with this book. The editing is eye-bleedingly woeful leaving a bitter taste for having had paid money to support such sloppy workers. However the setting is a good one. It is not the Mars of Edgar Rice Burroughs, just within the same genre, if you really want to play in that specific world this is not the game for you. Me, I just want to play in the genre and the setting captures the feel of planetary romance perfectly. The setting rules support action-packed daring-do entertainment like that found in the old novels. I found myself enthused about holstering my radium pistol and soaring my scout flyer over the crimson deserts in search of adventure. You'll need a copy of the Savage Worlds rules, other than that the book is very self contained with everything you need to play multiple sessions at your table. If you're a fan of swashbuckling styles of play or the old planetary romance genre then this is a must-have. Otherwise save yourself a typo-induced brain haemorrhage and give it the skip.

The Book

Mars was first available for d20. The d20 version used many of the same rules as the Conan game from Mongoose and these additions to the d20 system were a pretty good fit for the setting. The less involved rules of Savage Worlds is an even better fit for the fast paced daring-do of planetary romance adventures. The d20 version had all the hallmarks of a product done in a hurry and on a tight budget including a cover taken from NASA's copyright-free gallery of images. The later Savage Worlds version has very presentable original cover art featuring a couple of Red Martians in a desperate battle with a horde of Green savages that nicely captures the feel and content of the setting. The flying ships on the cover are totally wrong, but more about that later. The dead tree version is a glossy hardback with 191 glossy black and white pages within. Rather nice to look at and should take many years of game-table abuse. The hardcover version includes an extra 13 page adventure. There is no index, something owners of the hardbound book will miss. There is a table of contents showing both chapters and sections though. If you buy the book keep your receipt, a scan of it sent to the publisher will get you the pdf free, sweet (see <http://www.adamantentertainment.com/downloads/> [1]). The 180 page PDF has three layers of bookmarks for easy navigation.

Inside there is an introduction and eight chapters: Introduction, Characters, Gear, Setting Rules, Game Mastering, Beasts of Mars, Slavers of Mars, and Encounters. There are also 14 pages of short fiction spread through the book. The interior art includes a number of different styles including line art, shaded full-page grey-scale plates, and the odd photo of the real Martian desert. Usually, I dislike a mish-mash of styles but in this instance it is not too jarring. There is some upper-torso nudity which is completely within genre but the 'features' of male and female alike are exaggerated enough to come across as tacky in a few pieces. The biggest problem with this book is a horde of editing issues. There are spelling errors, obvious cut-and-paste issues, setting-out flaws, and grammar mistakes with resulting lack of clarity. One or more of these jarring errors mars virtually every page. This is sloppy and made even more inexcusable by the fact that this is the second iteration following the d20 version. I might be more forgiving if this was fan writing distributed for free, but it isn't, this is backed by a company and I paid good money for it. Hang your heads in shame. The adventures and other supplements that followed this core release do not seem to suffer this from editorial slackness.

'Dials'

Throughout the book the authors have deliberately created grey areas for groups to tweak the setting to their liking. This font and colour is used here to discuss these opportunities and as examples describe how I handled each topic.

Short Fiction

Each chapter is prefaced by a short piece of fiction set in on Mars. These are a good introduction to the genre. I'd set them as homework for players who have never read any of the old Scientific Romance novels.

Introduction

Modern readers will be most familiar with the works of Edgar Rice Burroughs (ERB), if only from the Pixar film John Carter, but there were others who wrote this kind of proto-space-opera. The works of ERB are in fact so much more

famous than others who wrote in this genre that some reviewers have thought this Mars a poor copy. The Mars presented is a kind of mash-up of the kinds of archetypes found in the genre. Some of the influences are obvious, others less so. Mars does a good job of taking these elements and welding them together into a seamless whole that captures the feel of the genre. The Mars described is not at all like the better-known Mars of Space 1889. The Space 1889 version comes across as a dusty mix of 19th Century India and Egypt. This Mars has all the vibrancy, colour, and miss-imagined high-technology of the planetary romance novels. Where Space 1889 Mars has gunpowder canons and crumbling stone ruins this Mars has radium blaster pistols and scintillating crystal spires. Even the canals are lines of clear water and flawless silvery metal. The book begins with a short history and details of everyday life that breathe life into this exotic world. Exactly the kind of small exotic details found in the old novels. Several diverse nations of Mars are described. I like that there are sections on 'typical' characters for each nation to help players create characters that fit within a genre and setting most will be unfamiliar with.

For busy referee's the nation of Callor Maralin (M15) is the easiest to use as a home base. The culture is dynamic, allows characters good personal freedoms, and warily accepts foreigners within its borders. All these attributes foster diverse and independent adventuring parties that appeal to most players. Furthermore most of the published adventures presume a freewheeling party of adventurers rather than say a cell of paranoid Maranian secret police or a cohort of White Ape Imperial soldiers.

The background material is more than sufficient but still deliberately leaves plenty of blanks for a referee to fill in to taste. For example though several nations are described in detail much of the map is only sketched in enabling you to create your own city-state or other area.

Characters

The core book offers good advice for creating a concept to build your character around (M36), useful for those unfamiliar with the genre. This is not a genre for navel gazing, characters should be dynamic and a little larger than life. Suggested roles include adventurer, companion, outcast, explorer, trickster, and defender. Those who want a little more structure I suggest you could create a concept to suit the setting by considering the following choices: choose a role (M36-37), choose a species (M39-59 and the notes below), choose or invent a homeland (M15-32), and finally choose a profession. This last could be anything suitable to the genre but professional edges provide some in genre examples (M65-69). Finally add a personality trait. Characters begin at novice rank but get 10xp to start with, enough for two Edges, making them a little more varied and competent.

Example: Explorer, Red, Callor, Sky-corsair, daring.

The Daring Tovus Valt, captain of the 3rd Callorian Expeditionary Force

Once you have a concept that fits the setting the rest of character generation follows the same procedures as in Savage Worlds. Like all settings in that system character creation is fast and easy to teach to novice gamers.

PC species

The species of Martians are Red Men, Green Men, White Apes, Grey Men, and Synthe Men. I assume the use of 'Men' rather than 'People' or 'Folk' is an attempt to stay within the usages of the period when the original planetary romance stories were written.

Mars indicates that of the 'races' of the planet only the Red Men, Green Men, and White Apes are suitable as player characters. Furthermore it suggests most groups consist of Red Men with perhaps a single member of another species. If you follow this advice, a system to assign roles like that described for Space 1889 in RPG Review 8 could be devised. Alternatively, the referee might allow short term 'guest appearances' or have players to create two characters a Red and another more exotic PC; players then take turns playing the one odder PC within the party changing at the start of each adventure.

Mars does indicate that this guidance could be ignored for campaigns showcasing other species and provides write-ups

with sufficient detail for PC use for all races. In the genre instances of mix species groups are common. Not only was ERB's John Carter an Earthman among Red Men, protagonist groups in ERB's novels have included a Green Man and a scuttling bodiless head. Referee could allow PCs can of any of the races described in the Mars book and still be true to the genre.

Those players familiar with the genre can also suggest rare species of men lingering in the deep tunnels or far off places of the planet. A set of rules to design these other peoples is included in the book (M57) useful for those with older editions of the core rules without the race creation rules now included in Savage Worlds Deluxe.

Red Men

The crimson skinned Red Men are almost like ERB's Red Martians. They are the "normal humans" of Mars physically and psychologically similar to humans of Earth. There are some differences but nothing too hard to get your head around.

Green Men

Tusked and fearsome, Green Men are obviously based loosely on ERB's Green Hordes. They are smaller than ERB's green giants and have only two arms. Their culture is also quite different to that imagined by ERB.

White Apes

Unlike the Red and Green Men, the white apes have no parallel that I know of in ERB's stories. The closest well-known equivalents are the Apes in Tim Burton's version of Planet of the Apes. The civilization described for them contains the kind of tensions typical of the genre.

Grey Men

The Grey Men are a distorted version of the Martians of Wells' War of the Worlds. While Wells' novel is absolutely not of the planetary romance genre these Martians certainly fit. The genre is filled with secretive and horrific aliens.

The surface dwellers of Mars only know the Greys from rumour and brief terrifying encounters. The rules and written fluff give one version of the how the Reds think the Greys are, the illustrations do not completely match and give another version of the rumours. What is the truth? Only the Greys know.

Greys could rarely be used as PCs or NPCs. A Grey PC in a group of non-Greys would likely be a secretive outcast whose goals aligned with those of the party, for the moment? The Whispering Lord (M28) gives an idea of the kind of Grey character that might be suitable as a PC.

Referees are encouraged in the book to modify the Greys to taste. You could tweak the details, add mesmeric powers, or even use them as a hidden link to some other more terrible secret. The ERB novel Chessmen of Mars has two ideas that could be applied to the Grey Men. Perhaps deep below the surface they are directing their efforts towards survival in a future airless Mars. They may also be evolving towards a bodiless brain, a terrible intellect devoid of the emotions and passions of the flesh. Deep in their hidden cities are huge bodiless brains with ruthless staggering intellects.

Taking inspiration from the drawings in Mars, I add the following to those rules in the book:

Large target, all attacks against the Grey are at +2 to hit.

They have six thicker shorter ambulatory tentacles and four longer manipulative ones. However, they generally have a "handedness" preferring one tentacle over the others much as most other men are right handed. These tentacles do not provide extra attacks.

They cannot ride, most Martian animals are too small to bare them and the Grey Men have no experience with riding beasts. They cannot begin with riding skill and will struggle to find in-game experiences to justify gaining it.

Use Grey machines. Advanced machines and vehicles manufactured by the Greys require someone of the Greys? unique shape to operate them. The reverse is sometimes true but for the most part the flexible tentacles of a Grey can operate most Martian hand held devices and control panels. They have Alien Minds (M55) with respect to Earthmen and the other peoples of Mars.

Just as some humans are not strongly handed or are ambidextrous, some Greys have good coordination with two or more manipulators; this can be modelled by purchasing edges from your normal allowance. Suggested edges include: Ambidextrous, Florentine, Counterattack, Two-fisted, or Frenzy (this last would represent attacking with multiple tentacles rather than a frenzy which would be so unlike the cold Grey Men).

Earth Men

While Mars does not give an exact date for Earth, just that it?s between 1850 and 1950. I suggest the date on Earth begins at 1867, shortly after the American Civil War. This is the same starting year as the Edgar Rice Burroughs?s John Carter narrative. However, since Mars is isolated from Earth the referee could really set the Earth date to anywhen. Perhaps, those Victorian age Earth Men are unknowingly time travelling and Earth is in the dinosaur epoch.

Similarly, how Earth Men find themselves on Mars is up to the referee (M54) but the options are not properly discussed within the book. I would suggest leaving this a mystery.

For example: recently, several Earthmen have awoken in remote places on Mars with no memory of how they got to this old world. Some say Earth Men on Mars were abducted by the Greys and brought across the void for some unknown reason. Others point out that there is no evidence that the Greys can sail between worlds and wonder if some ancient unseen power is at work. There are rumours that when the corpses of Earth Men are dissected small odd black cubes are found buried in their guts?

Mars also discusses how a referee may or may not give Earth Men special powers when they arrive on Mars. A selection of options is given for you to choose from. I personally prefer all Earth Men on Mars to manifest the same extraordinary abilities due to the differences in gravity and temperature on the worlds; Earth Men find the hottest day on Mars cool enough for long sleeves. In my campaign humans on Mars have:

Alien mind

Disease immunity

Mighty Thews

Also -2 to resist cold.

Martians on Earth

It seems logical to me that Martians on Earth would be affected by the inverse of the effects of Mars on Earthmen. Therefore I provide this example rule.

Though rare, in some of the old stories Martians find themselves on Earth. It is expected that Martians if ever taken to Earth would experience Alien mind, disease immunity, +2 to resist cold, and the inverse of Mighty Thews (see below).

Puny Thews

The higher gravity of Earth has had a noticeable affect on the Martian. His jumping capacity is automatically 1?lower (minimum 1?), and his encumbrance is calculated as if his strength was 1 die lower. A character with a d4 for Strength is reduced to carrying a maximum of 20 pounds for his load limit (SWD49) This has no effect on melee combat.

Cost: -2 points

Synthe Men

These are synthetic men. They are not robots, nor are they clones. They are artificial lifeforms created through advanced chemistry. This kind of being was common in older science fiction prior to the 1980s. The Synthe Men as

described are exactly the kind of thing one finds in the genre without being a copy of any particular authors work (as far as I know). Synthe Men are created for a specific purpose in the system for maintaining and defending the canals, they have no life beyond their work. A PC Synthe Man might be on a mission to acquire a rare component for a pump station or might be a trouble-shooting unit dispatched to investigate a potential threat to the canals. A Synthe Man makes the most sense in a campaign centred on a growing threat to the flow of the water. However, a particularly well-maintained pumping station may have a surplus Synthe Man that can be dispatched to proactively seek out threats to the canals. Ordering a character like this to seek out travelling companions provides extra protection without expending the thinly stretched resources of the canal maintenance system thus providing a rationale for one to join an adventuring group.

Skills

Generally the skills section contains a few tweaks and notes to the core Savage Worlds skill rules.

Guts

Guts is the skill for resisting fear effects. Note that all characters get a free d4 in this skill. It would have been better if this was noted in the character generation section rather than hiding it away in the skills section. Since Savage Worlds Deluxe this skill has been removed as a core rule, regardless of the version of Savage Worlds you are using I'd remove this skill when using this setting.

Military Characters

Some background material for the fighting forces of the various cultures of Mars can be found in the booklet Warriors of Mars. Military characters might find ample opportunity to use the Knowledge (Battle) skill (SWD92), warfare is a common occurrence in the genre.

Knowledge: Wire Pattern

Here I add a new skill. The ?language? used to interface with the machine minds when mechanical men are not available. Questions for the Machine Mind need to be crafted as patterns of wire and inserted into the machine to be read. Synth Men automatically have flawless knowledge of this language. Part craft and part mathematics this ?language? is not included within the languages skill which covers normal spoken and written communication between living people.

Hindrances and Edges

Edges and hindrances are character details much like the advantages/disadvantages of GURPS or the Feats of d20. Alterations here include jettisoning anything related to wealth, some professional edges, and a few other edges and hindrances. New hindrances are introduced: Cocky, Stigma, and Xenophobic. The new Edges mostly support the kinds of lightly armoured flashy fighting seen in the source material, these are: Dirty Fighter, Really Dirty Fighter, Improved Defence, Riposte, Improved Riposte, Sword and Blaster, Improved Sword and Blaster, Precision Strike, Improved Precision Strike, Spot Weakness, Wall of Steal (referring to flashing blades not armour). Many of these could be of use to those playing pirate or swashbuckler settings. Other new edges support archetypes of the genre: Brilliant Scientist, Failsafe, Brute Warrior, Canaller, Criminal, Doctor, Engineer, Explorer, Guardian, Fencer, Military Elite, Priest, and Sky-Corsair.

Arcane Backgrounds

In Savage Worlds Arcane Backgrounds are Edges that allow a character to use some kind of power. In Mars these are limited to Weird Science and perhaps Psionics. There is no magic in the genre.

Weird Science

Super-science and incredible devices are a feature of the genre. This background enables PCs to invent things as per the Savage Worlds rules. Weird Science is most often held by Greys and more vital cultures of the Red Men like the Academy of Avak Callor. Occasionally a Machine Mind holds a vast store of ancient designs giving it the appearance of creative invention.

Mindwitches

Psionics is an optional extra and notes for its use are included in Mars (M62). Mars makes the case that it is usually the villains that have mind-powers, however in the classic ERB Mars everyone has low-level telepathy and I can think of at least one instance of an ally with substantial psi-powers. Taking my cue from the ERB stories my version of Mars has only telepathy type psi. Only the following powers are available to mindwitches: beastfriend, confusion, fear, mind reading, puppet, succour, slumber, stun, slow and quickness; these last two represent alterations to neural speed and clarity. Note I do not use Soul Drain.

In my Mars mesmeric powers are rare, manifesting in about 1 in 10 000 Martians. The most populous city on Mars, Avak Callor, is the home to half a million people but holds only about 50 psiers. Earthmen are almost never mindwitches, those few yogi and mesmerists that find themselves on Mars discover that all Martians have Alien Mind (+2 Spirit rolls to resist) against the Earth-spiritualist's powers.

Starting Equipment

Mars gives us no prices for equipment and no guidance on what gear characters begin with beyond write down what you want and then run it by the referee. Generally, an exact accounting of every possession is not required instead important resources and possessions typically carried into danger are recorded. This may be a little too unstructured for some groups.

While jettisoning the rules for buying and selling may seem a little strange and is definitely open to abuse it is also a huge dial for you to twiddle and adjust the setting to taste. For starting equipment: Are your characters low born youths just embarking on a career of daring do? Then give them basic weapons, clothes, a pack and little else. If the characters are scheming ambassadors and aristocrats then bring on the sky-ships and jewelled radium holdout pistols. A White Ape crack fighting squad will have heavy armour and weapons but Red Nomads probably wont. Your party might even contain a mix of these and other character types.

For those wanting a little more structure I off the following guidance designed with a diverse party in mind. Please adjust to taste.

Characters are assumed to have all manner of furniture, clothes, and other possessions appropriate to their concept at home but the only items that really matter are those that they take into danger.

All starting equipment should be appropriate to culture, social status, and profession. All characters should note down the following at creation:

One residence, not a vehicle but a nomad tent is permitted. Typical residences include: gleaming palace, barracks? bunk, canal side dwelling, polar jungle villa, ruin, nomad's tent, crystal spire apartment etc. The residence could also double as a workplace such as an orchard, workshop etc. In these cases a small living area is assumed. All residences are furnished and stocked appropriately for the character background.

Sets of clothes and jewellery of number and type appropriate to status.

A pack, sack, harness, or similar for carrying goods.

One Weapon, only a fool would travel Mars without one, with a holster, scabbard, quiver, or baldric to carry it.

One possession related to each skill the character has at least a d6 in. These could be from the four lists in the book or other items.

The following are discussed in Warriors of Mars (WM)

Ballista, catapult, boiling oil pot, battering ram, ladder, siege tower.

*medical kits of all kinds range from the herbs and splints of primitive cultures to the precise healing rays and powered dissection tools of the Greys.

Most cultures do not keep slaves but characters might also have servants. Machine minds may have Synthe Men surplus to the immediate needs of maintaining the canals. All of these novice extras will avoid dangerous situations and combat, they don't adventure. Characters who want help on their adventures should invest Edges to get that help.

Setting Rules

A series of setting rules look like they would do a good job of encouraging the heroic action of the genre and make for faster-paced and fun game play.

Heroic Survival: important characters are not killed by damage instead they are incapacitated. Killing a PC or important NPC requires a "finishing move" against the now defenceless foe, something the heroes of the genre would never do. This rule should encourage players to throw their characters into danger and generally be heroic as demanded by the genre conventions.

Stunt Actions: the player describes an action in a flashy manner that adds difficulty and is rewarded with a bennie (a point that can be spent later for a game effect, a bit like a fate point in FATE). Why take the stairs when you can swing on the chandelier then leap down?

Story Declarations: these work like similar rules in FATE games. The player spends a bennie to add a small useful detail to the scene. A good way to emulate the coincidences and luck finds seen in the genre; this rule should also help prevent the action from stalling at the table.

Henchmen and Mooks: there is a fan-favourite scene in the ERB novels where a hero takes on a horde of fierce giant Green Martians with only his animal companion by his side and decimates his foes! These tissue-paper foes allow for that sort of over-the-top out-numbered fighting. Savage Worlds can already handle pretty big fights well without resorting to the mass combat rules, the use of Mooks enables you to put the Green horde on your table.

Miniatures

While we are on the topic of combat, Savage Worlds is designed around miniatures (or counters) and not using them removes some tactical richness. A quick look at the Savage Worlds forums will tell you plenty of people run the system without miniatures, no problem. However, there is no line of miniatures for the setting. You could use any counters really, buttons are cheap. However there are companies that sell miniatures portraying peoples of ERB's Mars that could be adapted (snip off the extra arms on the Green Men). Many companies also cast "pseudo-Egyptian fantasy figures that could be painted with crimson skin. There are numerous intelligent gorilla and yeti figures that will pass as White Apes. Also useful are packs of steam-punk or science fiction weapons that can be added to fantasy figures to give them that "sword and planet" look.

Here is a link to a forum discussing where to get miniatures for this setting:

<https://www.peginc.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=37830&sid=07af63cbf9d04eca0...> [2]

Airships

Personally, I think the term "airship" invokes images of the Hindenberg and the Goodyear Blimp. The smallest of these vehicles is about the size of a canoe, hardly a ship, so perhaps "Flyer" would be even better. While I'm dispelling assumptions older gamers might imagine the Space 1889's stately Martian sail "kites" and chuffing British aerial steam launches, also wrong. The Airships of Mars are like those of the ERB novels, advanced aerial vehicles more manoeuvrable than a helicopter, as fast as a jet, and with practically unlimited range. If you are having trouble picturing

them the Pixar movie John Carter, Jabba's pleasure barge in Return of the Jedi, and the illustrations within the Mars book will help. The rules recommend you re-scale the measurements by a factor of four or more but then leave you to do this yourself rather than having speeds in "ship scale" and "human scale?". This is kinda olde school but those used to having their hand held might balk. There is a rule to cover aerial battles without the use of miniatures. Finally, Mars was written before the Savage Worlds Deluxe edition and therefore uses the old climb rules. In the new system I'd rate Climb by ship size as follows: Small 4, Medium 3, Large 3, Huge 2, Gargantuan 2, Colossal 1.

Game Mastering

A good overview of the history of the genre is provided. This section was written before the Pixar film John Carter that captured the genre fairly well. A section on the thematic elements of the genre is provided. Even if you have read some of the old genre novels having someone actually clearly state the genre conventions is really useful. The specific advice for creating adventures in the setting and genre is pretty good. There is a set of tables to create adventure outlines that is useful when your creative juices get sluggish. As well as these stand out features there is also an adequate description of the basics of adventure design and NPC creation.

Beasts of Mars

This chapter contains only nine creatures, a few more would have been nice but those provided do represent the weirdness of beasts in the genre. After this is "Making it Martian?", a series of random tables to modify existing creatures into suitably odd Martian organisms. This was one of my favorite features of the d20 version and it is nice to see this useful tool presented for the savage worlds system. Referees of space opera or Cthulhu-esque settings would also get a lot of mileage out of these tables.

Slavers of Mars

This chapter contains the titular adventure (30 pages), and 14 one-paragraph adventure seeds. A shorter adventure "Caravan of Mars" (13 pages) is included in the hardcover version. The first adventure "Slaver's of Mars" assumes that the PCs are mostly Red Men mercenaries. I would have preferred a premise that could cater for a greater diversity of PCs. That the PCs are to be paid in read meat, a rarity on Mars, is a nice touch of the "exotic everyday" of a kind common in novels of the genre. As the plot proceeds the players encounter a lot of the fun stuff in the setting: sky pirates, alien carnivores, savages, dark pits, schemes, rescues! This adventure should provide several sessions of play and a good introduction to the setting.

Encounters

This chapter provides random encounter tables and a selection of NPCs ready for use by the referee. There are 14 stock NPCs and eight fully detailed personalities.

Support

The setting has adequate support. There are 10 supplements available as pdf only, mostly adventures. The supplements have evocative cover art, another good tool to help players new to the genre to grok it. The company has character sheets and wallpapers on their website but does not host any form of community. This book uses the Savage Worlds rules and as such many supplements for that rules set will be of use on Mars.

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