

The Gods of Mars

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

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Prologue.

There are a few venturesome authors gifted with vivid imaginations who, like Alexander, sigh for new worlds to conquer, and they do it. H. G. Wells is one of these, and Edgar Rice Burroughs is another.

In his most recent and most fascinating work, "The Gods of Mars," the author lifts his readers to that interesting planet with an earth born hero who is mysteriously translated there.

As Mr. Burroughs reveals the condition of that planet, Mars is well named, for there is continuous warfare going on there of a most extraordinary kind. Wonderful air battles and wonderful war machines are described, and wonderful adventures are related.

Every page is full of color and incident, and every page has its thrill. With a touch of genius akin to that of Jules Verne, an air of reality is given to the marvelous, for here indeed is a marvelous story, and yet it might all have happened in Mars.

Foreword.

TWELVE years had passed since I had laid the body of Captain John Carter of Virginia away from the sight of men in that strange mausoleum in the old cemetery at Richmond.

Often had I pondered on the odd instructions he had left me governing the construction of his mighty tomb, and especially those parts wherein he directed that he be laid in an open casket and that the ponderous mechanism which controlled the bolts of the vault's huge door be accessible only from the inside.

Twelve years had passed since I had read the remarkable manuscript of this remarkable man, this man who remembered no childhood and who could not even offer a vague guess as to his age, who was always young and yet who had—so he claimed—dandled my grandfather's great-grandfather upon his knee; this man who had spent ten years upon the planet Mars, who had fought for the green men of Barsoom and fought against them, who had fought for and against the red men and who had won the ever beautiful Dejah Thoris, princess of Hellium, for his wife and for nearly ten years had been a prince of the house of Tardos Mors, Jeddak of Hellium.

Twelve years had passed since his body had been found upon the bluff before his cottage overlooking the Hudson. Ofttimes during the long years I had wondered if John Carter were really dead or if he again roamed the dead sea bottoms of that dying planet. Had he returned to Barsoom to find that he had opened the frowning portals of the mighty atmosphere plant in time to save the countless millions who were dying of asphyxiation on that far gone day that had seen him hurried ruthlessly through 48,000,000 miles of space back to earth once more?

I had wondered if he had found his black haired princess and the slender son he had dreamed was with her in the royal gardens of Tardos Mors awaiting his return.

Or had he found that he had been too late and thus gone back to living death upon a dead world, or was he really dead after all, never to return either to his Mother Earth or his beloved Mars?

Thus I lost in useless speculation one sultry August evening when old Ben, my body servant, handed me a telegram. Tearing it open, I read:

Meet me tomorrow hotel—Richmond. JOHN CARTER.

Early the next morning I took the first train for Richmond and within two hours was being ushered into the room occupied by John Carter.

As I entered he rose to greet me, his old time smile of welcome lighting his handsome face. Apparently he had not aged a minute, but was still the straight, clean limbed fighting man of thirty.

His keen gray eyes were undimmed, and the only lines upon his face were the lines of character and determination that always had been there since first I remembered him, nearly thirty-five years before.

"Well, nephew," he greeted me, "do you feel as though you were seeing a

ghost or suffering from the effects of too many of Uncle Ben's juleps?"

"Juleps, I reckon," I replied, "for I certainly feel mighty good. But maybe it's just the sight of you again that affects me. You have been back to Mars? Tell me. And Dejah Thoris? You found her well and awaiting you?"

"Yes, I have been to Barsoom again and—but it's a long story, too long to tell in the limited time I have before I must return. I have learned the secret, nephew, and I may traverse the trackless void at my will, coming and going between the countless planets as I wish. But my heart is always in Barsoom, and I doubt that I shall ever again leave the dying world that holds my dearest memories.

"I have come now because my affection for you prompted me to see you once more before you pass over forever into that other life that I shall never know and which, though I have died thrice and shall die again tonight, as you know death, I am as unable to fathom as are you.

"Even the wise and mysterious therns of Barsoom, that ancient cult which for countless ages has been credited with holding the secret of life and death in their impregnable fastnesses upon the hither slopes of the mountains of Otz, are as ignorant as we.

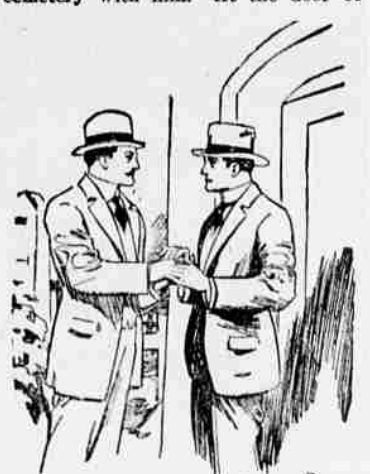
"I have proved it, though I nearly lost my life in the doing of it. But you shall read it all in the notes I have been making during the last three months that I have been back upon earth."

He patted a swelling portfolio that lay on the table at his elbow.

"I know that you are interested and that you believe, and I know that the world, too, is interested, though they will not believe for many years—yes for many ages—since they cannot understand. Earth men have not yet progressed to a point where they can comprehend the things that I have written in these notes.

"Give them what you wish of it, what you think will not harm them, but do not feel aggrieved if they laugh at you."

"That night I walked down to the cemetery with him. At the door of



"Goodby, nephew," he said. "I may never see you again."

his vault he turned and pressed my hand.

"Goodby, nephew," he said. "I may never see you again."

He entered the vault. The great door swung slowly to. The ponderous bolts grated into place. The lock clicked.

I have never seen Captain John Carter of Virginia since.

But here is the story of his return to Mars on that other occasion as I have gleaned it from the great mass of notes which he left for me upon the table of his room in the hotel at Richmond.

There is much which I have left out; much which I have not dared to tell, but you will find the story of his search for Dejah Thoris, princess of Hellium, one of the most remarkable stories of adventure in strange lands and among strange people ever written. This story, as told by Captain John Carter of Virginia, is as follows:

CHAPTER I.

The Plant Men.

AS I stood upon the bluff before my cottage on that clear, cold night in the early part of March, 1880, the noble Hudson dawning like the silent specter of a dead river below me, I felt again the strange, compelling influence of the mighty god of war, my beloved Mars, which for ten lonesome years I had implored with outstretched arms to carry me back to my lost love.

Not since that other March night in 1800, when I had stood without that Arizona cave in which my still and lifeless body lay wrapped in the stim-

tude of earthly death, had I felt the irresistible attraction of the god of my profession.

With arms outstretched toward the red eye of the great star, I stood praying for a return of that strange power which twice had drawn me through the immensity of space, praying as I had prayed on a thousand nights before during the years that I had waited and hoped.

Suddenly a quain of nausea swept over me, my senses swam, my knees gave beneath me, and I pitched headlong to the ground upon the very verge of the dizzy bluff.

Instantly my brain cleared, and there swept back across the threshold of my memory the vivid picture of the horrors of that ghostly Arizona cave; again, as on that far gone night, my muscles refused to respond to my will, and again as though even here upon the banks of the placid Hudson I could hear the awful moans and rustling of the fearsome thing which had lurked and threatened me from the dark recesses of the cave.

I made the same mighty and superhuman effort to break the bonds of the strange anaesthesia which held me, and again came the sharp click as of the sudden parting of a taut wire, and I stood naked and free beside the staring, lifeless thing that had so recently pulsed with the warm lifeblood of John Carter.

With scarcely a parting glance I turned my eyes again toward Mars, lifted my hands toward his lurid rays and waited.

Nor did I have long to wait, for scarce had I turned ere I shot with the rapidity of thought into the awful void before me.

There was the same instant of unthinkable cold and utter darkness that I had experienced twenty years before, and then I opened my eyes in another world, beneath the burning rays of a hot sun, which beat through a tiny opening in the dome of the mighty forest in which I lay.

The scene that met my eyes was so unmarian that my heart sprang to my throat as the sudden fear swept through me that I had been aimlessly tossed upon some strange planet by a cruel fate.

I lay upon a close cropped sward of red grass-like vegetation, and about me stretched a grove of strange and beautiful trees, covered with huge and gorgeous blossoms and filled with brilliant, voiceless birds. I call them birds since they were winged, but mortal eye never rested on such unearthly shapes.

The vegetation was similar to that which covers the lawns of the red Martians of the great waterways, but the trees and birds were unlike anything that I had ever seen upon Mars, and then through the farther trees I could see that most unmarian of all sights—an open sea, its blue waters shimmering beneath the brazen sun.

As I rose to investigate further I experienced the same ridiculous catastrophe that had met my first attempt to walk under Martian conditions.

The lesser attraction of this smaller planet and the reduced air pressure of its greatly rarefied atmosphere afforded so little resistance to my earthly muscles that the ordinary exertion of the mere act of rising sent me several feet into the air and precipitated me upon my face in the soft and brilliant grass of this strange world.

This experience, however, gave me some slightly increased assurance that, after all, I might indeed be in some, to me, unknown corner of Mars, and this was very possible, since during my ten years' residence upon the planet I had explored but a comparatively tiny area of its vast expanse.

I rose again, laughing at my forgetfulness, and soon had mastered once more the art of attuning my earthly sinews to these changed conditions.

As I walked slowly down the imperceptible slope toward the sea I could not help but note the parklike appearance of the sward and trees.

The grass was as close cropped and carpet-like as some old English lawn, and the trees themselves showed evidence of careful pruning to a uniform height of about fifteen feet, so that as one turned his glance in any direction the forest had the appearance of a little distance of a vast, high celled chamber.

All these evidences of careful and systematic cultivation convinced me that I had been fortunate enough to make my entry into Mars on this second occasion through the domain of a civilized people and that when I should find them I would be accorded the courtesy and protection that my rank as a prince of the house of Tardos Mors entitled me to.

The trees of the forest attracted my deep admiration as I proceeded toward the sea. Their great trunks, some of them fully a hundred feet in diameter, attested their prodigious height, which I could only guess at, since at no point could I penetrate their dense foliage above me to more than sixty or eighty feet.

As I neared the confines of the forest I beheld before me and between the grove and the open sea a broad expanse of meadow land, and as I was about to emerge from the shadows of the trees a sight met my eyes that banished all romantic and poetic reflection.

It was the sight of a score of figures moving slowly about the meadow near the bank of a mighty river.

Odd, grotesque shapes they were, unlike anything that I had ever seen upon Mars, and yet at a distance most manlike in appearance. The larger specimens appeared to be about ten or twelve feet in height when they stood erect and to be proportioned as to torso and lower extremities precisely as is earthly man.

Their arms, however, were very short and from where I stood seemed as though fashioned much after the manner of an elephant's trunk in that

they moved in sinuous and snakelike undulations, as though entirely without bony structure, or if there were bones they must be vertebral in nature.

As I watched them from behind the trunk of a huge tree one of the creatures moved slowly in my direction, engaged in the occupation that seemed to be the principal business of each of them and which consisted in running their oddly shaped hands over the surface of the sward, for what purpose I could not determine.

As he approached quite close to me I obtained an excellent view of him, and, though I was later to become better acquainted with his kind, I may say that that single cursory examination of this awful travesty of nature would have proved quite sufficient to my desires had I been a free agent.

Its hairless body was of a strange and ghoulish blue except for a broad band of white which encircled its protruding, single eye, an eye that was all dead white—pupil, iris and ball.

Its nose was a ragged, inflamed, circular hole in the center of its blank face, a hole that resembled more closely nothing that I could think of other than a fresh bullet wound which has not yet commenced to bleed.

Below this repulsive orifice the face was quite blank to the chin, for the thing had no mouth that I could discover.

The head, with the exception of the face, was covered by a tangled mass



Its Hairless Body Was of a Strange and Ghoulish Blue.

of jet black hair some eight or ten inches in length. Each hair was about the bigness of a large angleworm, and as the thing moved the muscles of its scalp this awful head covering seemed to writhe and wriggle and crawl about the fearsome face as though indeed each separate hair was endowed with independent life.

The body and the legs were as symmetrically human as nature could have fashioned them, and the feet, too, were human in shape, but of monstrous proportions. From heel to toe they were fully three feet long and very flat and very broad.

As it came quite close to me I discovered that its strange movements, running its odd hands over the surface of the turf, were the result of its peculiar method of feeding, which consists in cropping off the tender vegetation with its razor-like talons and sucking it up from its two mouths, which lie one in the palm of each hand, through its armlike throats.

In addition to the features which I have already described, the beast was equipped with a massive tail about six feet in length, quite round where it joined the body, but tapering to a flat, thin blade toward the end, which trailed at right angles to the ground.

CHAPTER II.

A Strange Meeting.

AS I had been scrutinizing this weird monstrosity the balance of the herd had fed quite close to me.

Fearsome looking as they were, I did not know whether to fear them or not, for they did not seem to be particularly well equipped for fighting.

I was, in fact, on the point of stepping from my hiding place and revealing myself to them to note the effect upon them of the sight of a man when my rash resolve was, fortunately for me, nipped in the bud by a strange shrieking wall which seemed to come from the direction of the bluffs at my right.

Naked and unarmed as I was, my end would have been both speedy and horrible at the hands of these cruel creatures, but at the moment of the shriek each member of the herd turned in the direction of the sound, and at the same instant every particular snakelike hair upon their heads rose stiffly perpendicular as if each had been a sentient organism looking or listening for the source or meaning of the wall.

And indeed the latter proved to be the truth, for this strange growth upon the craniums of the plant men of Barsoom represents the thousand ears of these hideous creatures, the last remnant of the strange race which sprung from the original tree of life.

Instantly every eye turned toward one member of the herd, a large fellow who evidently was the leader. A strange purring sound issued from the mouth in the palm of one of his hands, and at the same time he started rapidly toward the bluff, followed by the entire herd.

Their speed and method of locomotion were both remarkable, springing, as they did, in great leaps of twenty or thirty feet, much after the manner of a kangaroo.

They were rapidly disappearing when it occurred to me to follow them, and so, hurrying caution to the winds, I sprang across the meadow in their wake with leaps and bounds even more prodigious than their own, for the muscles of an athletic earth man produce remarkable results when pitted against the lesser gravity and air pressure of Mars.

Their way led directly toward the apparent source of the river at the base of the cliffs, and as I neared this point I found the meadow dotted with

huge bowlders dislodged from the towering crags above.

For this reason I came quite close to the cause of the disturbance before the scene broke upon my horrified gaze.

As I topped a great bowlder I saw the herd of plant men surrounding a little group of perhaps five or six green men and women of Barsoom.

That I was indeed upon Mars I now had no doubt, for here were members of the wild hordes that people the dead sea bottoms and deserted cities of that dying planet.

Here were the great males towering in all the majesty of their imposing height; here were the gleaming white tusks protruding from their massive lower jaws to a point near the center of their foreheads; the laterally placed, protruding eyes, with which they could look forward or backward or to either side without turning their heads; here the strange antennae-like ears rising from the tops of their foreheads and the additional pair of arms extending from midway between the shoulders and the hips.

Even without the glossy green hide and the metal ornaments which denoted the tribes to which they belonged I would have known them on the instant for what they were, for where else in all the universe is their like duplicated?

There were two men and four females in the party, and their ornaments denoted them as members of different hordes.

The facts puzzled me, since the various hordes of green men of Barsoom are eternally at war with one another, and never had I seen green Martians of different hordes associated in other than mortal combat, save on that historic instance when the great Tars Tarkas of Thark gathered 150,000 green warriors from several hordes to march upon the doomed city of Zodanga and rescue Dejah Thoris, princess of Hellium, from the clutches of Than Kosis.

But now they stood back to back, facing in wide eyed amazement the very evidently hostile demonstrations of a common enemy.

Both men and women were armed with long swords and daggers, but no firearms were in evidence, else it had been short shift for the grewsome plant men of Barsoom.

Presently the leader of the plant men charged the little party, and his method of attack was as remarkable as it was effective and by its very strangeness was the more potent, since in the science of the green warriors there was no defense for this singular manner of attack.

The plant man charged to within a dozen feet of the party and then, with a bound, rose as though to pass directly above their heads. His powerful tail was raised high to one side, and as he passed close above them he brought it down in one terrific sweep that crushed a green warrior's skull as though it had been an eggshell.

The balance of the frightful herd was now circling rapidly and with bewildering speed about the little knot of victims. Their prodigious bounds and the shrill screeching pur of their uncanny mouths were well calculated to confuse and terrorize their prey, so that as two of them leaped simultaneously from either side the mighty sweep of those awful tails met with no resistance, and two more green Martians went down to an ignoble death.

There were now but one warrior and two females left, and it seemed that it could be but a matter of seconds ere these also lay dead upon the sward.

But, as two or more of the plant men charged, the warrior, who was now prepared by the experiences of the past few minutes, swung his mighty long sword aloft and met the hurtling bulk with a clean cut that clove one of the plant men from chin to groin.

The other, however, dealt a single blow with his cruel tail that laid both of the females crushed corpses upon the ground.

As the green warrior saw the last of his companions go down and at the same time perceived that the entire herd was charging him in a body he rushed boldly to meet them, swinging his long sword in the terrific manner that I had so often seen the men of his kind wield it in their ferocious and almost continual warfare among their own race.

Cutting and hewing to right and left, he laid an open path straight through the advancing plant men and then commenced a mad race for the forest, in the shelter of which he evidently hoped he might find a haven of refuge.

He had turned for that portion of the forest which abutted on the cliffs, and thus the flight was taking the entire party farther and farther from the bowlder where I lay concealed.

As I had watched the flight which the great warrior had made against such odds my heart had swelled for him, and acting as I am wont to do, more upon impulse than after mature deliberation, I sprang from my sheltering rock and bounded quickly toward the bodies of the dead green Martians, a well defined plan of action already formed.

Half a dozen great leaps brought me to the spot, and another instant saw me again in my stride in rapid pursuit of the hideous monsters that were rapidly gaining on the fleeing warrior.

But this time I grasped a mighty long sword in my hand, and in my heart was the old blood lust of the fighting man.

A red mist swam before my eyes, and I felt my lips respond to my heart in the old smile that has marked me in the midst of the joy of battle.

Though swift, I was none too soon, for the green warrior had been overtaken before he had made half the distance to the forest, and now he stood with his back to the bowlder, while the

herd, temporarily balked, hissed and screeched about him.

With their single eyes in the center of their heads and every eye turned upon their prey, they did not note my soundless approach, so that I was upon them with my great long sword, and four of them lay dead before they knew that I was among them.

For an instant they recoiled before my terrific onslaught, and in that instant the green warrior rose to the occasion and, springing to my side, lay to the right and left of him as I had never seen but one other warrior do. With circling strokes that formed a figure 8 about him he did not stop until none stood living to oppose him, his keen blade passing through flesh and bone as though each had been, alike, thin air.

As we bent to the slaughter far above us rose that shrill, weird cry which I had heard once before and which had called the herd to the attack upon their victims. Again and again it rose, but we were too much engaged with the fierce, powerful creatures about us to attempt to search out even with our eyes the author of the horrid notes.

Great tails lashed in frenzied anger about us, razor-like talons cut our limbs and bodies, and a green and sticky slurr, such as oozes from a crushed caterpillar, smeared us from head to foot, for every cut and thrust of our long swords brought spurts of this stuff upon us from the severed arteries of the plant men, through which it courses in its sluggish viscosity in lieu of blood.

Once I felt the great weight of one of the monsters upon my back, and as keen talons sank into my flesh I experienced the frightful sensation of moist lips sucking the blood from the wounds to which the claws still clung.

I was very much engaged with a ferocious fellow who was endeavoring to reach my throat from in front while two more, one on either side, were lashing viciously at me with their tails.

The green warrior was much put to it to hold his own, and I felt that the unequal struggle could last but a moment longer when the huge fellow discovered my plight, and, tearing himself from those that surrounded him, he raked the assailant from my back with a sweep of his blade, and, thus relieved, I had little difficulty with the others.

Once together we stood almost back to back against the great bowlder, and thus the creatures were prevented from soaring above us to deliver their deadly blows. As we were easily their match while they remained upon the ground we were making great headway in dispatching what remained of them when our attention was again attracted by the shrill wail of the caller above our heads.

This time I glanced up, and far above us upon a little natural balcony on the face of the cliff stood a strange figure of a man shrieking out his shrill signal, while he waved a hand in the direction of the river's mouth, as though beckoning to some one there. With the other he pointed and gesticulated toward us.

A glance in the direction toward which he was looking was sufficient to



The Green Warrior Was Much Put to It to Hold His Own.

apprise me of his aims and at the same time to fill me with the dread of dire apprehension.

Streaming in from all directions across the meadow, from out of the forest and from the far distance of the flat land across the river I could see converging upon us a hundred different lines of wildly leaping creatures such as we were now engaged with, and with them some strange new monsters which ran with great swiftness, now erect and now upon all fours.

"It will be a great death," I said to my companion. "Look."

As he shot a quick glance in the direction I indicated he smiled.

"We may at least die fighting and as great warriors should, John Carter," he replied.

We had just finished the last of our immediate antagonists as he spoke, and I turned in surprised wonderment at the sound of my name.

And there before my astonished eyes I beheld the greatest of the green men of Barsoom—their shrewdest statesman, their mightiest general—my great and good friend, Tars Tarkas, Jeddak of Thark.

(Continued next week.)