

SPACE

BEASTMEN  
OF

1889

MARS

Lester  
W.  
Smith

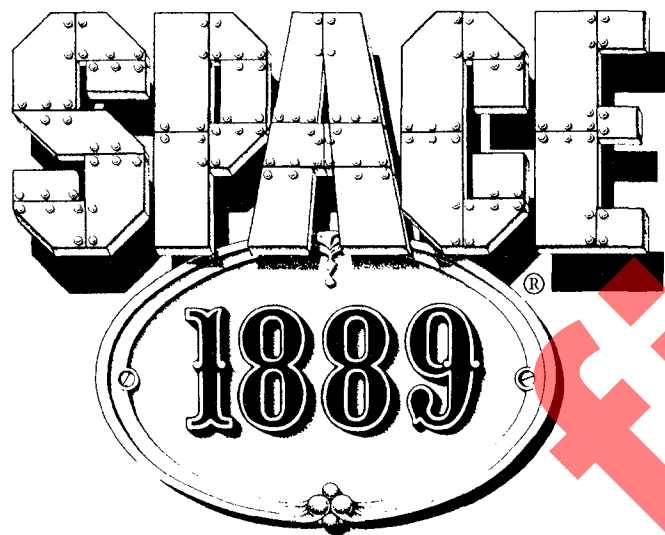


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A Secret Evil...  
on 19th-Century Mars.

Science-Fiction Role Playing in a More Civilized Time.



# BEASTMEN OF MARS





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# Introduction

HIGH IN THE Astusapes Mountains, home of the dreaded High Martians, often called the beastmen of Mars, King Hattabranx, lord of Kraag Barrovaar, strongest of the High Martian mountain fortresses, sits upon his throne and nurses his hatred for humans. At his ear whisper the hideous Worm Priests, devotees of a bizarre god that delights in death and pain.

On the western edge of the Astusapes, a clan of Queln, the savage skrill-riding Steppe Martians, has recently made its home. The clan has come to raid the *bhutan* spice trade of the Umbran League, despite the fact that the High Martians already pirate that trade. As a result, High Martian screw galleys and fierce Queln riders ply the same winds, inviting war between the two savage peoples.

East of the Astusapes, the Hashas-

sa, a peaceful tribe of the Wagon Masters of Meroe, struggle to settle the difference between their chieftain's two sons—differences that threaten to tear the clan apart. And to add tension to their troubles, the ruumet breehr herds that these nomads follow have strayed into the Astusapes, inviting retribution from the High Martians if the Hashassa follow the herds.

On the canals of the British Crown Colony of Syrtis Lapis, a young captain risks his future on a new barge design, hoping to make a name for himself and ensure profits. Not realizing his peril, he agrees to carry a handful of dangerous passengers to the cities of the north.

In the city of Syrtis Major, a group of human adventurers become entangled in thwarting a plot to rob an old man of his one chance for wealth. In so doing, they call down on their

own heads the wrath of a dark cult of assassins. As they struggle for their very lives, innocents are slaughtered before their eyes.

Deep in the bowels of the planet, an ancient evil plots, weaving these threads together into a twisted web that will draw the humans into its power. Do they have the fortitude to face that evil and break its unclean hold on them?

All this and more occurs in **Beastmen of Mars**, an adventure module for **Space: 1889**. The events in this book form a mini-campaign that should take the average group about five nights to play through if each chapter is played as a separate episode. Along the way, player characters will have chances to learn much about Mars, gain some wealth, and frustrate the plans of evil as it reaches into the heart of the British colony.

## WARNING

In order to preserve suspense,  
players should read no further.

*Lester W. Smith*

## Synopsis

EPISODE ONE, “An Inauspicious Beginning,” opens with the player characters in the Canal City of Syrtis Major, jewel of the British colony on Mars. While going about their business, the PCs become friends with an old Canal Martian who has made a living as a scholar, studying the writings of ancient civilizations. One day, the old scholar sends the player characters a note explaining that he has learned the location of an ancient tomb, and evil forces are trying to kill him for it. He asks the PCs to meet him at noon at a particular spot in Syrtis Major’s bazaar quarter.

When the PCs arrive at the bazaar, they are just about to talk to the old Martian when an assassin strikes him down from behind and runs off with the map he has made. Chasing the assassin through the streets, the PCs finally retrieve the map, which shows them the location of an ancient tomb within the Astusapes Highlands. The group members set about making arrangements for a journey to the tomb, but they experience several failed attempts on their lives in the process. Eventually they acquire everything that they believe they will need and prepare to leave the city. As they square their ac-

counts at the hotel, they find that a note has been left for them—a note that warns of certain death if they proceed with their plans.

Episode two, “A Trip by Canal,” deals with the canal trip from Syrtis Major to the borders of the Astusapes Highlands. The PCs can follow either of two main canal routes—one leads to Parhoon, a city just southwest of the Astusapes; the other leads through Haatt to Gorovaan, a city to the Astusapes’ southeast. Regardless of the route they choose, the party will finally have to take a boat along the canal that stretches between Parhoon and Gorovaan, with the intent to disembark about halfway between those two cities and begin their way overland. Before they reach their intended unloading point, however, the ship they are travelling on is blown up, and the PCs barely escape with their lives.

In episode three, “An Overland Trek,” the PCs crawl out upon the shore of the canal and find themselves stranded almost 100 miles from civilization, with nearly all their equipment gone. They begin an overland trek along the course of the canal, heading for the city they left just recently. Along the way, they are forced to hide from repeated

searches by a High Martian screw galley that has been sent to look for them. Then, a few days into their journey, they are discovered by a clan of Steppe Martians (one of two possible clans, both described in this book), who take them as hostages. There follows a period in which the PCs dwell and travel with the Steppe Martians, learning the culture of these people as they struggle to remain alive.

Eventually, the player characters leave the company of the Steppe Martians, possibly during an attack by High Martians, possibly in the company of a guide who will lead them into an ambush, or possibly relying solely on themselves. Whatever the course they choose, it seems inevitable that they will finally be discovered by the High Martian screw galley that has been dogging their heels.

In episode four, “Captives of the Beastmen,” that screw galley carries the PCs to Kraag Barrovaar, where they are dragged before the bestial High Martian, King Hattabranx. After gloating over them for a bit, Hattabranx turns them over to the Priests of the Worm Cult for sacrifice to their bloody god. Just as the first of the characters is to be slain, a chill-



ing voice seems to speak from the very air, commanding that the characters be dropped into “Hell’s Maw,” a chasm from which no one ever returns. The Worm Priests obey, beginning to cast the bound heroes into the chasm. The episode closes as the first of the PCs is thrown over the edge.

In the final episode, “Guests of the Worm Lord,” the PCs discover that the fall is not fatal and that they have entered an ancient underground complex unlike any they have ever seen before. A bit of exploration reveals that it is seemingly empty of any inhabitants, but there is one door that is mysteriously locked, preventing their entry into whatever lies behind it. Days pass as the characters explore, learning a few of the city’s secrets but finding most incomprehensible. A multitude of emeralds abound, and the PCs can fill their pockets if they like. Finally, the mysterious door opens, and the PCs meet their host, the Lord of the Worm, self-styled god of the Worm Cult. This personage is so humanlike as to be nearly indistinguishable from Terrans, but he is a complete albino.

He is also obviously mad. Over the course of many days in his presence, the PCs learn much about the man. They find that he claims to be a member of a race of immortals, having discovered by their arcane sciences how to put aside death. But, paradoxically, he claims that all his companions eventually killed themselves to escape the maddening boredom of their existence.

He shows the PCs much of the mechanisms that run his palace—those that provide light and communication with the Worm Priests are kept in perfect working order; all others have been left to fall into ruin. There is one small flyer the party might be able to squeeze into, but it looks dangerous.

The Worm Lord then reveals to the party members that it was he who lured them here, he who planted the reference to Haataneethra I’s tomb, he who sent an assassin to slay the old Martian scholar, and he who had the boat blown up. He also instigated the search by the High Martian screw galley, and, of course, it was his priests who cast the group into the chasm and sent them on their way to

the underground city. His sole purpose for doing all of this: He had heard that people like himself were on Mars once again, and he wanted to meet them. Now that he has, he plans to dispose of them. He gives them five minutes to hide, and then he begins stalking them with an energy rifle.

Escape involves the PCs taking the flyer out of the cavern, whereupon it can be nursed along above the mountains, finally depositing the group a mere 50 miles from any of three nearby cities. Forced to leave the flyer, the group marches into the city and safety. If they organize a party to go get the flyer, they discover that it is gone, undoubtedly reclaimed by some minion of the Worm Lord. Without that evidence, no one will believe their incredible story, although their gems will be welcomed, and any scientist PCs may have learned something from the group’s adventure.

If the group has retained the map to the tomb of Haataneethra I through all the adventures, the referee has an excellent beginning for a new adventure.