

Age of the Sail

by Albatross, January 2016

"T'was Mars that opened the heavens to us." — Captain Algernon Dunbar



Thousands upon thousands of years ago humans rode wild explosions. On the tips of missiles they flung themselves with reckless abandon into the abyss of space. Using the precise calculations of their freshly understood maths they set about intrepid collisions. They created robotic explorers to first dare the emptiness, but it wasn't long until those brave enough followed in their fiery wake. First they set their feet upon Luna, Earth's own moon. But it wasn't long after that they set their itinerant gaze upon Mars. It was there that their history began.

Before the advances in terraforming, life for the early martian settlers was disastrous. It was a life of confinement. There was no breathable air and the planet itself was barren. Despite the difficulties that the Martians had to endure, they survived. During the first attempts at terraforming a great discovery was made that would forever change humankind. Gargantuan deposits of a naturally formed Beryllium lay just beneath the red surface. It wasn't long before the most significant use of this ore was found — the solar sail.

The first sailing vessels were crude but incredibly effective, and the great abundance of the new Beryllium allowed for many vessels to be made at low cost. Soon the space around Earth and Mars was teeming with sailors developing new techniques and learning to ride the solar winds. Settlements sprung up as humans swarmed off of Earth, drawn to the new black seas of the solar system.

New discoveries in terraforming and atmospheric mimicry created vast opportunities for ambitious adventurers and settlers. The largest settlements took hold on the moons. Earth's moon, Luna, became an enormous port community. Also the moons around Mars, Phobos and Deimos. On Deimos (the smaller, slower and more distant of Mars' satellites) sprung two thriving cities, Swift and Voltaire — so named for the giant craters in which they were housed. Craters provided the perfect locations for localized atmospheric mimicry. Miniature atmospheres could be suspended over the concave formations, giving limited but livable conditions. On Phobos was the thriving port of Stickney. Due to the speed of Phobos' orbit of Mars, Stickney was an ideal port from which ships could slingshot back toward Earth. 'Slingshotting' was a very ancient technique whereby a vessel would accelerate using the gravity of a large celestial object. On return trips to Earth, the gained momentum was comparable to 'tacking' Solar Winds.

Of course, during all of this expansion was the great terraforming of Mars herself. After the reformation of the planetary magnetic field the native Martians along with their Earthly counterparts bombarded the planet for decades. Raising the global temperature along with the never-ending robotic shipments of ammonia from the outer solar system eventually led to the historic Hundred-Year Rain. More about the great terraforming of Mars can be read, of course, in Andelehos' famous work *Ex Nihilo*.

Even before the atmosphere of Mars became completely breathable, men and women flocked to her in droves. The New World became an escape and the colonies multiplied quickly. The first successful settlements of Victoria and Miyamoto led the way but suffered many hardships and setbacks as the martians learned to adapt to the ever changing and dramatic climate. Later, colonies developed along the new seas and oceans. Pearl Bay (formerly Margaritifer Sinus) and New Innsbruck rose up around the

Aurorae and Chaos Seas. Once crater developing became more proficient, larger and more populated colonies formed at Schiaparelli, Huygens, Dawestown and Schroeter.

Several hundred years after the first settlements the Martian Colonies were self sufficient. The Independent colonies of Mars each had their own governments, but all answered to the authority of the Earth. Earth held a primarily watchful presence on the planet but allowed them a certain 'isolation'. Large trade routes developed between the two planets and were heavily guarded. The wealth under the surface of Mars led to ever increasing shipments and commercial traffic which became the target of many pirates. Every two years, when Earth and Mars were closest in their orbits, the 55 to 60 million kilometer sea of space between the planets teemed with activity. A buzzing swath of movement that also attracted parasitic predators. Ships were plundered and added to the ever increasing number of pirate fleets. Large interplanetary gunships were sent out to protect the trade routes. The dark of space lit up with the glitter of battle and debris. The Age of the Sail had begun.

In this era we shall set our scene.

☞ To Be Continued ☞