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# Lost on Mars

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Editor's Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

3

Paul Magrs has some **Doctor Who** novelisations on his cv, and while, as far as I can see, he hasn't been responsible for any of the recent TV scripts, readers of this account of life on Mars will find themselves in a very similar world of knowing literary reference and manipulation of audience expectations, in which nothing is as it seems. The tale begins with a Martian dust storm which engulfs a homestead of second or third generation pioneer earth settlers. The hopes for life on Mars of the first settlers have long ago disappeared and these homesteaders are grubbing a living on the Red Planet in exactly the way that homesteaders did in the Old West; except that their beasts of burden are large lizards and their robot servant is a customised sun-bed. At first I thought we might be in a Martian **Grapes of Wrath** but I should have realised that, since the narrator's name is Lora, it's **Little House on the Prairie** in space. But here it's not Native Americans the family have to worry about, along with bad weather and crop failure. Lora and her family are driven from their home by the encroachment of ghost insect-like indigenous Martians who are 'disappearing' humans and according to a young Martian who befriends Lora, eating them; because, well, times are hard for the Martians too and there's a lot of meat on even a skinny human. After Grandma's disappearance and Pa's death, Lora sets off with the remains of her family and a motley group of townsfolk to find other humans on the planet, following the signals of broadcast weather forecasts whose mysterious incantations are reminiscent of our own shipping forecasts. Adventures and encounters with more strange creatures later, and separated from the rest of her party, Lora, her brother and the sun-bed find themselves in what appears to be a Victorian city. Yet, as I may have said, nothing is what it seems, and they are mysteriously reunited with Grandma and Pa. Disappointingly, for this reader at least, many of the questions that are raised during the novels 300+ pages, will have to remain unanswered until further on in the projected trilogy. In fact, this didn't seem to me to be enough of a satisfying read in itself. It was more intriguing than exciting and rather too much of what intrigued me was left unresolved.

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