

Sample file

MARTIAN EMPIRES

WARGAMES RULES FOR THE MARTIAN INVASION OF
EARTH, THE FIRST EXPEDITION TO MARS AND THE
SCRAMBLE FOR MARS

BY MIKE LEWIS

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INTRODUCTION

I have always been drawn to the stories of H G Wells, Edgar Rice Burroughs and Jules Verne – there is something about naivety of their visions of the future and Victorian belief in the dominance of the machine and of the Empire that appeals to me. It is these authors, along with the influence of the steam-punk movement such as Gibson/Sterling's *The Difference Engine*, that have inspired the whole Victorian Science Fiction (VSF) genre of roleplaying and wargames.

I started playing VSF games as a light relief from historical games such as Napoleonics, attracted into it by the excellent and quirky Pax Limpopo range from Eureka Miniatures and the fun and simple *GASLIGHT* rules set for skirmishes.

Eventually, though, I wanted to play bigger games and 15mm figures seemed to offer the best solution for a large-scale game that provided plenty of space in which units of flying ships and steam tanks could operate.

As there was a shortage of true VSF figures in 15mm, I found myself starting Black Hat Miniatures and creating the *Martian Empires* range of 18mm VSF figures that will eventually cover everything you need to fight a Martian Invasion or take the fight to Mars.

The *Martian Empires* ruleset is designed as a fast-play set of element-based rules that make large-scale VSF games possible. It is intended to be a game and is in no way a simulation of true Victorian SF warfare, if you can have such a thing!

The rules draw on a number of rules ideas and sets that I have played over the years and I am especially grateful to Ian Marsh for providing his own Napoleonic ruleset, *Huzzah!*, as a base document for me to start with, though I have deviated greatly from that starting point both in terms of rules and the game style.

The rules have their own suggested background that fills out the detail behind the *Martian Empires* range of figures, but I repeat that they are just a suggestion. Feel free to add to the rules, change the army lists or just tinker.

There is a *Martian Empires* group on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/699293393894929>

Figures and downloadable versions of the rules and errata are available from <https://fighting15s.com>

Mike Lewis
Woking, 2007

A British heavy steam hovertank



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AT WAR WITH MARS

Cephalods: the Martian invaders of Earth



Martian Invasion

In March 1880, Earth astronomers saw flashes on the surface of Mars: 10 days later the first cylinders of the Martian invasion force landed. The invaders were Cephalods, squid-like creatures. Their large cylindrical spacecraft were powered by an initial thrust from a giant gun, but then used a strange Martian mineral to slow and control their flight.

The Cephalods built a number of tripod walking machines and attacked London, driving the government and Her Majesty to the safety of Balmoral in Scotland. There was fierce fighting, but the Martian invasion was eventually defeated at the decisive battle of Horsell Common – the landing site of the first cylinder – through overwhelming force of artillery, and the use of a captured Martian tripod.

The military and leading scientists feared that this was just an advance guard and that soon the Martians would send a stronger, overwhelming force that Earth could not withstand.

The captured Martian machines were studied at the new research establishment at Porton Down and attempts made to adapt them for use by British forces. This became a matter of urgency when it was reported that both the Prussians and the French had captured their own Martian machines.

In 1881, eminent physicist George Cavor finally isolated Cavorite from a Martian spaceship drive and showed that it had anti-gravity properties. In the demonstration, both he and an assistant floated to the top of the Porton Down hangar before they were rescued by other workers.

Cavor then built a small, experimental space craft, the *Louise* (named after his niece), and with an assistant undertook the first flight into the atmosphere. After some teething problems they managed to land back at Porton Down with nothing more than scratches and a couple of broken bones.

With the means to reach Mars now available, plans were set in place by the British government (with Her Majesty's blessing) to carry the force of the Empire to the distant red

planet and to isolate the threat of further invasions.

General Gordon was appointed overall commander of the expedition and troops were soon recalled from areas of the Empire for intensive training in the use of the new Martian-based weapons. In particular, the First Mars Expedition troops were issued with breathing masks, based on the Samuel Barton design, to counter the effects of the black smoke used by the Cephalods.

The force of 7,000 infantry, 1,500 cavalry and assorted artillery and support troops was assembled on Salisbury Plain where seven vast spaceships powered by Cavorite engines had been built. On 10 June 1882, just over two years since the original Martian invasion, the force lifted off to the sounds of cheers from the hundreds of thousands who had gathered to see them depart. With the sounds of the massed brass bands fading in the distance, they cleared the atmosphere and headed for Mars.

The First Mars Expedition

When the expedition cylinders arrived on Mars, the British found a very different planet from the one that they had expected. Instead of a planet dominated by the Cephalods, they found a planet with three distinct races, large, sophisticated empires and a continual state of civil war.

The flagship, *Victoria Regina*, and two other ships – *The Prince Albert* and the *Charles Dickens* – all landed within a few hundred yards of each other and were able to group their forces quickly into a defensive formation.

Three other ships – *Bulwer-Lytton*, *Disraeli* and *Lord Cardigan* – also landed together, some miles away from the flagship. They too were able to unload their cargo and form a defensive camp.

The *Lord Palmerston* was unlucky and landed on its own nearly 100 miles from the other ships. As it unloaded, its men were surprised by a group of Tribal Martians and after some

fierce fighting they were able to beat them off. The ship and its crew were besieged and despite a number of attempts were unable to break free of the encampment to contact the other British ships.

Patrols were dispatched from both the *Bulwer-Lytton* group and from the flagship. The patrols failed to find evidence of Cephalod activity as expected (they had landed a thousand miles from the main Cephalod settlements) but they did encounter Imperial Martian patrols from the nearby cities of Helia and Gorlan.

It immediately became clear that although the men of the expedition force could adjust to the thinner atmosphere and lighter gravity of Mars, the horses they had brought were less well adapted. The cavalry lost more than half its mounts in the first week from broken bones and breathing problems. Then an outbreak of disease, spread by a local Martian insect, killed most of the remaining horses. The expedition force soon turned to the local fauna to find remounts, initially using octasaurs captured from Martian patrols.

After some initial minor clashes, the *Bulwer-Lytton* encampment was attacked by forces from Gorlan and the attack repulsed with some losses. The new Cavor-Smythe walking machines proved particularly effective against the Martian scout fliers.

The main flagship encampment also survived a number of probing raids from Helian forces before General Gordon received information on the whereabouts of the *Bulwer-Lytton* and the other ships. He decided to consolidate his forces and, leaving the spaceships guarded by a small force, he marched his main force across the Martian desert and towards the *Bulwer-Lytton*.

After a number of days of minor skirmishes, Gordon caught and beat a large Helian force at the Battle of the Spires (named after an unusual rock formation that formed a central feature of the battlefield). Gordon then carried on to the *Bulwer-Lytton* and reunited his forces.

The British forces came under heavy attack from the Gorlan Martian army and suffered a number of setbacks when they tried to pin down the army and fight it. The Giant Tribal Martians that fought alongside the Gorlans were a particular problem.

Gordon's forces were approached by an envoy from Helia that offered a pact between the two forces in return for help against Gorlan forces that were besieging Helia itself. Gordon realised that this was an opportunity to gain local knowledge and support and so the British broke camp and attacked the Gorlan forces from the rear. The siege of Helia was lifted and the Helia Treaty signed on 27 January 1883. Gordon conscripted some Helia forces into his own force as askaris. The first expedition of the combined forces was against the Tribal Martians and Gorlan allies who were besieging the *Lord Palmerston*. After a fierce battle, the British were relieved.

Gordon then set out on a punitive campaign against Gorlan. He still had it in mind to reach Cephalod territory and to deal with those forces before consolidating his position on Mars. A number of losses forced him to retreat to Helia, which was once more besieged by Gorlan. At this point, Gordon used the heliograph ship – the *Lord Cardigan* – to signal back to Earth for help.

The Expedition to relieve Gordon

Back on Earth, the papers had been filled with stories of Gordon's expedition, often accompanied by lurid illustrations from the correspondents' imaginations.

The news that Gordon was surrounded and that the expedition had still not achieved its aim of punishing the Cephalods did not go down well in parliament, and some hotheads proposed leaving Gordon to his fate rather than risk the Empire on another ill-fated mission to the red planet. Common sense and human decency prevailed and another large force was built up comprising 15 ships and some 30,000 men and supplies. This time, the ships included traders and trade goods in the hope of establishing new merchant enterprises with the Martian empire of Helia.

The ships were finally equipped and took off from Salisbury Plain on 24 November 1883. Gordon and his forces had been holding out in Helia for more than six months and the situation was becoming more desperate. Even the promise of a relief expedition from Earth did little to quieten the mutterings of discontent from the radical elements within the Helian Council.

Eventually, the news came that the expedition was on its way and the flashes of the launches were seen through the powerful Helian telescopes.

Just days later, other flashes were seen from the continent of Europe. Prussia had finally overcome its technical problems with Cavorite and launched its own expedition to Mars.

The targeting of the ships and their manoeuvrability had been greatly improved between the first and second expeditions and the ships were able to enter the Martian atmosphere under control. The trade ships landed in Helia itself along with a number of reinforcements.

The remainder of the ships landed 10 miles from Helia and formed a relief column that attacked the Gorlan forces besieging Helia. The combined attacks from the city and the relief column split the Gorlan forces in two and they fled the field, leaving the British and Helian troops as the victors of the Second Battle of Helia.

The Gorlan forces sued for peace and the British installed a Helian governor and a small troop presence within their city.

The Prussians land

The Prussian forces comprised five cylinder ships of Count Zeppelin's Mk III design and they each carried a small strike force that could act independently. They landed on the edges of the Gorlan influence and close to the city of Lota within the wastelands of the centre of Mars.

The Prussians quickly made an alliance with the disaffected factions within Gorlan and built a bridgehead on the edge of Gorlan territory.

The Scramble begins

The French landed Foreign Legion forces close to the city state of Lota and were quick to ally with the city. The Lotans were grateful to receive additional forces to build up their very meagre "real" forces.

The situation was now in place for a conflict between the three major Earth powers and their respective Martian allies.

The Scramble for Mars had begun...