

The Gods of Mars

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

Carter discovers that Carthoris is his son by his Martian wife, Dejah Thoris, a princess. A fleet from Hellum, Carter's principality, meets his airship.

Carter is accused of blasphemy by Zat Arras, governor of Hellum during Carter's absence. Carter is condemned, but saved by powerful friends.

I knew that Zat Arras dared not trust the people near to us, for he feared that their love for Carthoris and myself might break into a demonstration which would wipe out their superstitious horror of the crime we were to be charged with.

What his plans were I could only guess, but that they were sinister was evidenced by the fact that only his most trusted servants accompanied us upon the flight to the temple of Reward.

We were lodged in a room upon the south side of the temple, overlooking the Avenue of Ancestors, down which we could see the full length to the gate of Jeddak, five miles away. The people had gathered in the temple plaza and in the streets for a distance of a full mile and were standing as close packed as it was possible for them to sit.

They were very quiet and orderly; there were neither scoffs nor plaudits, and when they saw us at the window above them there were many who buried their faces in their arms and wept.

Late in the afternoon a messenger arrived from Zat Arras to inform us that we would be tried by an impartial body of nobles in the great hall of the temple at the first zode on the following day, or about 8:40 a. m., earth time.

CHAPTER XI. The Death Sentence.

A FEW moments before the appointed time on the following morning a strong guard of Zat Arras' officers appeared at our quarters to conduct us to the great hall of the temple.

In two we entered the chamber and marched down the broad aisle of hope, as it is called, to the platform in the center of the hall. Before and behind us marched armed guards, while three solid ranks of Zondangan soldiery lined either side of the aisle from the entrance to the rostrum.

As we reached the raised inclosure I saw our judges. As is the custom upon Barsoom, there were thirty-one, supposedly selected by lot from men of the noble class, for nobles were on trial.

But to my amazement I saw no single friendly face among them. Practically all were Zondangans, and it was I to whom Zondanga owed her defeat at the hands of the green hordes and her subsequent vassalage to Hellum.

There could be little justice here for John Carter or his son or for the great Thark who had commanded the savage tribesmen who overran Zondanga's broad avenues, looting, burning and murdering.

About us the vast circular coliseum was packed to its fullest capacity. All classes were represented—all ages and both sexes. As we entered the hall the hum of subdued conversation ceased until as we halted upon the platform or throne of righteousness the silence of death enveloped the spectators.

The judges were seated in a great circle about the periphery of the circular platform. We were assigned seats with our backs toward a small platform in the exact center of the larger one.

This placed us facing the judges and the audience. Upon the smaller platform each would take his place while his case was being heard.

Zat Arras himself sat in the golden chair of the presiding magistrate. As we were seated and our guards retired to the foot of the stairway leading to the platform he arose and called my name.

"John Carter," he cried, "take your place upon the pedestal of truth to be judged impartially according to your

acts and here to know the reward you have earned thereby."

Then, turning to and fro toward the audience, he narrated the acts upon the value of which my reward was to be determined.

"Know you, O judges and people of Hellum," he said, "that John Carter, one time Prince of Hellum, has returned, by his own statement, from the valley Dor and even from the temple of Issus itself.

"That, in the presence of many men of Hellum, he has blasphemed against the sacred Iss, and against the valley Dor, and the lost sea of Korus, and the holy therns themselves, and even against Issus, goddess of death and life eternal.

"And know you further by witness of thine own eyes that see him here now upon the pedestal of truth that he has indeed returned from these sacred precincts in the face of our ancient customs and in violation of the sanctity of our ancient religion.

"He who be once dead may not live again. He who attempts it must be made dead forever. Judges, your duty lies plain before you—there can be no testimony in contravention of truth. What reward shall be meted to John Carter in accordance with the acts he has committed?"

"Death!" shouted one of the judges. And then a man sprang to his feet in the audience and, raising his hand on high, cried, "Justice, justice, justice!"

It was Kantos Kan, and as all eyes turned toward him he leaped past the Zondangan soldiery and sprang upon the platform.

"What manner of justice is this?" he cried to Zat Arras. "The defendant has not been heard, nor has he had an opportunity to call others in his behalf. In the name of the people of Hellum, I demand fair and impartial treatment for the Prince of Hellum."

A great cry rose from the audience then, "Justice, justice, justice!" And Zat Arras dared not deny them.

"Speak, then," he snarled, turning to me. "But blaspheme not against the things that are sacred upon Barsoom."

"Men of Hellum," I cried, turning to the spectators and speaking over the heads of my judges, "how can John Carter expect justice from the men of Zondanga? He cannot, nor does he ask it.

"It is to the men of Hellum that he states his case, nor does he appeal for mercy to any. It is not in his own cause that he speaks now; it is in yours, in the cause of your wives and daughters and of wives and daughters yet unborn.

"It is to save them from the unthinkable atrocities indignities that I have seen heaped upon the fair women of Barsoom in the place men call the temple of Issus. It is to save them from the plant men, from the fangs of the white apes of Dor, from the cruelty of the holy therns, from all that the cold, dead Iss carries them to from homes of love and happiness.

"Sits there any man here who does not know the history of John Carter—how he came among you from another world and rose from a prisoner among the green men, through torture and persecution, to a place high among the highest of Barsoom?"

"Nor ever did you know John Carter to lie in his own behalf, nor to say aught that might harm the people of Barsoom, or to speak lightly of the strange religion which he respected without understanding.

"There be no man here, or elsewhere upon Barsoom today, who does not owe his life directly to a single act of mine, in which I sacrificed myself and the happiness of my princess that you might live.

"And so, men of Hellum, I think that I have the right to demand that I be heard, that I be believed and that you let me serve you and save you from the false hereafter of Dor and Issus, as I saved you from the real death the other day.

"It is to you of Hellum that I speak now. When I am done let the men of Zondanga have their will with me. Zat Arras has taken my sword from me, so the men of Zondanga no longer fear me. Will you listen?"

"Speak, John Carter, prince of Hellum," cried a noble from the audience, and the multitude echoed his permission, until the building rocked with the noise of their demonstration.

Zat Arras knew better than to interfere with such a sentiment as was expressed that day in the temple of Reward, and so for two hours I talked with the people of Hellum.

But when I had finished Zat Arras rose and, turning to the judges, said in a low tone: "My nobles, you have heard John Carter's plea. Every opportunity has been given him to prove his innocence if he be not guilty, but instead he has but utilized the time in further blasphemy. What gentlemen, is your verdict?"

"Death to the blasphemer!" cried one, springing to his feet, and in an instant the entire thirty-one judges were on their feet with upraised swords in token of the unanimity of their verdict.

If the people did not hear Zat Arras' charge they certainly did hear the verdict of the tribunal. A sullen murmur rose louder and louder above the packed coliseum, and then Kantos Kan, who had not left the platform since first he had taken his place near me, raised his hand for silence. When he could be heard he spoke to the people in a cool and level voice.

"You have heard the fate that the men of Zondanga would mete to Hellum's noblest hero. It may be the duty of the men of Hellum to accept



"Death!" shouted one of the judges.

the verdict as final. Let each man act according to his own heart. Here is the answer of Kantos Kan to Zat Arras and his judges."

And with that he unbuckled his scabbard and threw his sword at my feet.

In an instant soldiers and citizens, officers and nobles, were crowding past the soldiers of Zondanga and forcing their way to the throne of righteousness. A hundred men surged upon the platform, and a hundred blades rattled and clanked to the floor at my feet.

Zat Arras and his officers were furious, but they were helpless. One by one I raised the swords to my lips and buckled them again upon their owners.

"Come," said Kantos Kan, "we will escort John Carter and his party to his own palace."

They formed about us and started toward the stairs leading to the aisle of hope.

"Stop!" cried Zat Arras. "Soldiers of Hellum, let no prisoner leave the throne of righteousness."

The soldiery from Zondanga were the only organized body of Hellumetic troops within the temple, so Zat Arras was confident that his orders would be obeyed, but I do not think that he looked for the opposition that was raised the moment the soldiers advanced toward the throne.

From every quarter of the coliseum swords flashed and men rushed threateningly upon the Zondangans. So one raised a cry: "Tardos Mors is dead! A thousand years to John Carter, Jeddak of Hellum."

As I heard that and saw the ugly attitude of the men of Hellum toward the soldiers of Zat Arras, I knew that only a miracle would avert a clash that would end in civil war.

"Hold!" I cried, leaping to the pedestal of truth once more. "Let no man move till I am done. A single sword thrust here today may plunge Hellum into a bitter and bloody war, the results of which none can foresee. It will turn brother against brother and father against son.

"No man's life is worth that sacrifice. Rather would I submit to the biased judgment of Zat Arras than be the cause of civil strife in Hellum.

"Let us each give in a point to the other, and let this entire matter rest



"Hold! Let no man move till I am done."

until Tardos Mors returns, or Mors Kajak, his son. If neither be back at the end of a year a second trial may be held—the thing has a precedent."

Then, turning to Zat Arras, I said in a low voice: "Unless you be a bigger fool than I take you to be, you will grasp the chance I am offering you ere it is too late. Once that multitude of swords below is drawn against your soldiery no man upon Barsoom—not even Tardos Mors himself—can avert the consequences. What say you? Speak quickly."

The jed of Zondangan Hellum raised his voice to the angry sea beneath us. "Stay your hands, men of Hellum," he shouted, his voice trembling with rage. "The sentence of the court is passed, but the day of retribution has not been set.

"I, Zat Arras, Jed of Zondanga, ap-

prelating the royal connections of the prisoner and his past services to Hellum and Barsoom, grant a respite of one year, or until the return of Mors Kajak or Tardos Mors to Hellum. Disperse quietly to your houses. Go!"

No one moved; instead they stood in tense silence with their eyes fastened upon me, as though waiting for a signal to attack.

CHAPTER XII. News From Dejah Thoris.

"CLEAR the temple," commanded Zat Arras in a low tone to one of his officers.

Fearing the result of an attempt to carry out this order by force, I stepped to the edge of the platform and, pointing toward the entrance, bid them pass out. As one man they turned at my request and fled, silent and threatening, past the soldiers of Zat Arras, jed of Zondanga. Kantos Kan, with the others who had sworn allegiance to me, still stood upon the throne of righteousness with me.

"Come," said Kantos Kan to me; "we will escort you to your palace, my prince. Come, Carthoris. Come, Tars Tarkas."

And with a haughty sneer for Zat Arras upon his handsome lips he turned and strode to the throne steps and up the aisle of hope. We four and the hundred loyal ones followed behind him. Nor was a hand raised to stay us, though glowering eyes followed our triumphal march through the temple.

In the avenues we found a press of people, but they opened a pathway for us, and many were the swords that were flung at my feet as I passed through the city of Hellum toward my palace upon the outskirts.

Here my old slaves fell upon their knees and kissed my hands as I greeted them. They cared not where I had been. It was enough that I had returned to them.

"Ah, master," cried one, "if our divine princess were but here this would be a day indeed!"

Tears came to my eyes, so that I was forced to turn away that I might hide my emotions. Carthoris wept openly as the slaves pressed about him with expressions of affection and words of sorrow for our common loss.

It was now that Tars Tarkas for the first time learned that his daughter, Sola, had accompanied Dejah Thoris upon the last long pilgrimage. I had not had the heart to tell him what Kantos Kan had told me.

With the stoicism of the green Martian he showed no sign of suffering, yet I knew that his grief was as poignant as my own. In marked contrast to his kind he had, in well developed form, the kindlier human characteristics of love, friendship and charity.

It was a sad party that sat at the feast of welcome in the great dining hall of the palace of the Prince of Hellum that day. We were over a hundred strong, not counting the members of my little court, for Dejah Thoris and I had maintained a household consistent with our royal rank.

The board, according to red Martian custom, was triangular, for there were three in our family. Carthoris and I presided in the center of our sides of the table. Midway of the third side Dejah Thoris' high backed carved chair stood vacant except for her gorgeous wedding trappings and jewels which were draped upon it.

Behind stood a slave as in the days when his mistress had occupied her place at the board ready to do her bidding. It was the way upon Barsoom, so I endured the anguish of it, though it wrung my heart to see that silent chair where should have been my laughing and vivacious princess keeping the great hall ringing with her merry gayer.

At my right sat Kantos Kan, while to the right of Dejah Thoris' empty place Tars Tarkas sat in a huge chair before a raised section of the board which years ago I had had constructed to meet the requirements of his mighty bulk.

The place of honor at a Martian board is always at the hostess' right, and this place was ever reserved by Dejah Thoris for the great Thark upon the occasions that he was in Hellum.

Hor Vastus sat in the seat of honor upon Carthoris' side of the table. There was little general conversation. It was a quiet and saddened party.

The loss of Dejah Thoris was still fresh in the minds of all, and to this was added fear for the safety of Tardos Mors and Mors Kajak, as well as doubt and uncertainty as to the fate of Hellum should it prove true that she were permanently deprived of her great jeddak.

Suddenly our attention was attracted by the sound of distant shouting as of many people raising their voices at once, but whether in anger or rejoicing we could not tell.

Nearer and nearer came the tumult. A slave rushed into the dining hall to cry that a great concourse of people was swarming through the palace gates. A second burst upon the heels of the first, alternately laughing and shrieking as a madman.

"Dejah Thoris is found!" he cried. "A messenger from Dejah Thoris!"

I waited to hear no more. The great windows of the dining hall overlooked the avenue leading to the many gates. They were upon the opposite side of the hall from me, with the table intervening. I did not waste time in circling it, but with a single leap I cleared table and diners and sprang upon the balcony beyond.

Thirty feet below lay the scarlet sward of the lawn, and beyond were many people crowding about a great that which bore a rider headed toward the palace.

I vaulted to the ground below and ran swiftly toward the advancing party. As I came near to them I saw that the figure on the that was Sola.

"Where is the Princess of Hellum?" I cried.

The green girl slid from her mighty mount and ran toward me.

"Oh, my prince, my prince, she is gone forever! Even now she may be a captive upon the lesser moon.

"The Black Pirates of Barsoom have stolen her."

Once within the palace I drew Sola to the dining hall, and when she had greeted her father after the formal manner of the green men she told the story of the pilgrimage and capture of Dejah Thoris.

"Seven days ago, after her audience with Zat Arras, Dejah Thoris attempted to slip from the palace in the dead of night. Though I had not heard the outcome of her interview with Zat Arras, I knew that something had occurred then to cause her the keenest mental agony, and when I discovered her creeping from the palace I did not need to be told her destination.

"Hastily rousing a dozen of her most faithful guards, I explained my fears to them, and as one they enlisted with me to follow our beloved princess in her wanderings, even to the sacred Iss



One of the Blacks Tore Her Dagger From Her.

and the valley Dor. We came upon her but a short distance from the palace. With her was faithful Woola, the hound, but none other.

"When we overtook her she feigned anger and ordered us back to the palace, but for once we disobeyed her, and when she found that we would not let her go upon the last long pilgrimage alone she wept and embraced us, and together we went out into the night toward the south.

"The following day we came upon a herd of small thoats, and thereafter we were mounted and made good time. We traveled very fast and very far due south until the morning of the fifth day we sighted a great fleet of battleships sailing north.

"They saw us before we could seek shelter, and soon we were surrounded by a horde of black men. The princess' guard fought nobly to the end, but they were soon overcome and slain.

"When she realized that she was in the clutches of the Black Pirates she attempted to take her own life, but one of the blacks tore her dagger from her, and then they bound us both so that we could not use our hands.

"The fleet continued north after capturing us. There were about twenty large battleships in all, besides a number of small cruisers.

"That evening one of the smaller cruisers, that had been far in advance of the fleet, returned with a prisoner, a young red woman, whom they had plucked up in a range of hills under the very noses, they said, of a fleet of three red Martian battleships.

"From scraps of conversation which we overheard it was evident that the Black Pirates were searching for a party of fugitives that had escaped them several days prior.

"That they considered the capture of the young woman important was evident from the long interview the commander of the fleet held with her when she was brought to him. Later she was bound and placed in the compartment with Dejah Thoris and myself.

"The new captive was a very beautiful girl. She told Dejah Thoris that many years ago she had taken the voluntary pilgrimage from the court of her father, the jeddak of Ptarth. She was Thuvia, the princess of Ptarth.

"And then she asked Dejah Thoris whom she might be, and when she heard she fell upon her knees and kissed Dejah Thoris' fettered hands and told her that just recently she had been with John Carter, prince of Hellum, and Carthoris, her son.

"Dejah Thoris could not believe her at first, but finally, when the girl had narrated all the strange adventures that had befallen her since she had met John Carter and told her of the things John Carter and Carthoris had narrated of their adventures in the valley Dor, Dejah Thoris knew that it could be none other than the Prince of Hellum, for whom," she said, "upon all Barsoom, other than John Carter could have done the deeds you tell of."

"And when Thuvia told Dejah Thoris of her love for John Carter and his loyalty and devotion to the princess of his choice Dejah Thoris broke down and wept, cursing Zat Arras and the cruel fate that had driven her from Hellum but a few brief days before the return

of her beloved lord. "I do not blame you for loving him, Thuvia," she said. "And that your affection for him is pure and sincere I can well believe from the candor of your avowal of it to me."

"The fleet continued north nearly to Hellum, but last night they evidently realized that John Carter had indeed escaped them, and so they turned toward the south once more. Shortly thereafter a guard entered our compartment and dragged me to the deck.

"There is no place in the land of the Black Pirates for a green one," he said, and with that he gave me a terrific shove that carried me toppling from the deck of the battleship. Evidently this seemed to him the easiest way of ridding the vessel of my presence and killing me at the same time.

"But a kind fate intervened, and by a miracle I escaped with but slight bruises. The ship was moving slowly at the time, and as I lunged overboard into the darkness beneath I shuddered at the awful plunge I thought awaited me, for all day the fleet had sailed thousands of feet above the ground, but to my utter surprise I struck upon a soft mass of vegetation not twenty feet from the deck of the ship.

"In fact, the keel of the vessel must have been grazing the surface of the ground at the time.

"I lay all night where I had fallen, and the next morning brought an explanation of the fortunate coincidence that had saved me from a terrible death. As the sun rose I saw a vast panorama of sea bottom and distant hills lying far below me.

"I was upon the highest peak of a lofty range. The fleet in the darkness of the preceding night had barely grazed the crest of the hills, and in the brief span that they hovered close to the surface the black guard had pitched me, as he supposed, to my death.

"A few miles west of me was a great waterway. When I reached it I found that it belonged to Hellum.

"Here a boat was procured for me. The rest you know."

For many minutes none spoke. Dejah Thoris in the clutches of the Black Pirates! I shuddered at the thought, but of a sudden the old fire of an unconquerable self confidence surged through me.

I sprang to my feet and, with back thrown shoulders and upraised sword, took a solemn vow to reach, rescue and revenge my princess.

A hundred swords leaped from a hundred scabbards, and a hundred fighting men sprang to the table top and pledged me their lives and fortunes to the expedition. Already my plans were formulated.

I thanked each loyal friend and, leaving Carthoris to entertain them, withdrew to my own audience chamber with Kantos Kan, Tars Tarkas, Xodar and Hor Vastus.

Here we discussed the details of our expedition until long after dark. Xodar was positive that Issus would choose both Dejah Thoris and Thuvia to serve her for a year.

"For that length of time at least they will be comparatively safe," he said, "and we will at least know where to look for them."

It was estimated that it would require six months to complete our preparations in view of the fact that the utmost secrecy must be maintained to keep the project from the ears of Zat Arras.

Kantos Kan was confident now that the man's ambitions were fully aroused and that nothing short of the title jeddak of Hellum would satisfy him.

"I doubt," he said, "if he would even welcome Dejah Thoris' return, for it would mean another nearer the throne than he. With you and Carthoris out of the way there would be little to prevent him from assuming the title of jeddak, and you may rest assured that so long as he is supreme here there is no safety for either of you."

"There is a way," cried Hor Vastus, "to thwart him effectually and forever."

"What?" I asked.

He smiled. "I shall whisper it here, but some day I shall stand upon the dome of the temple of Reward and shout it to cheering multitudes below."

"What do you mean?" asked Kantos Kan.

"John Carter, jeddak of Hellum," said Hor Vastus in a low voice. "The eyes of my companions lighted, and grim smiles of pleasure and anticipation overspread their faces as each eye turned toward me questioningly.

But I shook my head. "No, my friends," I said, smiling. "I thank you, but it cannot be—not yet at least. When we know that Tardos Mors and Mors Kajak are gone to return no more, if I be here then, I shall join you all to see that the people of Hellum are permitted to choose fairly their next jeddak.

"Whom they choose may count upon the loyalty of my sword, nor shall I seek the honor for myself. Until then Tardos Mors is jeddak of Hellum and Zat Arras is his representative."

"As you will, John Carter," said Hor Vastus. "But—what was that?" he whispered, pointing toward the windows overlooking the gardens.

The words were scarce out of his mouth ere he had sprung to the balcony without.

"There he goes!" he cried. "The guards! Below there! The guards!"

CHAPTER XIII. Death of the Holy Thern.

WE were close behind him, and all saw the figure of a man run quickly across a little piece of sward and disappear in the shrubbery beyond.

"He was on the balcony when I first saw him!" cried Hor Vastus. "Quick! Let us follow him!"

(Continued next week.)