

# 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 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.

Carter is escorted to his palace. He learns that Dejah Thoris is held a prisoner by the Black Pirates.

Carter and his friends assemble a huge air fleet and fly to the rescue of Dejah Thoris.

A fearful aerial battle takes place. Carter is also attacked by an air fleet under Zat Arras, who is defeated.

Together we run to the gardens, but even though we scoured the grounds with the entire guard for hours no trace could we find of the night marauder.

"What do you make of it, Kantos Kan?" asked Tars Tarkas.

"A spy sent by Zat Arras," he replied. "It was ever his way."

"He will have something interesting to report to his master, then," laughed Hor Vastus.

"I hope he heard only our references to a new jeddak," I said. "If he overheard our plans to rescue Dejah Thoris



I Took a Solemn Vow to Reach, Rescue and Revenge My Princess.

It will mean civil war, for he will attempt to thwart us, and in that I will not be thwarted. There would I turn against Tardos Mors himself were it necessary.

"If it throws all Hellum into a bloody conflict I shall go on with these plans to save my princess. Nothing shall stay me now short of death, and should I die, my friends, will you take oath to prosecute the search for her and bring her back in safety to her grandfather's court?"

Upon the hilt of his sword each of them swore to do as I had asked.

It was agreed that the battleships that were to be remodeled should be ordered to Hastor, another Hellumetic city, far to the southwest. Kantos Kan thought that the docks there, in addition to their regular work, would accommodate at least six battleships at a time.

As he was commander in chief of the navy, it would be a simple matter for him to order the vessels there as they could be handled and thereafter keep the remodeled fleet in remote parts of the empire until we should be ready to assemble it for the dash upon Omean.

It was late that night before our conference broke up, but each man there had his particular duties outlined, and the details of the entire plan had been mapped out.

Kantos Kan was to attend to the remodeling of the ships. Tars Tarkas was to get into communication with Thark and learn the sentiments of his people toward his return from Dor.

If favorable, he was to repair immediately to Thark and devote his time to the assembling of a great horde of

green warriors whom it was our plan to send in transports directly to the valley Dor and the temple of Issus while the fleet entered Omean and destroyed the vessels of the Black Pirates.

Upon Hor Vastus devolved the delicate mission of organizing a secret force of fighting men sworn to follow John Carter wherever he might lead.

As we estimated that it would require over a million men to man the thousand great battleships we intended



Nothing Shall Stay Me Now Short of Death.

to use on Omean and the transports for the green men as well as the ships that were to convey the transports it was no trifling job that Hor Vastus had before him.

After they had left I bid Carthoris good night, for I was very tired, and going to my own apartments, bathed and lay down upon my sleeping silks and furs for the first good night's sleep I had had an opportunity to look forward to since I had returned to Barsoom.

Six months later Kantos Kan, Tars Tarkas, Hor Vastus, Carthoris and myself met quietly in a room in my palace, and I questioned them regarding the preparations for the rescue of Dejah Thoris.

"It has been even more difficult than we had expected," said Kantos Kan. "The fact that we were compelled to maintain utter secrecy has handicapped us terribly. Zat Arras' spies are everywhere. Yet, to the best of my knowledge, no word of our real plans has reached the villain's ear."

"Tonight there lies about the great docks at Hastor a fleet of a thousand of the mightiest battleships that ever sailed above Barsoom and each equipped to navigate the air to Omean and the waters of Omean itself. Upon each battleship there are five ten-man cruisers and ten five-man scouts and a hundred one-man scouts, in all 110,000 craft fitted with both air and water propellers."

"At Thark lie the transports for the green warriors of Tars Tarkas, 900 large troopships, and with them their convoys. Seven days ago all was in readiness, but we waited in the hope that by so doing the rescue of Dejah Thoris might be attempted at a time when the Black Pirates could be taken at a disadvantage."

"How is it, Tars Tarkas," I asked, "that the men of Thark take not the accustomed action against one who returns from the bosom of Issus?"

"They sent a council of fifty chieftains to talk with me here," replied the Thark. "We are a just people, and when I had told them the entire story they were as one man in agreeing that their action toward me should be guided by the action of Hellum toward John Carter."

"In the meantime at their request I was to resume my throne as jeddak of Thark that I might negotiate with neighboring hordes for warriors to compose the land forces of the expedition. I have done that which I agreed."

"Two hundred and fifty thousand fighting men gathered from the ice cap at the north to the ice cap at the south and, representing a thousand different communities from a hundred wild and warlike hordes, fill the great city of Thark tonight. They are ready to sail for the land of the Black Pirates when I give the word and fight there until I bid them stop."

"All they ask is the loot they take and transportation to their own territories when the fighting and the looting are over. I am done."

"And thou, Hor Vastus," I asked, "what has been thy success?"

"A million veteran fighting men from Hellum's thin waterways man the battleships, the transports and the convoys," he replied. "Each is sworn to loyalty and secrecy, nor were enough recruited from a single district to cause suspicion."

"Good!" I cried. "Each has done his

duty, and now, Kantos Kan, may we not repair at once to Hastor and get under way before tomorrow's sun?"

"We should lose no time, prince," replied Kantos Kan. "Already the people of Hastor are questioning the purpose of so great a fleet fully manned with fighting men. I wonder much that word of it has not before reached Zat Arras. A cruiser awaits above at your own dock. Let us leave at—"

A fusillade of shots from the palace gardens just without cut short his further words.

Together we rushed to the balcony in time to see a dozen members of my palace guard disappear in the shadows of some distant shrubbery as in pursuit of one who fled. Directly beneath us upon the scarlet sward a handful of guardsmen were stooping above a still and prostrate form.

While we watched they lifted the figure in their arms and at my command bore it to the audience chamber where we had been in council. When they stretched the body at our feet we saw that it was that of a red man in the prime of life. His metal was plain, such as common soldiers wear or those who have a motive to conceal their identity.

"Another of Zat Arras' spies," said Hor Vastus.

"So it would seem," I replied, and then to the guard, "You may remove the body."

"Wait!" said Xodar. "If you will, prince, ask that a cloth and a little throat oil be brought."

I nodded to one of the soldiers, who left the chamber, returning presently with the things that Xodar had requested. The black knelt beside the body and, dipping a corner of the cloth in the throat oil, rubbed for a moment on the dead face before him.

Then he turned to me with a smile, pointing to his work. I looked and saw that where Xodar had applied the throat oil the face was white—as white as mine—and then Xodar seized the black hair of the corpse and with a sudden wrench tore it all away, revealing a hairless pate beneath.

Guardsmen and nobles pressed close about the silent witness upon the marble floor. Many were the exclamations of astonishment and questioning wonder as Xodar's acts confirmed the suspicion which he had held all the time.

"A thern!" whispered Tars Tarkas.

"Worse than that, I fear," replied Xodar. "But let us see."

With that he drew his dagger and cut open a locked pouch which had dangled from the thern's harness, and from it he brought forth a circlet of gold set with a large gem. It was the mate to that which I had taken from Sator Throg.

"He was a holy thern," said Xodar. "Fortunate, indeed, it is for us that he did not escape."

The officer of the guard entered the chamber at this juncture.

"My prince," he said. "I have to report that this fellow's companion escaped us. I think that it was with the connivance of one or more of the men at the gate. I have ordered them all under arrest."

Xodar handed him the throat oil and cloth.

"With this you may discover the spy among you," he said.

I at once ordered a secret search within the city, for every Martian noble maintains a secret service of his own.

A half hour later the officer of the guard came to the chamber again to report. This time it was to confirm our worst fears—half the guards at the gate that night had been therns disguised as red men.

"Come!" I cried. "We must lose no time. On to Hastor at once! Should the therns attempt to check us at the southern verge of the ice cap it may result in the wrecking of all our plans and the total destruction of the expedition."

Ten minutes later we were speeding through the night toward Hastor, prepared to strike the first blow for the preservation of Dejah Thoris.

Two hours after leaving my palace in Hellum, or about midnight, Kantos Kan and I arrived at Hastor. Carthoris, Tars Tarkas and Hor Vastus had gone directly to Thark upon another cruiser.

The transports were to get under way immediately and move slowly



"A thern!" whispered Tars Tarkas.

south. The fleet of battleships would overtake them on the morning of the second day.

At Hastor we found all in readiness,

and so perfectly had Kantos Kan planned every detail of the campaign that within ten minutes of our arrival the first of the fleet had soared aloft from its dock. And thereafter, at the rate of one a second, the great ships floated gracefully out into the night to form a long, thin line which stretched for miles toward the south.

The expedition could yet do much besides rescuing Dejah Thoris if it could but reach the people of Barsoom the facts of the cruel deception that had been worked upon them for countless ages and thus save thousands each year from the horrid fate that awaited them at the conclusion of the voluntary pilgrimage.

If it could open to the red men the fair valley Dor it would have accomplished much, and in the land of lost souls, between the mountains of Ots and the ice barrier, were many broad acres that needed no irrigation to bear rich harvests.

Here at the bottom of a dying world was the only naturally productive area upon its surface. Here alone were dew and rains; here alone was an open sea; here was water in plenty—and all this was but the stamping ground of fierce brutes, and from its beautiful and fertile expanse the wicked remnants of two once mighty races barred all the other millions of Barsoom.

Could I but succeed in once breaking down the barrier of religious superstition which had kept the red races from this El Dorado it would be a fitting memorial to the immortal virtues of my princess—I should have again served Barsoom, and Dejah Thoris' martyrdom would not have been in vain.

On the morning of the second day we raised the great fleet of transports and their consorts at the first flood of dawn and soon were near enough to exchange signals.

I may mention here that radio-aerograms are seldom if ever used in wartime or for the transmission of secret dispatches at any time, for as often as one nation discovers a new cipher or invents a new instrument for wireless purposes its neighbors bend every effort until they are able to intercept and translate the messages.

For so long a time has this gone on that practically every possibility of wireless communication had been exhausted, and no nation dares transmit dispatches of importance in this way.

Tars Tarkas reported all well with the transports. The battleships passed through to take an advanced position, and the combined fleets moved slowly over the ice cap, hugging the surface closely to prevent detection by the therns whose land we were approaching.

Far in advance of all a thin line of one man air scouts protected us from surprise, and on either side they flanked us, while a smaller number brought up the rear some twenty miles behind the transports.

In this formation we had progressed toward the entrance to Omean for several hours when one of our scouts returned from the front to report that the conelike summit of the entrance was in sight. At almost the same instant another scout from the left flank came racing toward the flagship.

His very speed bespoke the importance of his information. Kantos Kan and I awaited him upon the little forward deck which corresponds with the bridge of earthly battleships. Scarcely had his tiny slier come to rest upon the broad landing deck of the flagship ere he was bounding up the stairway to the deck where we stood.

"A great fleet of battleships south-southeast, my prince!" he cried. "There must be several thousands of them, and they are bearing down directly upon us."

"The thern spies were not in the palace of John Carter for nothing," said Kantos Kan to me. "Your orders, prince."

"Dispatch ten battleships to guard the entrance to Omean, with orders to let no hostile vessel enter or leave the shaft. That will bottle up the great fleet of the Black Pirates."

"Form the balance of the battleships into a great V, with the apex pointing directly south-southeast. Order the transports, surrounded by their convoys, to follow closely in the wake of the battleships until the point of the V has entered the enemy's line; then the V must open outward at the apex, the battleships of each leg engage the enemy fiercely, and drive him back to form a lane through his line into



"A great fleet of battleships south-southeast, my prince!" he cried.

which the transports, with their convoys, must race at top speed that they may gain a position above the temples and gardens of the therns.

"Here let them land and teach the holy therns such a lesson in ferocious warfare as they will not forget for countless ages. It had not been my

intention to be distracted from the main issue of the campaign, but we must settle this attack with the therns once and for all or there will be no peace for us while our fleet remains near Dor, and our chances of ever returning to the outer world will be greatly minimized."

Kantos Kan saluted and turned to deliver my instructions to his waiting aides. In an incredibly short space of time the formation of the battleships changed in accordance with my commands, the ten that were to guard the way to Omean were speeding toward their destination, and the troop ships and convoys were closing up in preparation for the spurt through the lane.

The order full speed ahead was given, the fleet sprang through the air like coursing greyhounds, and in another moment the ships of the enemy were in full view. They formed a ragged line as far as the eye could reach in either direction and about three ships deep.

### CHAPTER XIV.

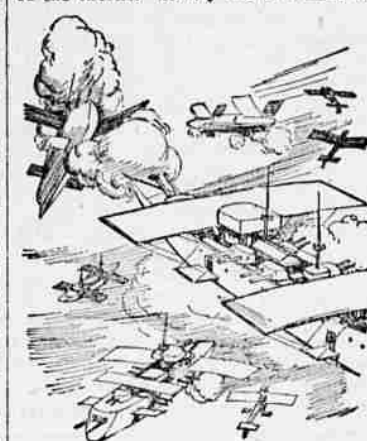
#### The Air Battle.

So sudden was our onslaught that they had no time to prepare for it. It was as unexpected as lightning from a clear sky.

Every phase of my plan worked splendidly. Our huge ships moved their way entirely through the line of their battle craft; then the V opened up and a broad lane appeared, through which the transports leaped toward the temples of the therns, which could now be seen glistening in the sunlight.

By the time the therns had rallied from the attack 100,000 green warriors were already pouring through their courts and gardens, while 150,000 others leaned from low swinging transports to direct their almost uncanny marksmanship upon the thern soldiery that manned the ramparts or attempted to defend the temples.

Now the two great fleets closed in a titanic struggle far above the fenshish din of battle in the gorgeous gardens of the therns. Slowly the two lines of



Now the Two Great Fleets Closed In a Titanic Struggle.

Hellum's battleships joined their ends, and then commenced the circling within the line of the enemy which is so marked a characteristic of Barsoomian naval warfare.

Round and round in each other's tracks moved the ships under Kantos Kan until at length they formed nearly a perfect circle. By this time they were moving at high speed, so that they presented a difficult target for the enemy.

Broadside after broadside they delivered as each vessel came in line with the ships of the therns. The latter attempted to rush in and break up the formation, but it was like stopping a buzzsaw with a bare hand.

From my position on the deck beside Kantos Kan I saw ship after ship of the enemy take the awful, stekening dive which proclaims its total destruction. Slowly we maneuvered our circle of death until we hung above the gardens, where our green warriors were engaged.

The order was passed down for them to embark. Then they rose slowly to a position within the center of the circle.

In the meantime the therns' fire had practically ceased. They had had enough of us and were only too glad to let us go on our way in peace.

But our escape was not to be accomplished with such ease, for scarcely had we got under way once more in the direction of the entrance to Omean than we saw, far to the north, a great black line topping the horizon. It could be nothing other than a fleet of war.

Whose or whether bound we could not even conjecture. When they had come close enough to make us out at all Kantos Kan's operator received a radio-aerogram, which he immediately handed to my companion. He read the thing and handed it to me:

Kantos Kan—Surrender in the name of the jeddak of Hellum, for you cannot escape.

ZAT ARRAS.

The therns must have caught and translated the message almost as soon as did we, for they immediately renewed hostilities when they realized that we were soon to be set upon by other enemies.

Before Zat Arras had approached near enough to fire a shot we were again hotly engaged with the thern fleet, and as soon as he drew near he, too, commenced to pour a terrific fusillade of heavy shot into us. Ship after ship reeled and staggered into uselessness beneath the pitiless fire that we were undergoing.

The thing could not last much longer. I ordered the transports to descend again into the gardens of the therns. "Wreak your vengeance to the utmost," was my message to the green allies, "for by night there will be none left to avenge your wrongs."

Presently I saw the ten battleships that had been ordered to hold the shaft of Omean. They were returning

at full speed, firing their stern batteries almost continuously.

There could be but one explanation. They were being pursued by another hostile fleet. Well, the situation could be no worse. The expedition already was doomed.

No man that had embarked upon it would return across that dreary ice cap. How I wished that I might face Zat Arras with my long sword for just an instant before I died! It was he who had caused our failure.

As I watched the oncoming ten I saw their pursuers race swiftly into sight. It was another great fleet. For a moment I could not believe my eyes, but finally I was forced to admit that the most fatal calamity had overtaken the expedition, for the fleet I saw was none other than the fleet of the Black Pirates that should have been so safely bottled up in Omean.

What a series of misfortunes and disasters! What awful fate hovered over me that I should have been so terribly thwarted at every angle of my search for my lost love! Could it be possible that the curse of Issus was upon me; that there was, indeed, some malign divinity in that hideous carcass?

I would not believe it, and, throwing back my shoulders, I ran to the deck below to join my men in repelling boarders from one of the thern craft that had grappled us broadside. In the wild lust of hand to hand combat my old hopefulness returned, and as then after thern went down beneath my blade I could almost feel that we should win success in the end even from apparent failure.

My presence among the men so greatly inspired them that they fell upon the luckless whites with such ferocity that within a few moments we had turned the tables upon them, and a second later as we swarmed their own decks I had the satisfaction of seeing their commander take the long leap from the bows of his vessel in token of surrender and defeat.

Then I joined Kantos Kan. He had been watching what had taken place on the deck below, and it seemed to have given him a new thought. Immediately he passed an order to one of his officers, and presently the colors of the Prince of Hellum broke from every point of the flagship.

A great cheer arose from the men of our own ship, a cheer that was taken up by every other vessel of our expedition as they in turn broke my colors from their upper works.

Then Kantos Kan sprang his coup. A signal legible to every sailor of all the fleets engaged in that fierce struggle was strung aloft upon the flagship. "Men of Hellum for the Prince of Hellum against all his enemies," it read.

Presently my colors broke from one of Zat Arras' ships; then from another and another. On some we could see fierce battles raging between the Zodangan soldiery and the Hellumetic crews, but eventually the colors of the Prince of Hellum floated above every ship that had followed Zat Arras upon our trail. Only his flagship flew them not.

Zat Arras had brought 5,000 ships. The sky was black with the three enormous fleets. It was Hellum against the field now, and the fight had settled to countless individual duels. There could be little or no maneuvering of fleets in that crowded, fire split sky.

Zat Arras' flagship was close to my own. I could see the thin features of the man from where I stood.

His Zodangan crew was pouring broadside after broadside into us, and we were returning their fire with equal ferocity. Closer and closer came the two vessels until but a few yards intervened. Grapplers and boarders lined the contiguous rails of each. We were preparing for the death struggle with our hated enemy.

There was but a yard between the two mighty ships as the first grappling irons were hurled. I rushed to the deck to be with my men as they boarded. Just as the vessels came together with a slight shock I forced my way through the lines and was the first to spring to the deck of Zat Arras' ship.

After me poured a yelling, cheering, cursing throng of Hellum's best fighting men. Nothing could withstand them in the fever of battle lust which enthralled them.

Down went the Zodangans before that surging tide of war, and as my men cleared the lower decks I sprang to the forward deck where stood Zat Arras.

"You are my prisoner, Zat Arras!" I cried. "Yield and you shall have quarter."

For a moment I could not tell whether he contemplated acceding to my demand or facing me with drawn sword. For an instant he stood hesitating, and then, throwing down his arms, he turned and rushed to the opposite side of the deck. Before I could overtake him he had sprung to the rail and buried himself headforemost into the awful depths below.

Thus went Zat Arras, jed of Zodanga, to his end.

On and on went that strange battle. The therns and blacks had not combined against us. Wherever thern ship met ship of the Black Pirates was a battle royal, and in this I thought I saw our salvation. Wherever messages could be passed between us that could not be intercepted by our enemies I passed the word that all our vessels were to withdraw from the fight as rapidly as possible, taking a position to the west and south of the combatants. I also sent an air scout to the fighting green men in the gardens below to re-embark and to the transports to join us.

My commanders were further instructed that when engaged with an

(Continued next week.)