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FICTION



WILDFIRE
Igniting Imagination

BARSOOM I

the
void

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SERIOUSLY? FREE-TO-PLAY?

Imagination is powerful. To quote Albert Einstein, “Imagination is more important than knowledge. For knowledge is limited to all we now know and understand, while imagination embraces the entire world, and all there ever will be to know and understand.” Well said.

We believe in the power of imagination and how it creates wonder and inspiration. Roleplaying games are one of the few things that can do what they do. Some might say they are the last frontier for wild imagination and creativity. We certainly believe so. That's why we make roleplaying games – to help make that possible.

Making roleplaying games the way we have hasn't helped us spark imagination the way we'd hoped. We want to try something different.

First, we're adopting the Creative Commons license, so that you can contribute to the game in a meaningful way. That way, we can support you in your awesome ideas and help you get them out to your fellow players.

Then, we're going to give away electronic copies of the core book for free. We've all bought games that didn't end up working out for us. That's why we're giving this to you for free – so that you can figure out if you like the game before you decide to spend money on it.

If you like The Void and you play it, we're going to put out a bunch of cool material at very reasonable prices. We're going to do it buffet-style, so you can pick and choose what works best for you and your group. Buying these supplements supports us making more cool material, along with the rest of your fellow players.

After all, life's too short to waste time and money on games you don't like.

– The Staff of WildFire



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BLACK SKY

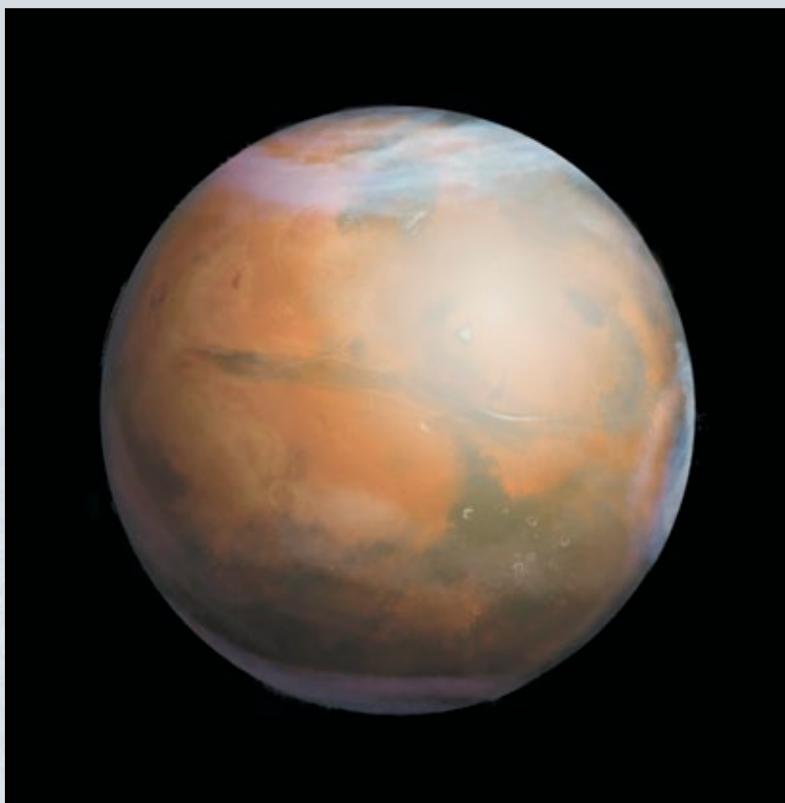


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BARSOOM I

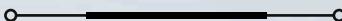
He was close. He could feel it. Stepan primed the explosives and took cover. The little mine was pretty far down already, thanks to his expertise. Mars had yet to give up its bounty, and he was determined to be the one who found it.

Pressing the detonator, the rocks at the end of the tunnel gave way. The dust clearing, Stepan stepped forward to see what treasures he'd unearthed. He found another batch of worthless Martian rock. Now he had to haul the rocks out and do this all over again. It took time, but he was sure not going to share his claim with anyone else. This was his ticket off of the Red Planet, to a world where he and his wife could live the good life.

Stepan pulled the first cart of debris out of the mine's entrance and into the cool Martian night. He took a breath of fresh air and took a pull from his canteen. Mars' air may not yet be like Earth's, but Stepan had been there long enough that it didn't matter. There was a part of him that would miss the place. He'd started to see the beauty in the red wastes of the Outback – the peace, the sand dunes, the mountains. Maybe he and Alise wouldn't leave. Maybe they'd just move to one of the Seven Sisters, where things were easier than Presidia.

Then he saw it – a dust storm blowing in. Ever since the Martian moons

collided, there were more and more of them. This one looked serious, probably 70 klicks. Stepan resigned himself to sleeping in the rover again with a sigh. He grabbed his goggles and breathemask and went back in to finish the job he'd started.



Even though he missed his wife, the rover had become a second home to Stepan. A hot plate in the front passenger's seat along with a small cooler, a memory foam mattress with reasonably clean sheets, a couple pillows, and some window tinting made it reasonably comfortable. Normally, he'd spend some time reading on his tablet – he especially like a murder thriller novelist named Jane Chin from Callisto – but tonight he was too tired from lifting rocks, even in the low gravity of Mars. Stepan curled up in his traveling nest and closed his eyes.

Though he wasn't sure how long it was after he'd drifted off, Stepan woke up to his rover swaying. He thought he'd dreamed it for a moment. Coming back from dreamland, he realized there was still the subtlest shake to the vehicle. Panicked, he looked around, but the dust storm meant that visibility was crap. Was it an earthquake? Had something thrown up by the storm hit his rover?

Rubbing the sleep out of his eyes, he grabbed his jacket, goggles, and

mask, and popped the back latch. Stepan did his best to try and keep fistfuls of red dust out of his bed, but the winds made that a fool's errand. Clicking the door shut behind him, tethering himself to the heavy vehicle, he began to survey the situation.

Shining his headlamp on the rover, he went over the side facing the wind. It didn't appear as if anything had hit it. The wind threatened to blow him off his feet, but the tether and years of practice made that less of a concern. The ground wasn't shaking, but that didn't mean there wouldn't be aftershocks. Stepan prayed that it wasn't an earthquake. If it was severe enough, it would sabotage all his hard work.

Stepan, staying low to the ground, carefully made his way back to the mouth of the mine. He flipped on the generator and white lights came to life. Even here, the dust from the storm reduced visibility to about three meters. He couldn't tell if an earthquake would have done any damage to the mine. The walls kept most of the wind out, so Stepan continued cautiously down.

He breathed a sign of relief to discover that whatever shook the rover must not have been an earthquake. The mine was intact and he wouldn't have any trouble starting up again tomorrow night. It was time to head back and get some much needed

rest – Stepan had a job in town tomorrow.

The wind had started dying down as he emerged from the mouth of the mine. It wouldn't be half as hard getting back to his mobile home as it was coming. Stepan made the crossing in minutes, looking forward to the warm comfort of his mattress. It was funny to him what he had come to regard as comfort out in the Martian Outback.

No sooner had he clicked the release on the back hatch when the rover shook again. Stepan braced himself for a quake, but none came. He stood back up, looking to each side of the rover, but nothing was there. Taking a moment, he looked up over the roof.

He didn't even have time to react. The thing was black and alive, barking at him as it leaped. Its clawed hand hit him, his head hit the dirt, and then, only darkness.

Anastasia tied her hair back in a ponytail as she looked out the window of the orbital elevator. The Red Planet sat far below, with its rough mountains and deep canyons. She could see the influence of humankind in the sparse clouds and green patches. Someday, not too far off, Mars would be a lot more like Earth. Even still, it was a cold desert world

and she wondered why anyone would want to live there.

Captain Shari's new assistant looked up from her flex-screen. She was just like Shari liked them – young, female, and fresh out of training. "The Warden-Commander is on his way," she said.

Felius snorted. "So nice of him to keep us waiting. Personally, I'm glad we don't have anything better to be doing."

Marcus shot him a look and Felius smiled, but held his tongue. Moments later, the unassuming Malaysian man that was Captain Antoine Shari strode in, contemplating something on his wrist comp. "Welcome to Mars," he said, without looking up.

Keying up something from his wrist comp to the giant flex screen on the wall, an aerial view of Mars flickered to life. It quickly zeroed in on the massive canyon known as Coprates Chasma. Anastasia recognized it immediately. "This is the Coprates Chasma canyon," said Shari. "It runs nearly 1000 km from end-to-end and goes as deep as four kilometers in some areas."

Finally looking up, Captain Shari directed the image as it zoomed down into the canyon and below the Martian surface. The walls of the canyon were nearly vertical as the image descended into the darkness of the natural fissure. Soon, man-made lights appeared in the distance, as silhouettes of buildings came into view.

The screen slowed to a stop just outside a small town within the canyon. "This is Presidia, a small insular community of independent miners and their families," said Shari. "It is also home to merchants, mechanics, and the other rabble you would expect to find in such an isolated location. There are also a couple of maintenance crews for the local atmospheric processor."

Statistics about the town, such as population and resources, began to scroll down the screen. Shari continued. "The residents aren't known to be welcoming. They don't like outsiders, especially those who represent any kind of authority. Frankly, it raised some eyebrows when a request for help came through."

Shari punched a few keys, minimizing the image of the town in favor of a video stream. The window showed a man with graying hair, a close-cropped beard, and skin that has been leathered by the harsh Martian winds. Stuck in time for a moment, the video began to play.

My name's Sheriff Joseph Fielding. I'm what passes for the law in Presidia here on Mars, and I think we may need some help. There's a bunch of things that've gone missing around here. It was just small stuff at first, but later people started reporting that their pets had gone and wandered off. Pets don't normally like leaving for long here, because it gets awfully cold at night. Not that day and night are much different round these parts, except for the lights."

The Sheriff paused for a moment and looked off-screen. Then he said to someone unseen, "Shut up! I'm on the call. We've been over this. I ain't got a clue what's going on and people are scared." He paused, while the someone lipped off. "Get out of here before I put a boot up your ass."

Felius leaned over to Anastasia and whispered, "I thought there was intelligent life on Mars." She stifled a chuckle.

The Sheriff looked back at the screen, with a slight blush. After a moment he continued, "Now, as I was saying - we need help here. Gear and pets gone missing is trouble, but now we've had some people disappear. I can't make sense of what is going on and could really use someone with a bit more experience in this kind of thing."

The image on the screen stopped again, then the window closed. The picture of the town moved to fill up the empty space once again.

Captain Shari turned off the flex-screen and sat down. "I don't know if this is anything we need to worry about, but Presidia is essentially deep under the surface of the planet. It could be that their mining has stirred up something that is our business. Go down and investigate. If it turns out to be a local problem, then help the sheriff deal with it. If it's something else, do what you need to do."

"Things in the system are getting strange," said Shari, leaning back. "I

don't know how much longer we can keep a lid on things. Pull anything you need out of the network. There's not much there. Presidia is isolated and the locals like it that way. Don't expect the warmest of welcomes. Any questions?"

Anastasia and Marcus both turned to look at Felius. The bookish man just smiled and said, "No, sir. I'm sure we'll have everything we need."

Standing, Shari signaled the end to the briefing. "Excellent. Good hunting, Wardens, and watch your backs."

Once the Warden-Commander was gone, Marcus stopped holding his tongue. "I hate Mars," he said. "Nothing but wind and dust."

Anastasia patted him on the shoulder on her way out the door. "And, if we're lucky, terrible monsters that want to eat us."

"Ever the optimist, Tasia," said Felius, as he beat them out the door.

The OTV dropped down to Presidia into the Martian atmosphere. The bumpy ride was a sign that the planet was well on its way to being terraformed, though it might still be decades before it was truly hospitable.

Marcus gathered his notes. "Alright, here's what we've got. Population 913, mostly miners and their families, along with the people you'd expect to find in this type of place, along with the maintenance crews.

Crime levels are low – mostly petty theft and brawls.” He paused and looked up, as the pilot kept the small ship on trajectory. “That is not the usual. Fringe towns like this attract people who want to stay off the grid, and have reason to.”

Marcus went back to his wrist comp. “Our sheriff used to work for 4G Enterprises for more than two decades. Presidia used to be a 4G outpost, but Fielding stayed when the corporation pulled up stakes. It turns out he was cited several times for undue force as a security officer, but was never formally charged. Interesting. It doesn’t look like there are any known criminals hiding out here, either. And that’s where the trail of useful information ends.”

“So, the same as always,” said Anastasia. “I’m glad I packed my flamethrower. Felius, you’ll notice I said my flamethrower.”

Felius smiled. “Wouldn’t dream of it, ma’am. However, it’s curious how your flamethrower continues to end up in my hands. I think it fancies me.”

And with a gentle thud, they landed through the Martian winds on the edge of the Coprates Chasma.

“Signal when you’re ready for pick-up,” said the pilot. “We have a timetable, but we’ll be here as quickly as we can.”

Anastasia had no sooner shut the hatch than the pilot began to dust off.

Making sure her goggles were properly snug, she looked around. Nothing but dust, hills, one deep canyon, remains of a deserted town, and a weathered building about 100 meters off. “No kidding they didn’t have extra resources to spare a shuttle. I thought Mars was supposed to be cosmopolitan.”

“It is, if you’re in the right place. Which we aren’t,” said Marcus, as he finished checking their munitions crate. “Looks like there’s only one place to go.”

The team strode forward through the light Martian gravity, their long Warden coats flapping in the breeze. Marcus and Anastasia carried the crate between them, its weight barely a concern.

As they approached, they could see the structure was barely more than a shack next to what appeared to be scaffolding – the canyon’s elevator. Anastasia and Marcus gently put down the crate in order to allow the Investigator to enter.

Inside was a single man behind something that passed as a counter. He was rough-looking, middle-aged, with a scraggly beard and leathered pale skin. His miner’s work clothes had the name “Vogler” stitched on a patch on his chest. Vogler looked up at Marcus, snorted, and pretended he wasn’t there, going back to what looked like Sudoku.

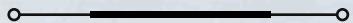
Marcus flashed his badge. “Sheriff Fielding called us.”

Looking up at the credentials, Vogler said, "Authorities, huh?" Then he spit on the ground and continued to ignore Marcus.

Without missing a beat, Marcus smiled. Reaching into his jacket, he produced a freshly packaged cheese stick – cheddar. That caught Vogler's attention. "I don't suppose you could help us down now, could you, mate?"

Grunting, Vogler took the cheese stick, turned, and hit the call button for the elevator. "Takes time," he said.

Marcus nodded and headed out the door, where Anastasia and Felius were waiting for him in the increasing winds.



Ten minutes later, the elevator finally arrived. It was large and surprisingly well-maintained. Anastasia approached a glowing display and hit the button. The elevator began to drop, faster than any of them were used to. They held onto the railing around them, feet on the crate.

The elevator, nearly ten minutes later, began to slow. Coming to a stop, the doors opened onto the bottom of the canyon floor. The darkness was pervasive, except for the harsh flood lights that illuminated the tiny town of Presidia. They were a clear indication of which way to go.

Stepping out onto the main thoroughfare, Anastasia could see that the town was alive and active, despite the darkness. People went about

their usual business, and there were children playing here and there. It looked like other mining towns she'd seen. However, there was a noticeable low frequency drone drifting through the air – enough so, that she would need to talk over it.

Felius checked his wrist comp. "And that's the town's sole ore processor," he said loudly. "Sounds old."

"Whatever," said Anastasia. "Let's find the sheriff."

Coming towards them was a group of workers, each showing the insignia of the Martian Terraforming Project. Anastasia approached them. "Excuse me. Can you tell me where to find Joseph Fielding?"

A clean-cut looking young man gave her elevator eyes and smiled. "You here to figure out why the yokels in this town keep going missing, sweetheart," he asked, with a distinct Martian twang.

Anastasia's looks won again. "Maybe. What have you heard."

An older man, clearly the alpha of the group, stepped in front of her new friend. "Don't let him put you off, miss. We're not all dogs down here," he said, as he elbowed the young man in the ribs. "As to things, I haven't heard much more than rumors."

Anastasia smiled, trying to play on the attraction that was already evident. "I like rumors."

"I hear most people think there's some sort of outsider camping somewhere around here that's preying on the good folks of the town," the young man blurted out.

The older man rolled his eyes. "And the people here aren't very friendly with strangers, which may explain that. And they think the sheriff is doing something to justify his job." He paused. "It's more likely that they've just run off because living here sucks. By the way, just follow the road down. The sheriff's in the only building with cameras on the outside. Come on, boys. We've got a shift to relieve."

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Anastasia smiled as most of the crew said their goodbyes on their way to the elevator.

"Pretty girl in a mining town," said Marcus. "Could come in useful."

Anastasia glared for a moment before leading the charge towards the sheriff's office.

[TO BE CONTINUED]

THE STYGIAN CYCLE

The Stygian Cycle is an epic campaign taking Warden Characters to every corner of our solar system, played out over a series of turn-key published adventures. Released monthly, they'll provide all you'll need to keep your group excited and engaged for a quite a while.

These adventures will also be connected to Organized Play. That means that you can take any Organized Play authorized Character to play in any group using the Organized Play framework. You can play with your group or multiple groups, as well as at conventions or events. Naturally, you can play the adventures with your regular gaming group – but Organized Play gives players the flexibility to take their Characters to other groups should their regular group move on to other games.

Here's a quick look at the first four adventures of *The Stygian Cycle*.

Awakening I: Barsoom

Trouble brews in the small mining colony of Presidia, found deep within the Martian Canals of the Outback. Things have begun to go missing – now people as well. The Wardens are assigned to investigate, as this seems like more than a simple mystery.

Awakening II: Venusian Sunset

Venus is a corporate world with a caustic atmosphere. Now a rash of murders and the increase of the drug trade have gone beyond where authorities can handle them. While not normally the domain of the Wardens, the Unified World Council thinks there may be something more underneath the surface.

Awakening III: The House Always Wins

Troy, a pleasure city often thought of as the Las Vegas of the Outer Planets. Three days ago a collection of ten bodies was found arranged in a neat circle in the center of the main thoroughfare. They all show signs of radiation burns from the inside out. The Wardens must find the source of this atrocity, while keeping the ever-important flow of tourism going.

Awakening IV: Turbulence

The weeks long journey from Saturn to Jupiter is not without its share of perils, including stellar bodies, debris, pirates, and the cold vacuum of space. However, none of these are what plague the Wardens, stuck on a civilian transport. Sometimes the dark things in the solar system come knocking without warning.

UPCOMING SUPPLEMENTS

There are many exciting supplemental books coming up for *The Void*!

Horrors of the Void I: Monsters

The *Horrors of the Void* series introduces you to more of the fascinating and terrifying creatures that are awakening in the solar system.

Ecological Footprint I: Jupiter

The *Ecological Footprint* series provides in-depth looks into the different planets of our solar system, with more setting, adventure seeds, and character options. This first installment explores Jupiter – most especially the Galilean Moons of Callisto, Europa, Ganymede, and Io.

Tools of the Trade I: Technology & Gear

The *Tools of the Trade* series explores new kinds of technology and provides new gear, weapons, vehicles, and more to add to your game.

Ecological Footprint II: Saturn

This second installment of the *Ecological Footprint* series explores the Republic of Saturn and its key colonies – Dione, Enceladus, Hyperion, Rhea, Tethys, and Titan.

Vessels of the Void: Spaceships

This volume greatly expands the roster of spaceships for *The Void*, including expanded stats, customization, and rules for spaceship combat.

Ecological Footprint III: Kuiper Belt

This third installment of the *Ecological Footprint* series explores the vast frontier of the Kuiper Belt, far out at the edge of what we know.

Characters Unbound I: Talents

The *Characters Unbound* series introduces new options for Characters of all kinds, with this volume focusing on a much expanded list of awesome Talents.



THE STARS WERE NEVER MEANT FOR US



2159 AD. It is a good time to be alive. The nations of Earth still exist, but they have become more civilized, and humanity has expanded into the rest of our solar system. But, alas, it is not to be our time. Something approaches, a thing on an orbit from far away. Seemingly a mysterious shard of dark matter, this object is known in obscure prophecy as the Chthonian Star. It is awakening things long thought lost or dead, things that have slumbered awaiting its return. The Unified World Council sends out special teams of sanctioned Wardens, whose job it is to ascertain the new threats to human life, to learn everything they can about them, and fight them wherever they are found.

The Void is an original Lovecraftian hard sci-fi horror setting. And this is fiction that helps tell its story.

Join UWC Wardens Anastasia Kiss, Marcus St. Croix, and Felius Fickerwith as they seek to unravel a mystery on Mars. First, things and pets went missing. Now people. What will these veteran Wardens find? What might be under the surface, awakened by the Chthonian Star?



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