

SCIONS OF A PRIMORDIAL PLANET

The oldest of us remember as if it were yesterday. A great hand reached across the sky and, pulling back the cloak of stars, tore a hole in the night. Cradling the whole of Midgard in its palm, it transported us, all the lands and people of the Norse, to this strange and tired planet.

We have prospered here, we sons of Odin. Our Viking ways have carried us from the lands of cold eternal Night to the north and south to the dreaming shores of the Great Sea of Mars. The twin moons, Phobos and Deimos, have seen us lay waste to our foes and make free with their wealth and their women.

The youngest of us take it as fair and fitting that we should be so much stronger than our enemies, that we should sweep across them as wind across fertile fields.

And yet.

Why are we here? What strange gods have sought fit to test us? The runes are quiet on this point; the Skalds have no legends to tell. Perhaps one day we shall find the answers we seek.

MARS

This is not the Mars we know from NASA's press releases. It is old but still fertile, the skies are blue and it is criss-crossed with canals of all size, all flowing towards the Great Sea of Mars, a slumbering ocean of great breadth and depth.

The human lands lie to the north, just south of the northern ice cap. They are very Earth-like, full of fjords and fog-shrouded mountains, vast pine forests. The nights are long, the winters harsh and summers brief. There is nowhere else on Mars that resembles it and it is several hundred miles wide.

To the north, the forests and earth-like terrain gradually fade into the northern polar ice cap.

To the east and west, the forests become rolling plains, the true landscape of Mars.

To the south, more rolling plains, and eventually, the Great Sea Of Mars. Beyond that, stories tell of desert, haunted by the ghosts of ages past.

Criss-crossing everywhere are great Canals, each ranging in size from several hundred feet across to the size of the mighty Amazon. Dotted the canals are ruins

of ancient cities.

Mars is an old planet and there have been an untold number of civilizations over its many eons...and all of these civilizations have left behind their marks.

CORE RULES

This game runs under the Microlite20 rules system, with the following exceptions:

SKILLS

Scions uses the standard Microlite20 skills, plus an additional skill called Survival.

COMBAT

The rules on dual-wielding and light weapons apply to Warriors, Skalds, Pirates, Nobles and Hunters.

ARMOR AND ARMOR CLASS

Armor Class (AC) = 10 + one-half level, rounded down + DEX bonus.

Armor contributes 1 point of DR for **light** armor, 1d3 for **medium** and 1d6 for **heavy**. Add +1 to this total if a **helmet** is worn. Roll for each hit separately.

Shields are treated as usual under d20.

Medium and **Heavy** armor limit Dexterity bonuses to AC to +2 and +1, respectively.

RACES OF MARS

Note: While any race can theoretically be a member of any class, it would require a bit of explanation as to how a human became a Martian priest...

HUMANS

Humans come from a planet with a much greater gravity than Mars, which gives them vastly improved physical capabilities—refer to the section on Gravity for more information.

These Humans are Vikings. Vikings gain +2 Strength. Other types of Humans may have different stat or skill bonuses should they appear in the campaign.

Humans can become Warriors, Hunters, Runecasters and Skalds.

Humans from other cultures may have different classes available to them than those listed here.

MARTIANS

Martians are red-skinned, with elfin features and black hair. They tend to be thin and tall, with a loose-limbed grace impossible to those adapted to higher gravity worlds.

Martians come from several castes. Upper caste Martians (aristocracy, merchants) gain +1 to Knowledge and Communications. Lower caste Martians, such as workers and soldiers, gain +2 Dex.

Martians can become Warriors, Nobles, Pirates, Priests and Scholars.

BEAST MEN

This hasn't been the first time creatures have been transported from Earth to the Red Planet. Over the years these new arrivals have bred (or been bred?) into highly evolved humanoid forms, each type genetically compatible with the other.

These new Beast Men have formed nomadic tribes that wander the wastes of Mars. Use the Microlite20 Anthro races for base abilities.

Beast Men can become Warriors, Hunters and Shaman.

CLASSES

HUNTERS

Hunters can use light armor and shields. They have a +2 bonus to Subterfuge and Survival.

If they successfully sneak up on a foe, they can add their Subterfuge skill rank to the damage of their first attack.

Hunters are +1 to hit and damage with ranged weapons. Ranged weapon attack rolls are increased by +1 to hit and damage at 5th level and every 5 levels on.

Hunters only incur a -1 to hit penalty when fighting with 2 weapons.

At 3rd level, Hunters automatically pass without trace as per the druid spell.

At 6th level, Hunters no longer take penalties for dual-wielding.

NOBLES

Nobles can use any kind of armor and can use shields. They gain a +3 on Communication.

Choose one word that describes the source of the noble's charisma (impressive, beautiful, fearsome, well-known, etc). Whenever a roll comes up that could possibly be benefited by that trait (social, diplomatic, even combat if appropriate), that roll will be at +2.

When a situation happens where social status could possibly affect the outcome, add half the Noble's level (rounded down) to the roll.

If personal wealth is important in the game, Nobles are noticeably more wealthy than the other non-Noble characters. How much so is up to the GM.

Nobles gain the equivalent of the Leadership feat at 3rd level. Their Leadership Score is equal to their level plus twice their Mind bonus (if positive, otherwise it's level +1).

PIRATES

Pirates can only use light armor. They have a +2 bonus to Subterfuge and Physical.

Pirates gain a +2 skill bonus when performing anything specifically related to their profession, such as climbing, swinging about on ropes or navigation.

Pirates can use their Mind bonus as an additional bonus to their AC. If they don't have a positive Mind bonus, then they have an AC bonus of +1.

At 3rd level, Pirates can use alcohol and other intoxicants to heal themselves. Achieving a mild state of intoxication cures 1d10 hp of damage along with all the other usual pitfalls and effects of being drunk or otherwise chemically impaired. Moderate intoxication cures 3d10 damage but also has the usual side effects. A full-on bender cures all damage save for 1d4 hit points, but the pirate will be completely useless for one or two days.

At 6th level, Pirates no longer take penalties for dual-wielding.

PRIESTS

Priests are the lore keepers of the ancient Martian civilizations. Worshipers of a vast—and nearly incomprehensible to outsiders—pantheon of gods and demons, they are heirs to a great body of arcane knowledge.

They do not wear armor. They have a +2 bonus to Communication and Knowledge. They also have access to psionic abilities, whichever one of the Microlite20 psionic variants the GM prefers.

RUNECASTERS

Runecasters are exactly as listed in the Rune Magic pdf.

SCHOLARS

Eager investigators into the scientific secrets of the past, scholars are one part inventor, one part mad scientist, one part archaeologist and one part wizard. They specialize in using devices, scientific inventions they may only partially understand. They tend to be a secretive and paranoid lot—often their knowledge dies with them.

Scholars can wear light armor. They have a +3 bonus to Knowledge. They gain a +2 to bonus when deciphering ancient writings.

They can build or discover devices. Each device duplicates a spell from the SRD. Choose a name for that device that sounds sufficiently impressive—instead of saying “gun that throws lightning bolt spells” call it an “Integrating Field Generator”. A flying device becomes an “omniraptor”...and so forth.

A Scholar may have 2 devices plus their Mind bonus. Every time they gain a level, they can build another device. The maximum level of device they can build is equal to their level.

It takes roughly one week per spell level to build a device. When designing a device, roll 2d6. Add the spell level to the total. Subtract 1 point for every 4 character levels, rounded down. Compare the result to the following table to determine the size of the device built.

How it actually looks is up to the player, but he should decide how the device is used. Is it worn? Wielded?

Thrown? Ridden? Does it have a switch or buttons?

2d6	Size of Device*
Less than 2	Tiny (ring, jewelry)
2-3	Palm-sized
4-7	Hand-held (a sword or crossbow, for example)
8-10	Bulky, requires two hands
11-12	Too large to be held.
More than 12	Wagon-sized

Devices tend to be unreliable. Every time a device is used, roll 1d20. If it's less than or equal to the spell level, it fails. This number goes down 1 for every 4 levels of the Scholar (round down). If a device fails 3 times, then the device is broken and needs to be repaired. The reliability of a device may never be lower than 1.

The reliability of a device can also be adjusted by making it smaller or larger than that initially rolled. Making a device larger makes it more reliable by 1 point per step (minimum 1). Making it smaller makes it less reliable by 1 point per step.

At the GM's option, several devices can be combined into one device. For every additional function beyond the first, either increase the size level by one or the reliability number.

It takes 1 day per spell level and a lab to repair a device.

Scholars may also attempt to repair and use devices they find in ruins or while otherwise adventuring. Results from these experiments tend to be...unreliable.

SHAMAN

Shaman can use light armor and shields. They can cast Druid spells and gain +2 to Knowledge and Survival.

At 3rd level, a Beast Man Shaman can assume the full form of their animal part at will, essentially becoming that creature with statistics as listed in the SRD. They retain their current HP total, Mind score and attack bonuses from level when doing so. If there's several listings for possible creatures, the GM and the player should decide together which one is most appropriate and stick with that decision.

At 6th level, they gain a +2 bonus to a physical statistic of their choice (Strength or Dexterity) when in animal form. This bonus increases by +1 for every 3 levels afterward (e.g. 9th = +3, 12th = +4, 15th = +5, 18th = +6).

In addition, *pass without trace* is on the Druid spell list if not available already, as a 1st level spell.

SKALDS

Skalds are the Vikings' lore keepers and storytellers. Their tales of heroism and poetry can inspire bravery and hearten weak souls.

They can wear light or medium armor and can use shields. They gain a +2 bonus to Communication and Knowledge.

Once per adventure, a Skald can make an inspirational speech about a single topic relevant to the crisis at hand. The speech takes at least a couple of minutes and those affected must be within earshot. Any nearby allies gain a +2 bonus on one skill check, save or attack roll of their choice. If not used by the end of the crisis, this bonus will be lost. For every 5 levels, the number of times this bonus may be used per audience member increases by +1.

A Skald can also cast 1st level Druid spells at 1st level--their maximum spell level castable increases by +1 every 4 levels (e.g. level 1 = spell level 1, level 4 = spell level 2, level 8 = spell level 3, etc).

WARRIORS

Warriors can wear any kind of armor and can use shields. They have a +3 bonus to Physical and add +1 to all attack and damage rolls. This increases by +1 at 5th level and every five levels on.

Each race has an additional special ability on top of the warrior's basic abilities:

- **Human warriors** (specifically, Vikings) can go **berserk**. They can do this a total number of rounds per day equal to their unmodified Strength score. When berserking, the warrior's Strength goes up by +4, they gain +1 hp per level (in addition to the +4 hp from the Strength bonus), but they lose 2 points of Armor Class. A warrior can end a berserk at any time. After berserking, the warrior will be tired, taking a -2 to all appropriate rolls until they can take a few minutes to rest. They cannot berserk again until they are rested.
- **Martian warriors** are renowned for their **skill and finesse with weapons**. They can choose one weapon to be their signature weapon. When fighting with that signature weapon, they gain +2 to hit and on a critical hit do an additional 1d6 damage.
- **Beastman warriors** grow progressively more in touch with their **primal nature**. At 1st level, when using one of their innate abilities, they gain +2 on skill or to-hit checks.

At 4th level, if they have a natural attack, they can perform that attack in addition to their normal melee weapon attacks with no penalty.

At 8th level, their natural abilities increase in power. Natural attacks go up to the next higher die type. Innate skill bonuses are increased by +4. Other numerical bonuses are increased by +2 (AC, for example). Any ability sustainable for a duration can be sustained 50% longer. Since there's a wide array of abilities (too many to list here), use common sense for anything not covered by the above.

THE MARTIAN ENVIRONMENT

GRAVITY MATTERS

Different planets have different levels of gravity. Earth has a surface gravity of 1. Mars has a surface gravity of .37, or roughly one-third of that.

When on a planet not your own, compare the two planets' surface gravities: the result multiplies jump distance, the amount of time you can perform an activity without fatiguing, lift capacity and divides any distance you fall. For simplicity's sake, round the numbers to the nearest convenient fraction (1/6, 1/4, 1/3, 1/2, etc).

This allows other effects not possible on other planets. For example, buildings can be several times taller on Mars than on Earth because gravity is not such an obstacle to construction.

Natives are assumed to be adapted to the gravity level of their home planet and perform in all respects equal to that of normal d20. Visitors, however, perform at the scale of their home planets.

Example: Earth has a surface gravity of 1. Mars has a surface gravity of 1/3.

An Earth human on Mars with a strength of 10 would have a maximum heavy load of 300 lbs instead of 100 (1 divided by 1/3). A Martian with 10 Strength transported to Earth would have the opposite effect—they would have a maximum heavy load of 33 lbs (1/3 divided by 1).

Similarly, the same human on Mars could easily jump 30 feet (10 ft x 3), and with training, could possibly even jump as far as 30 yards. The same Martian as above would be lucky to jump a yard before collapsing under the brutal grip of Earth's gravity.

Now, take them both to the Earth's Moon. The Moon has a gravity of 1/6, half that of Mars. An Earth human would be able to jump six times farther (1 divided by 1/6). A Martian would be able to jump twice as far as normal (1/3 divided by 1/6).

Keep in mind that the intent of this system is not to be a physics simulator—it's strictly there to Make Things More Awesome. If the laws of physics get in the way of telling a good story, ignore them.

THE CANALS OF MARS

The Canals of Mars were first constructed eons ago by an ancient civilization. Canals range in size from several hundred feet across to wider than the Amazon river and can be anywhere from 20 to 100 feet deep in the center.

Canals always maintain uniform size along their entire length—they never narrow, widen, deepen or get shallower. They always run in perfectly straight lines and connect sites important to the civilization that built them.

Legends say that these sites were all important cities, but all that remains today are crumbling ruins and enigmatic monuments. Quite a few are still inhabited, but not by their original builders.

Ruins of ancient cities, temples and fortifications dot the canals at regular intervals, usually separated by 15 – 20 miles, as well as most of Mars' settled areas. A great deal of trade and traffic occurs along the canals—not only watercraft, but also along the shore.

The Canals support a diverse variety of aquatic life, not all of which is dangerous.

THE MOONS

Phobos is the larger and closer of the two moons of Mars. It speeds around the planet in 11 hours. It's an unevenly-shaped dull chunk of rock and its apparent size varies from hour to hour, growing from less than a quarter the apparent size of Earth's moon to one-third the Moon's apparent size, depending on its location relative to the observer.

Legends speak of its surface as a savage, jungle-choked land. It is home to dragons who occasionally fly down to Mars to feed as the moon passes overhead. This usually only occurs in equatorial regions.

Deimos is the smaller of Mar's two moons. It orbits the planet in 30 hours and looks like a bright star from

the surface of Mars.

Martian astronomers recount ancient legends of a crystalline palace covering the entire surface of Deimos. *The Palace of Atum* is supposedly the dwelling place of the mysterious Gods of Mars.

GEOGRAPHIC FEATURES OF MARS

Olympus Mons is the largest volcano in the solar system. It stands 16 miles high, but the slope is so gradual that its vast height is hidden by the horizon in most places. The caldera is roughly 50 miles wide and almost 2 miles deep and is filled with a steamy jungle populated by dinosaurs and reptile men. There are few Canals in the area, so it mostly remains unexplored.

Mars has two **polar ice caps**. The bitter cold and savage winds keep exploration to a minimum, but stories abound of empty wastelands filled with tribes of savage white apes. It is said that if you travel far enough north, eventually you may reach a dark tower where the dead walk and strange lights play across the sky.

The Caves Of Mars. To the southeast of Olympus Mons lies a chain of 3 mighty volcanoes, **Pavonis Mons, Ascraeus Mons** and **Arsia Mons**. They are fairly similar to Olympus Mons, including the deep calderas. Rumors tell of great cave systems in each that lead to a mysterious underworld where none return.

The Nexus Of Mars. Dozens of Canals converge on this point on the north-western shore of the Great Sea to form a single mighty Canal that stretches for miles, so wide that that one side cannot be seen by the other and lined on either embankment by 1,000 foot tall weathered stone statues of forgotten kings and heroes. It ends in the Great Sea a few miles away from the **Island of the Emperor**, where the palace of the Emperor of Mars stands.

The Valles Marineris is a vast valley, similar to the Grand Canyon of Earth, but much larger. It is over 3000 miles long (roughly the size of Europe) and up to 5 miles deep in parts. Cold, damp and mist-shrouded, it is home to vast forests of giant mushrooms populated by strange fungal creatures. It is rumored that a powerful and reclusive civilization is hidden within its depths.

CREATURES OF MARS

In the human areas, wildlife tends to be fairly standard for northern Europe. Horses, cows, deer, bears, standard Earth fish and fowl all are plentiful.

Near the fringes, the Earth wildlife and native Martian wildlife have begun to interbreed, often with strange and surprising results.

Native Martian life tends to fall along several lines—variations of arachnids, spiders and humanoids, with the occasional reptilian life form. Besides humanoids, mammals are fairly rare.

Martian life also tends to evolve in odd directions rather quickly in isolated ecosystems. It's not uncommon to find caves filled with walking fungus creatures or dozens of varieties of carnivorous plants. Caution is always suggested when exploring.

There are two useful shortcuts in developing Martian critters—either use the stats of an Earth equivalent and then describe it as an alien beast or, if you desire more randomness, use the *Microlite20* online creature generator.

Sample Critters:

Carnivorous plants come in a wide variety of shapes and sizes. The following example is a giant Venus fly trap:

Carnivorous Plant. HD 8d8+40 (76 HP), AC 14, Melee +13/+8 Grabs opponent (Str 20), bites for 1d6+10 next round.

Another common variety is a vine identical in statistics and attack mode to a boa constrictor:

Carnivorous Vine. HD 3d8+6 (19 HP), AC 15, Bite +5 (1d3+4), Grabs (Str 14) and squeezes for 1d3+4 per round after hitting with Bite until killed or target breaks free.

Chalo. Chalos are the Martian equivalent of Clydesdale horses. They are enormous spider-like creatures, with coloration ranging through all shades of green. Their poison, which can be milked, is mildly intoxicating but nutritious. It is only fatal to small animals, which they feed on. They secrete webbing which is useful in making weaponry, rope and other such items. They are widely used by both Beast Men and Martians as war horses.

Chalo. HD 4d8+12 (18 hp), AC 14, Bite +6 (1d8+2). Very good over rugged terrain. Moves about as fast as a war horse or roughly twice as fast as a normal human can run.

Chalig. A smaller *Chalo* bred by the Martians as a beast of burden and cattle and also used for their silk.

Chalig. HD 2d8+2 (11 hp), AC 12, Bite +4 (1d8+1).

Kalkula. Thought to be alien to their world, the Kalkula is known on Earth as a megalodon, an extinct (on Earth) species of shark with jaws wide enough to swallow a horse and often reaching well over 80 feet in length. Kalkula are thankfully rare, living in the Canals and preying on, well, everything.

Kalkula. HD 24d8+68 (264 hp), AC 20, Bite +24 (4d6+10). They can swallow most creatures whole and swim four times faster than a man can run.

Phobos Dragon. Paleontologists would recognize these as pterodactyls, if a pterodactyl was the size of a hay wagon. Only the largest and most powerful successfully make the flight from Phobos to Mars. The standard variety on Phobos is considerably smaller, about twice the size of a vulture.

Phobos Dragon. HD 10d10+50 (105 hp), AC 17. Bite +13 (2d10+8) or batters with wings +8 (2d6+4). Can also grab opponents and carry them off if they are man-sized or less. They fly about three times faster than a man can run, but are awkward and slow on the ground.

Tec-tecs are aquatic creatures that travel in swarms and greatly resemble wasps. They are a prized delicacy but catching them is somewhat problematic because large colonies of tec-tec are capable of shocking attackers with electric charges. Once stunned, they become food for the tec-tec. It's often possible to tell they are nearby because the water takes on a curious yellow shimmer.

Tec-tec. HD 1/4d8 (1 hp), AC 16. Shock +2 (1d2-1 individually).

Tec-tec, swarm. Shock +8 (1d6 damage + DC 15 save or be paralyzed for several minutes).

Tec-tec are only dangerous to those in the water. They are quite vulnerable to nets and traps.

Thonts are the Martian equivalent of war elephants. Descended from a creature that looks like an 8-legged gila monster, they are enormous, slow and heavily armored. Different breeds exist—when not seen dragging siege engines, they are used in heavy construction and for pulling the largest wagons in merchant caravans.

Thonts. HD 9d10+72 (121 hp), AC 22. Trample +13 2d12+13. Thonts travel at about human walking speed and are enormously strong.

Ultira are small vermin strongly resembling a cross between a feral rat and a black widow spider. When threatened, they make a high-pitched shrieking noise and can spit a blinding poison. They tend to infest dark abandoned places where they can feed on rubbish and decaying things.

Ultira. HD 1/2d8 (2 hp), AC 14, Bite +4 (1d3-4) or Spit Poison +2 (blind target for 1d4 rounds unless a DC 15 save is made).

White Apes dwell in the far regions of the polar ice caps and are very rare elsewhere on the planet. They have a rudimentary intelligence and social structure and tend to travel in organized packs.

White Ape. HD 4d8+11 (29 hp), AC 14. Claws +7 (1d6+5) or Bite +2 (1d6+2) or melee with a large club +7 (2d6+5).

Zigdur. Zigdur are dog-sized furry spiders that perform all duties that dogs perform on Earth. Unlike dogs, however, they can climb walls as a spider and weave webs. The write-up below is for a war/hunting breed.

Zigdur. HD 1d8+2 (6 hp), AC 15. Bite +2 (1d4+1). Zigdur can run a little faster than humans and have a keen sense of smell. They are also very sensitive to vibrations in the ground.

MARTIAN TECHNOLOGY

Martians have roughly an Elizabethan level of technology, with the occasional addition of strange devices invented by a scholar or salvaged from an ancient ruin.

They tend to use weapons such as long swords, rapiers and cutlasses, with the occasional halberd. They often wear leather or scale armor with ceremonial plate being the exception instead of the rule.

Martians have mastered the use of black powder and have cannons. They also have various forms of primitive firearms, such as blunderbusses and flintlocks. These weapons do 2d6 damage if one-handed or 2d8 damage for two-handed variants. They can only fire once and reloading takes 2 rounds.

Martian skyships are rather reminiscent of Greek triremes in terms of hull layout and design. They are supported by large durable *chalog* silk bags filled with hydrogen. Hydrogen is harvested from a plant grown

on vast plantations.

Skyships are propelled by sails in good weather. In less favorable weather, they often have large silk wings that can be used, albeit with great effort, to provide propulsion.

Beast Men have basic metalsmithing skills. They primarily use bows, arrows, spears and axes. Their level of technology is roughly equivalent to that of the Vikings but they often lack resources. They tend to not wear any armor heavier than leather or hide, but that's likely a matter of availability rather than taste.

Vikings are, well, Vikings. Broadswords, chain mail, axes, long ships, knives, bows and thatched houses...assume that they have the standard array of "medieval" fantasy equipment available to them.

Martians and Vikings both use coins made of gold, silver or copper to conduct trade. Vikings and Beast Men also tend to rely on barter.