

**The Chessmen of Mars**

**By**

**Edgar Rice Burroughs**

## **Contents**

|  |     |
|--|-----|
| PRELUDE - JOHN CARTER COMES TO EARTH .....     | 3   |
| CHAPTER I - TARA IN A TANTRUM .....            | 5   |
| CHAPTER II - AT THE GALE'S MERCY .....         | 13  |
| CHAPTER III - THE HEADLESS HUMANS.....         | 21  |
| CHAPTER IV - CAPTURED .....                    | 30  |
| CHAPTER V - THE PERFECT BRAIN.....             | 39  |
| CHAPTER VI - IN THE TOILS OF HORROR.....       | 48  |
| CHAPTER VII - A REPELLENT SIGHT .....          | 58  |
| CHAPTER VIII - CLOSE WORK .....                | 67  |
| CHAPTER IX - ADRIFT OVER STRANGE REGIONS ..... | 75  |
| CHAPTER X - ENTRAPPED.....                     | 84  |
| CHAPTER XI - THE CHOICE OF TARA.....           | 92  |
| CHAPTER XII - GHEK PLAYS PRANKS.....           | 101 |
| CHAPTER XIII - A DESPERATE DEED.....           | 109 |
| CHAPTER XIV - AT GHEK'S COMMAND .....          | 118 |
| CHAPTER XV - THE OLD MAN OF THE PITS.....      | 127 |
| CHAPTER XVI - ANOTHER CHANGE OF NAME.....      | 136 |
| CHAPTER XVII - A PLAY TO THE DEATH .....       | 145 |
| CHAPTER XVIII - A TASK FOR LOYALTY .....       | 153 |
| CHAPTER XIX - THE MENACE OF THE DEAD .....     | 163 |
| CHAPTER XX - THE CHARGE OF COWARDICE .....     | 170 |
| CHAPTER XXI - A RISK FOR LOVE .....            | 179 |
| CHAPTER XXII - AT THE MOMENT OF MARRIAGE ..... | 187 |

## **PRELUDE - JOHN CARTER COMES TO EARTH**

Shea had just beaten me at chess, as usual, and, also as usual, I had gleaned what questionable satisfaction I might by twitting him with this indication of failing mentality by calling his attention to the nth time to that theory, propounded by certain scientists, which is based upon the assertion that phenomenal chess players are always found to be from the ranks of children under twelve, adults over seventy-two or the mentally defective--a theory that is lightly ignored upon those rare occasions that I win. Shea had gone to bed and I should have followed suit, for we are always in the saddle here before sunrise; but instead I sat there before the chess table in the library, idly blowing smoke at the dishonored head of my defeated king.

While thus profitably employed I heard the east door of the living-room open and someone enter. I thought it was Shea returning to speak with me on some matter of tomorrow's work; but when I raised my eyes to the doorway that connects the two rooms I saw framed there the figure of a bronzed giant, his otherwise naked body trapped with a jewel-encrusted harness from which there hung at one side an ornate short-sword and at the other a pistol of strange pattern. The black hair, the steel-gray eyes, brave and smiling, the noble features--I recognized them at once, and leaping to my feet I advanced with outstretched hand.

"John Carter!" I cried. "You?"

"None other, my son," he replied, taking my hand in one of his and placing the other upon my shoulder.

"And what are you doing here?" I asked. "It has been long years since you revisited Earth, and never before in the trappings of Mars. Lord! but it is good to see you--and not a day older in appearance than when you trotted me on your knee in my babyhood. How do you explain it, John Carter, Warlord of Mars, or do you try to explain it?"

"Why attempt to explain the inexplicable?" he replied. "As I have told you before, I am a very old man. I do not know how old I am. I recall no childhood; but recollect only having been always as you see me now and as you saw me first when you were five years old. You, yourself, have aged, though not as much as most men in a corresponding number of years, which may be accounted for by the fact that the same blood runs in our veins; but I have not aged at all. I have discussed the question with a noted Martian scientist, a friend of mine; but his theories are still only theories. However, I am content with the fact--I never age, and I love life and the vigor of youth.

"And now as to your natural question as to what brings me to Earth again and in this, to earthly eyes, strange habiliment. We may thank Kar Komak, the Bowman of Lothar. It was he who gave me the idea upon which I have been experimenting until at last I have achieved success. As you know I have long possessed the power to cross the void in spirit, but never before have I been able to impart to inanimate things a similar power. Now, however, you see me for the first time precisely as my Martian fellows see me--you see the very short-sword that has tasted the blood of many a savage foe; the harness with the devices of Helium and the insignia of my rank; the pistol that was presented to me by Tars Tarkas, Jeddak of Thark.

"Aside from seeing you, which is my principal reason for being here, and satisfying myself that I can transport inanimate things from Mars to Earth, and therefore animate things if I so desire, I have no purpose. Earth is not for me. My every interest is upon Barsoom--my wife, my children, my work; all are there. I will spend a quiet evening with you and then back to the world I love even better than I love life."

As he spoke he dropped into the chair upon the opposite side of the chess table.

"You spoke of children," I said. "Have you more than Carthoris?"

"A daughter," he replied, "only a little younger than Carthoris, and, barring one, the fairest thing that ever breathed the thin air of dying Mars. Only Dejah Thoris, her mother, could be more beautiful than Tara of Helium."

For a moment he fingered the chessmen idly. "We have a game on Mars similar to chess," he said, "very similar. And there is a race there that plays it grimly with men and naked swords. We call the game jetan. It is played on a board like yours, except that there are a hundred squares and we use twenty pieces on each side. I never see it played without thinking of Tara of Helium and what befell her among the chessmen of Barsoom. Would you like to hear her story?"

I said that I would and so he told it to me, and now I shall try to re-tell it for you as nearly in the words of The Warlord of Mars as I can recall them, but in the third person. If there be inconsistencies and errors, let the blame fall not upon John Carter, but rather upon my faulty memory, where it belongs. It is a strange tale and utterly Barsoomian.