

The Gods of Mars

By EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

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SYNOPSIS

John Carter, who has been translated twice to Mars, returns to earth and leaves the story of his adventures with his nephew, then goes again to Mars.

Carter aids a Martian warrior fighting a horde of plant men. He discovers in the warrior an old friend, Tars Tarkas.

Carter and Tarkas escape their enemies by entering a hollow tree and making their way to a cliff cave above.

They explore the cave, and through a secret door enter a mysterious chamber. Unseen voices threaten them.

They engage in desperate fighting with therns, people who inhabit that section, and meet an imprisoned maid, Thuvia.

She tells of her captivity, shoots a thern and Carter disguises himself in the thern's garments.

Carter plans an escape from the mysterious place. Thuvia leads the way to still other chambers.

The therns are attacked by a aerial fleet of Black Pirates, and during the battle Carter, Tarkas, Thuvia and a young male prisoner, Carthoris, escape in an airship.

of a sudden a great form shot from a clump of low shrubbery into the midst of a struggling mass of humanity. A scream of bestial rage broke from the banth as he felt warm flesh beneath his powerful talons.

As though his cry was but a signal to the others, the entire great pack hurled themselves among the fighters.

Panic reigned in an instant. Thern and black man turned alike against the common enemy, for the banths showed no partiality toward either.

The awful beasts bore down a hundred men by the mere weight of their great bodies as they hurled themselves into the thick of the fight. Leaping and clawing, they mowed down the warriors with their powerful paws, turning for an instant to rend their victims with frightful fangs.

The scene was fascinating in its terribleness, but suddenly it came to me that we were wasting valuable time watching this conflict which in itself might prove a means to our escape.

The therns were so engaged with their terrible assailants that now, if ever, escape should be comparatively easy.

I turned to search for an opening through the contending hordes. If we could but reach the ramparts we might find that the pirates somewhere had thinned the guarding forces and left a way open to us to the world without.

As my eyes wandered about the garden the sight of the hundreds of air-craft lying unguarded round us suggested the simplest avenue to freedom. Why had it not occurred to me before?

I was thoroughly familiar with the mechanism of every known make of flier on Barsoom. For nine years I had sailed and fought with the navy of Hellum. I had raced through space on the tiny one man air scout, and I had commanded the greatest battleship that ever had floated the thin air of dying Mars.

To think with me is to act. Grasping Thuvia by the arm, I whispered to Tars Tarkas and Carthoris to follow. Quickly we glided toward a small flier which lay farthest from the battling warriors.

Another instant found us huddled on the deck. My hand was on the starting lever. I pressed my thumb upon the button which controls the ray of repulsion, that splendid discovery of the Martians which permits them to

navigate the thin atmosphere of their planet in huge ships that dwarf the dreadnaughts of our earthly navies into pitiful insignificance.

Soon we rose high in the air and with headlong speed rushed away from the terrible scenes that were being enacted below us. Our speed must have approximated 200 miles an hour, for Martian fliers are swifter than those of earth.

I dropped into a horizontal course and headed due north.

We had performed the miraculous and come through a thousand dangers unscathed. We had escaped from the valley Dor.

No other prisoners in all the ages of Barsoom had done this thing, and

now as I looked back upon it it did not seem to have been so difficult after all.

I said as much to Tars Tarkas over my shoulder.

"It is very wonderful, nevertheless," he replied. "No one else could have accomplished it but John Carter," he added with emphasis.

At the sound of that name the boy, Carthoris, jumped to his feet.

"John Carter?" he cried in amazement. "John Carter? Why, man, John Carter, prince of Hellum, was been dead for many years. I am his son."

CHAPTER IX. The Eyes in the Dark.

MY son! I could not believe my ears. Slowly I rose and faced the handsome youth. Now that I looked at him closely I commenced to see why his face and personality had attracted me so strongly.

There was much of his mother's incomparable beauty in his clear cut features, but it was strongly masculine beauty. His gray eyes and the expression of them were mine.

The boy stood facing me, half hope and half uncertainty in his look.

"Tell me of your mother," I said. "Tell me all you can of the years that I have been robbed of her dear companionship."

With a cry of pleasure he sprang toward me and threw his arms about my neck, and for a brief moment, as I held my boy close to me, the tears welled to my eyes.

"Your stature, your manner, the ferocity of your swordsmanship," said the boy, "are as my mother has described them to me a thousand times, but even with such evidence I could scarce credit the truth of what seemed so improbable to me, however much I desired it to be true."

"For long years, my son, I can scarce recall a moment that the radiant vision of your mother's face has not been before me. Tell me of her."

"Those who have known her longest say that she has not changed, unless it be to grow more beautiful—were that possible. Only, when she thinks I am not about to see her, her face grows very sad and wistful."

"She thinks ever of you, my father, and all Hellum mourns with her and for her. Her grandfather's people love her. They love you also, and fairly worship your memory as the savior of Barsoom."

"Each year that brings its anniversary of the day that saw you racing across a nearly dead world to unlock the secret of that awful portal behind which lay the mighty power of life for countless millions, a great festival is held in your honor. But there are tears mingled with the thanksgiving—tears of real regret that the author of the happiness is not with them to share the joy of living he died to give them. Upon all Barsoom there is no greater name than John Carter."

"And by what name has your mother called you, my boy?" I asked.

"The people of Hellum asked that I be named with my father's name, but my mother said no, that you and she had chosen a name for me together and that your wish must be honored before all others, so the name that she called me is the one that you desired, a combination of hers and yours—Carthoris."

"How came you into the valley Dor?" I asked.

"It is very simple. I was flying a one man air scout far to the south when the brilliant idea occurred to me that I should like to search for the lost sea of Korus, which tradition places near to the south pole. I must have inherited from you a wild lust for adventure as

well as a hollow where my bump of reverence should be.

"I had reached the area of eternal ice when my port propeller jammed, and I dropped to the ground to make repairs. Before I knew it the air was black with fliers, and a hundred of these Black Pirates were leaping to the

ground all about me.

"With drawn swords they made for me, but before I went down beneath them they had tasted of the steel of my father's sword, and I had given such an account of myself as I know would have pleased you had you been there to witness it.

"A prisoner, I was taken to the very temple of Issus itself and for looking on her was doomed to die within a year. She is nothing but an old dried up black hag whom superstition has made a goddess of."

Tars Tarkas, who was at the wheel as I talked with my son, called to me and told me there was some difficulty with one of the airship's ray tanks. This he rectified. We had

from the ground, raised the hilt to my lips, and then, stepping to Hor Vastus, I buckled the weapon upon him with my own hands.

"Hor Vastus," I said, placing my hand upon his shoulder. "You know best the promptings of your own heart. That I shall need your sword I have little doubt, but except from John Carter upon his sacred honor the assurance that he will never call upon you to draw this sword other than in the cause of truth, justice and righteousness."

"That I knew, my prince," he replied, "ere ever I threw my beloved blade at thy feet."

As we spoke other fliers came and went between the ground and the battleship, and presently a larger boat was launched from above, one capable of carrying a dozen persons perhaps, and dropped lightly near us. As she touched, an officer sprang from her deck to the ground and, advancing to Hor Vastus, saluted.

"Kantos Kan desires that this party whom we have met be brought immediately to the deck of the Xavarian," he said.

As we approached the little craft I looked about for the members of my party and for the first time noticed that Thuvia was not among them.

Immediately Hor Vastus dispatched a dozen air scouts in as many directions to search for her. It could not be possible that she had gone far since we had last seen her. "We others stepped to the deck of the craft that had been sent to fetch us and a moment later were upon the Xavarian."

The first man to greet me was Kantos Kan himself. My old friend had won to the highest place in the navy of Hellum, but he was still to me the same brave comrade who had shared with me the privations of a Warhoon dungeon, the terrible atrocities of the great games and later the dangers of our search for Dejah Thoris within the hostile city of Zodanga.

Then I had been an unknown wanderer upon a strange planet and he a simple padwar in the navy of Hellum. Today he commanded all Hellum's great terrors of the skies, and I was a prince of the house of Tardos Mors, Jeddak of Hellum.

He did not ask me where I had been. Like Hor Vastus, he, too, dreaded the truth and would not be the one to wrest a statement from me. That it must come some time he well knew, but until it came he seemed satisfied to but know that I was with him once more.



With Drawn Swords They Made For Me.

slightly reduced our speed with the dawning of a sense of security, but now I took the helm once more, and we raced north again at terrific velocity.

The next day we were flying over the land of Barsoom when something seemed to go amiss with the engine, and we descended to a small hill in order to better make any necessary repairs. We had hardly descended when we heard the report of a gun from above us, and on looking upward we saw, just clearing the tops of the nearer hills, a great battleship swinging majestically through the air. As she drew nearer I could not suppress a wild cry of elation, for upon her bows I saw the device of Hellum.

As Carthoris, Tars Tarkas and I stood gazing at the magnificent vessel, which meant so much to all of us, we saw a second and then a third top of the summit of the hills and glide gracefully after their sister.

Now a score of one man air scouts were launching from the upper decks of the nearer vessel, and in a moment more were speeding in long, swift dives to the ground about us.

In another instant we were surrounded by armed sailors, and an officer stepped forward to address us when his eyes fell upon Carthoris.

With an expression of surprised pleasure he sprang forward and, placing his hand upon the boy's shoulder, called him by name.

"Carthoris, my prince!" he cried. "Kaor! Kaor! Hor Vastus greets the son of Dejah Thoris, princess of Hellum, and of her husband, John Carter. Where have you been, O my prince? All Hellum has been plunged in sorrow. Terrible have been the calamities that have befallen your great-grandfather's mighty nation since the fatal day that saw you leave our midst."

"Grieve not, my good Hor Vastus," cried Carthoris, "since I bring not back myself alone to cheer my mother's heart and the hearts of my beloved people, but also one whom all Barsoom loved best—her greatest warrior and her savior—John Carter, Prince of Hellum!"

Hor Vastus turned in the direction indicated by Carthoris, and as his eyes fell upon me he almost collapsed from sheer surprise.

"John Carter!" he exclaimed, and then a sudden troubled look came into his eyes. "My prince," he started, "where hast thou?"

And then he stopped, but I knew the question that his lips dared not frame. The loyal fellow would not be the one to force from mine a confession of the terrible truth that I had returned from the bosom of Iss, the river of mystery, back from the shore of the sea of Korus and the valley Dor.

"Ah, my prince," he continued, as though no thought had interrupted his greeting, "that you are back is sufficient, and let Hor Vastus' sword have the high honor of being first at thy feet."

With these words the noble fellow unbuckled his scabbard and flung his sword upon the ground before me.

Could you know the customs and the character of red Martians you would appreciate the depth of meaning that that simple act conveyed to me and to all about us who witnessed it.

The thing was equivalent to saying: "My sword, my body, my life, my soul, are yours, to do with as you wish. Until death and after death I look to you alone for authority for my every act. Be you right or wrong, your word shall be my only truth. Whoso raises his hand against you must answer to my sword."

It is the oath of fealty that men occasionally pay to a jeddak whose high character and chivalrous acts have inspired their enthusiastic love of his followers. Never had I known this high tribute paid to a lesser mortal.

There was but one response possible. I stooped and lifted the sword

back from them, but rumors were rife that they had met with a terrible disaster and that all were dead.

"About this time Zat Arras renewed his importunities for her hand in marriage. He has been forever after her since you disappeared.

"She hated him and feared him, but

with both her father and grandfather gone Zat Arras was very powerful, for he is still jed of Zodanga, to which Mors appointed him after you had refused the honor.

"He had a secret audience with her six days ago. What took place none knows, but the next day Dejah Thoris had disappeared, and with her had gone a dozen of her household guard and body servants, including Sola, the green woman—Tars Tarkas' daughter, you recall.

"No word left they of their intentions, but it is always thus with those who go upon the voluntary pilgrimage from which none returns. We cannot think aught than that Dejah Thoris has sought the icy bosom of Iss and that her devoted servants have chosen to accompany her.

"Zat Arras was at Hellum when she disappeared. He commands this fleet, which has been searching for her since. No trace of her have we found, and I fear that it be a futile quest."

CHAPTER X. Under Arrest.

WHILE we talked Hor Vastus' fliers were turning to the Xavarian. Not one, however, had discovered a trace of Thuvia. I was much depressed over the news of Dejah Thoris' disappearance, and now there was added the further burden of apprehension concerning the fate of Thuvia.

I felt keen responsibility for the welfare of this girl, whom I believed to be the daughter of some proud Barsoomian house, and it had been my intention to make every effort to return her to her people.

I was about to ask Kantos Kan to prosecute a further search for her when a flier from the flagship of the fleet arrived at the Xavarian with an officer bearing a message to Kantos Kan from Arras.

My friend read the dispatch and then turned to me.

"Zat Arras commands me to bring our prisoners before him. There is naught else to do. He is supreme in Hellum, yet it would be far more in keeping with chivalry and good taste were he to come hither and greet the savior of Barsoom with the honors that are his due."

I smiled.

"You know full well, my friend," I said, "that Zat Arras hates me. Nothing would please him better than to humiliate me and then kill me. He has an excellent excuse. Let us go and see if he has the courage to take advantage of it."

Summoning Carthoris and Tars Tarkas, we entered the small flier with Kantos Kan and Zat Arras' officer and in a moment were stepping to the deck of Zat Arras' flagship.

As we approached the jed of Zodanga no sign of greeting or recognition crossed his face. Not even to Carthoris did he vouchsafe a friendly word. His attitude was cold, haughty and uncompromising.

"Kaor, Zat Arras," I said in greeting, but he did not respond.

"Why were these prisoners not disarmed?" he asked of Kantos Kan.

"They are not prisoners, Zat Arras," replied the officer. "Two of them are of Hellum's most noble family. Tars Tarkas, jeddak of Thark, is Tardos Mors' best beloved ally. The other is a friend and companion of the Prince of Hellum. That is enough for me to know."

"It is not enough for me, however," retorted Zat Arras. "More must I hear from those who have taken the pilgrimage than their names. Where have you been, John Carter?"

"I have just come from the valley Dor, Zat Arras," I replied.

"Ah!" he exclaimed in evident pleasure. "You do not deny it then? You have returned from the bosom of Iss?"

"I have come back from a land of false hope, from a valley of torture and death. With my companions I have escaped from the hideous clutches of lying fiends. I have come back to the Barsoom that I saved from a painless death again to save her, but this time from death in its most frightful form."

"Cease, blasphemer!" cried Zat Arras. "Hope not to save thy cowardly carcass by inventing horrid lies to—"

He got no further.

One does not call John Carter "coward" and "liar" thus lightly, and Zat Arras should have known it.

Before a hand could be raised to stop me I was at his side, and one hand grasped his throat.

"Come I from heaven or hell, Zat Arras, you will find me still the same John Carter that I have always been, nor did ever man call me such names and live—without apologizing."

And with that I commenced to bend him back across my knee and tighten my grip upon his throat.

"Seize him!" cried Zat Arras, and a dozen officers sprang forward to assist him.

Kantos Kan came close and whispered to me:

"Desist, I beg of you! It will but involve us all, for I cannot see these men lay hands upon you without aiding you. My officers and men will join me, and we shall have a mutiny then that may lead to revolution. For the sake of Tardos Mors and Hellum, desist!"

At his words I released Zat Arras and, turning my back upon him, walked toward the ship's rail.

"Come, Kantos Kan," I said, "the Prince of Hellum would return to the Xavarian."

None interfered. Zat Arras stood, white and trembling amid his officers. Some there were who looked upon him with scorn and drew toward me, while one, a man long in the service and confidence of Tardos Mors, spoke to me in a low tone as I passed him.

"You may count my metal among

your fighting men, John Carter," he said.

I thanked him and passed on. In silence we embarked and shortly after stepped once more upon the deck of the Xavarian. Fifteen minutes later we received orders from the flagship to proceed toward Hellum.

Our journey thither was uneventful. Carthoris and I were wrapped in the gloomiest of thoughts. Kantos Kan was somber in contemplation of the

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"Seize him!" cried Zat Arras.

further calamity that might fall upon Hellum should Zat Arras attempt to follow the age old precedent that allotted a terrible death to fugitives from the valley Dor.

Xodar alone was cure free. He could be no worse off in Hellum than elsewhere.

"Let us hope that we may at least go out with good red blood upon our blades," he said.

It was a simple wish and one most likely to be gratified.

Among the officers of the Xavarian I thought I could already note a division into factions ere we had reached Hellum. There were those who gathered about Carthoris and myself whenever the opportunity presented, while about an equal number held aloof from us.

They offered us only the most courteous treatment, but were evidently bound by their superstitious belief in the doctrine of Dor and Iss and Korus. I could not blame them, for I knew how strong a hold a creed, however ridiculous it may be, may gain upon an otherwise intelligent people.

By returning from Dor we had committed a sacrilege; by recounting our adventures there and stating the facts as they existed we had outraged the religion of their fathers. We were blasphemers, lying heretics.

Even those who still cling to us from personal love and loyalty, I think did so in the face of the fact that at heart they questioned our veracity—it is very hard to accept a new religion for an old, no matter how alluring the promises of the new may be. But to reject the old as a tissue of falsehoods without being offered anything in its stead is indeed a most difficult thing to ask of any people.