

# Foreword

**T**WELVE years have passed since I laid the body of my great-uncle, Captain John Carter, away in his tomb.

I wondered about his instructions relating to the construction of his tomb, and especially those parts that directed that he be laid in an OPEN casket and that the bolts of the vault's door be accessible FROM THE INSIDE.

Twelve years had passed since I had read the manuscript of the adventures of this remarkable man who could not even guess his age; this man who had spent ten years on the planet Mars; who had fought for and against the green men of Barsoom; who had fought for and against the red men and who had won the beautiful Dejah Thoris, Princess of Helium, for his wife, and had been made a prince of the House of Tardos Mors, Jeddak of Helium.

Twelve years had passed since his body had been found at his cottage, and many times during those twelve years I had wondered if John Carter was really dead, or if he roamed again on the planet of Mars. I wondered if he had returned to Barsoom to find that he had opened the doors of the atmosphere plant in time to save the countless millions on the planet. And I wondered if he had found his black-haired princess and the son he dreamed was with her.

Twelve years had passed when one evening I received a telegram directing me to meet "John Carter" at a nearby hotel. As I entered, his smile of welcome lit up his handsome face. Apparently he had not aged a minute, but was still the straight, lean, fighting-man of thirty, looking just like I remembered him, nearly thirty-five years ago.

"Well, nephew," he greeted me, "do you feel like you're seeing a ghost, or suffering from the effects of too many mint juleps?"

"Juleps, I reckon, but maybe it's just the sight of you again that affects me. You've been back to Mars? Tell me. And Dejah Thoris? You found her well?"

"Yes, I have been to Barsoom again—but it's a long story, too long to tell in the limited time I have before I must return. My heart is in Barsoom with my Martian princess and I doubt that I will ever leave her again. I have come now to give you these notes."

He patted a swelling portfolio that lay on the table at his elbow and said, "I know that you are interested and I know that the world is interested, too, though they will not believe these things for many ages. Earthmen cannot comprehend the things that I have written in these notes.

"Give the people what you think will not harm them, but do not feel bad if they laugh at you."

That night I walked down to the cemetery with him. At the door of his vault he turned and shook my hand.

"Goodbye, nephew," he said. "I may never see you again. I doubt I'll ever leave my wife and boy while they live, and the span of life on Barsoom is often more than a thousand years."

He entered the vault and the door swung slowly closed. The ponderous bolts grated into place and the lock clicked. I have never seen him again.

But here is the story of his return to Mars. There is much that I have left out but you will find the story of his second search for Dejah Thoris, Princess of Helium, even more remarkable than the first.

E. R. B.

## CHAPTER 1

# The Plant Men

**S**tanding by my cottage on that cold night in March, 1886, I again felt the compelling influence of the god of war, my beloved Mars. For ten lonesome years I had begged the planet to carry me back to my lost love.

Not since that other March night in 1866, when I stood outside the Arizona cave, had I felt the attraction. I stood praying for a return of the strange power that had drawn me through space, praying as I had prayed on thousands of nights before during the ten years I waited and hoped.

Suddenly nausea swept over me, my knees gave way and I fell to the ground. Instantly my brain cleared and there, across the threshold of my memory, swept the horrors of that ghostly Arizona cave. Just like on that long ago night, my muscles refused to respond to my will and I could hear again the awful moans and rustling of the

fearsome thing which had threatened me from the back of the cave. I made the same superhuman effort to break the bonds of the paralysis, and once more came the sharp click, and I stood naked and free beside the lifeless thing that had so recently been my live body.

With scarcely a parting glance I turned my eyes toward Mars, lifted my hands up, and waited. It was not long before I shot into the void. There was the same instant of cold darkness that I had experienced twenty years before and then I opened my eyes in another world. I found myself beneath the burning rays of a hot sun shining through an opening in the dome of an immense forest.

The scene that met my eyes was so un-Martian that a sudden fear swept through me that I had been aimlessly tossed onto some other planet. I lay on a patch of red grass-like vegetation, and around me stretched a grove of strange and beautiful trees, covered with huge blossoms and filled with brilliant, voiceless birds. I call them birds, but the human eye never rested on such odd, unearthly shapes.

Some 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 before. Through the trees I could see a most un-Martian sight—an open sea, its blue waters shimmering.

As I rose to investigate I experienced the same ridiculous situation as on my first attempt to walk on Mars so long ago. The lesser gravity and reduced air pressure of its atmosphere gave so little resistance to my earthly muscles that the ordinary exertion of rising sent me several feet into the air and landed me on my face.

This experience proved to me that I might indeed be on Mars, though in some unknown area. I tried again, and soon mastered the art of tuning my muscles to these changed conditions.

As I walked toward the sea I could not help but note the park-like appearance of the grass and trees. The grass was as close-cropped and carpet-like as a lawn and the trees themselves showed evidence of careful pruning up to about fifteen feet. As I turned my glance in any direction the forest had the appearance of a vast, high-ceilinged chamber.

This appearance of careful cultivation convinced me that I had made my second entry onto Mars into the domain of a civilized people. I hoped that when I found them I would be accorded the courtesy and protection due me by my rank as a Prince of the House of Tardos Mors.

I found the trees remarkable. Their trunks, some a hundred feet in diameter, told of their tremendous height. As far up as I could see the trunk and branches and twigs were as smooth and highly polished as a fine piece of furniture. The

wood of some of the trees was as black as ebony, while the nearest neighbors were white. Some others were scarlet, yellow, or the deepest purple.

As I neared the edge of the forest I saw a broad expanse of meadowland, and as I was about to emerge from the shadows a sight met my eyes that took away all romantic reflection on the beauty of the strange landscape.

To my left the sea extended to the horizon, ahead only a vague, dim line indicated its far shore, while at my right a river, broad and majestic, flowed down to empty into the quiet sea. A short distance away, the river appeared to flow out of the base of some high cliffs.

But it was not this evidence of Nature's magnificence that drew my attention from the beauty of the forest. It was the sight of a group of figures moving on the meadow near the river.

They were odd, grotesque shapes, unlike anything that I had ever seen on Mars, and yet, at a distance, slightly manlike in appearance. The larger specimens appeared to be about ten feet high when they stood erect. Their arms, however, were very short, and from where I stood seemed like an elephant's trunk, moving in sinuous and snakelike motions, as though they had no bone structure. As I watched them from behind a tree, one of the creatures moved slowly in my direction, running his oddly shaped hands over the ground.

As he approached I got an excellent view, and I must say that after one look at this freak of nature nothing could get me away from this hideous creature quickly enough. Its hairless body was a strange and death-like blue, except for a broad band of white around its large single protruding white eye. Its nose was a ragged, inflamed, circular hole in the center of its blank face; a hole that resembled a fresh bullet wound. Below this repulsive opening the face was quite blank to the chin, for the thing had no mouth.

The head, with the exception of the face, was covered by a tangled mass of jet-black hair some ten inches long. Each hair was about the size of a large worm, and as the muscles of its scalp moved, they seemed to wriggle and crawl around the horrible face as though each separate hair had independent life. The body and the legs looked almost human and the feet too, were human in shape, but of monstrous proportions. From heel to toe they were three feet long.

As it came close to me I discovered that its strange movements, running its hands over the surface of the ground, was its method of feeding, which consists in cropping off the tender vegetation with its razor-like claws and sucking it up through its two mouths, which each lie in the palm of a hand.

In addition, the beast had a massive tail about six feet long, round where it joined the body, but



tapering to a flat, thin blade toward the end.

As I had been studying this monstrosity the rest of the herd had moved quite close to me. Horrible-looking as they were, I did not know whether to fear them or not—they did not seem to be particularly well equipped for fighting. I was on the point of stepping from my hiding place when I was stopped by a shrieking wail from the cliffs.

Naked and unarmed as I was, my death would have been horrible at the hands of these creatures, but at the sound of the shriek each member of the herd turned in its direction. At the same instant every worm-like hair on their heads stood out stiffly like they were listening for the source of the wail.

Every eye then turned toward one large member of the herd. A strange purring sound issued from the mouth in one of his hands. At the same time he started toward the cliffs, followed by the entire herd.

Their speed and method of movement were both remarkable, springing in long leaps of twenty feet, just like a kangaroo. They were rapidly disappearing when it occurred to me to follow them, and so, throwing caution to the winds, I ran behind them with my own leaps and bounds.

They went directly to the source of the river at the base of the cliffs. As I hid behind a series of boulders I came quite close to the cause of the

disturbance before I saw what was happening. I saw the herd of plant men surrounding a group of green men and women. I now knew I was on Mars, for these were members of the wild hordes that populate the dead sea bottoms and deserted cities.

There were two men and four females standing back to back, facing the hostile actions of the plant men. Both men and women were armed with swords.

The leader of the plant men charged the little party, and his method of attack was as remarkable as it was effective. He charged to within a dozen feet of them and then, with a bound, jumped directly above their heads. His powerful tail was raised high to one side, and as he passed over he brought it down in a sweep that crushed a green warrior's skull.

The rest of the frightful herd was now circling around the little knot of victims. Their impressive leaps and their shrill, screeching purr confused their prey. As two of them leaped from opposite sides, the sweep of those awful tails met with no resistance and two more green Martians went down. There was now only one warrior and two females left.

But as two more of the plant men charged and jumped, the warrior, who was now prepared, swung his sword high and met one with a clean cut that sliced the plant man from chin to groin.

The other, however, dealt a single blow with his tail that killed both of the females.

As the green warrior watched the last of his companions go down and saw that the entire herd was charging him, he rushed to meet them. Swinging his sword, cutting to right and left, he laid an open path straight through the advancing plant men, and then ran for the forest. He turned toward the cliffs, taking the entire party away from me.

As I had watched the green warrior fight against such enormous odds my heart swelled in admiration, and acting as I tend to do, I jumped up and ran quickly toward the dead green Martians.

I was quickly at the spot, and in an instant I was in pursuit of the hideous monsters that were gaining on the fleeing warrior. This time I grasped a sword in my hand and my heart was filled with a fighting man's blood lust! I felt my lips form the smile that has always marked me in the midst of battle.

As I caught up, the green warrior stood with his back to a boulder, while the herd, hissed and screeched around him. With their single eye in the center of their heads and every eye on their prey, they did not notice my soundless approach. I was on them with my sword and four of them lay dead before they even knew it.

For just an instant they drew back from my

onslaught and the green warrior rose to the occasion. Fighting to my side he swung to the right and left with murderous cuts. His keen blade passed through flesh and bone like thin air and his powerful circling strokes never stopped until no one stood to oppose him.

As we joined in the slaughter, that shrill, weird cry which had called the herd to the attack was repeated. Again and again it sounded, but we were too much engaged with the creatures around us to check out its source.

Tails lashed around us as razor-like claws cut our limbs and bodies. A green, sticky syrup smeared us from head to foot. Every cut and thrust of our swords caused this stuff to spurt from the severed arteries of the plant men.

Once I felt the weight of one of the monsters on my back and as sharp claws dug into my flesh I experienced the frightful sensation of moist lips sucking out my blood. I was fighting with a ferocious monster trying to reach my throat, while two more were lashing at me from either side. The green warrior was barely holding his own, and I felt that the struggle would not last much longer when the huge fellow saw the fix I was in. Tearing away from those that surrounded him, he cut the one off my back with a single sweep of his blade and, relieved from that burden, I had little difficulty with the others.

We moved against a boulder that kept the

creatures from soaring above us to deliver their deadly blows. Since we were more equally matched while they remained on the ground, we were making headway in killing them when our attention was again attracted by the shrill wail above our heads. This time I glanced up, and far above us stood a strange figure of a man. He was shrieking while he waved one hand toward the river's mouth and with the other pointed toward us.

A glance in that direction showed hundreds of these leaping creatures heading toward us, and with them some strange new monsters.

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

As he shot a quick glance in that direction, smiled and said, "We will at least die fighting as great warriors should, John Carter!"

We had just finished off the last of our immediate attackers, and I turned in surprise at the sound of my name.

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