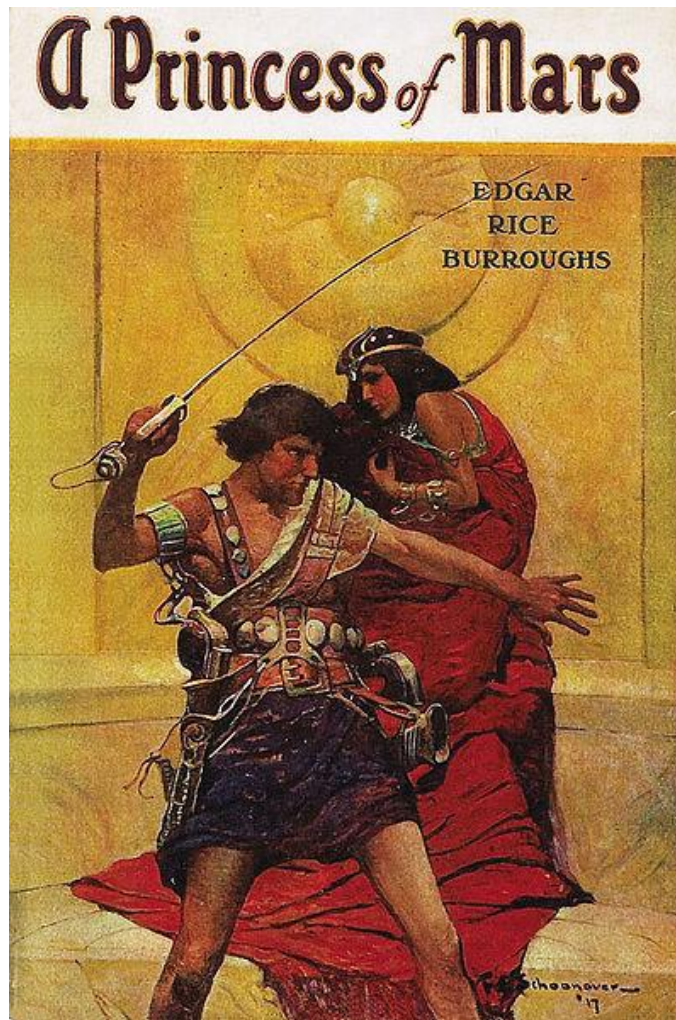


BOOK DISCUSSION KIT



A Princess of Mars

by Edgar Rice Burroughs

Summary

The original epic Space Opera, *A Princess of Mars* is the first adventure of John Carter, a Civil War veteran who unexpectedly finds himself transplanted to the planet Mars. He soon discovers that the red planet is far more than a dusty, barren place; it's a fantasy world populated with giant green barbarians, beautiful maidens in distress, weird flora and monstrous fauna.

Author Information

Edgar Rice Burroughs was born September 1, 1875 in Chicago, Illinois. The son of a Civil War veteran, Burroughs attended military academies and enlisted in the 7th U.S. Cavalry after failing the entrance exam for West Point. He served for two years before being discharged in 1897 due to a heart condition.



Working a series of intermittent low wage jobs left Burroughs plenty of time to read popular pulp fiction magazines. Amazed that people were paid for writing what he considered "rot," Burroughs began writing his own stories. Targeting his work at those same magazines, Burroughs sold his first story "Under the Moons of Mars" to *All-Story Magazine*. The tale would later become the novel *A Princess of Mars*.

Burroughs went on to write numerous other science fiction and fantasy adventure novels. They were set on Mars, Venus, the Moon, various lost islands and even a hollow earth. Eventually though, they were all eclipsed by his most famous creation, Tarzan the Ape Man. Burroughs even named his California ranch Tarzana after the jungle lord.

Following two failed marriages, Burroughs was living in Hawaii at the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor. He was too old to serve in the military, so he applied for permission to report on the war from the field. Burroughs was in his late sixties, and served the U.S. as one of the nation's oldest war correspondents. After the end of the war, Burroughs returned to California. His health began to fail soon, and he died of a heart attack in Encino, California on March 19, 1950. He left behind a legacy of almost seventy novels. The Burroughs crater on Mars was named in his honor.

About the Novel

In 1895 astronomer Percival Lowell published *Mars*, his first work on the red planet. (A copy in PDF format has been included with this kit.) He went on to theorize that the 'canals' on Mars were artificially created irrigation canals. His

conjectures about life on Mars were disproved by Alfred Wallace in his 1907 book *Is Mars Habitable?* Despite this, Edgar Rice Burroughs was fascinated by Lowell's work, and chose Mars as the setting for his novel *A Princess of Mars*.

First serialized in *All-Story Magazine* in 1912 under the title "Under the Moons of Mars", *A Princess of Mars* was published in book form in 1917. Though it can be read as a solitary novel, it became the first of the eleven books in the Barsoom series.

When the serial first appeared in print, Burroughs feared he would be ridiculed for penning such a fantastic tale. This prompted him to publish it under the pen name 'Normal Bean' in an attempt to emphasize his sanity. Believing it to be a typo, the typesetter changed it to 'Norman Bean' before the first issue was printed.

If you like this novel, you may also like...

Under the Moons of Mars by John Joseph Adams

The Black Galaxy by Murray Leinster

A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court by Mark Twain

Captain Blood by Rafael Sabatini

The complete Barsoom series:

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| 1. <i>A Princess of Mars</i> (1917) | 7. <i>A Fighting Man of Mars</i> (1930) |
| 2. <i>The Gods of Mars</i> (1918) | 8. <i>Swords of Mars</i> (1934) |
| 3. <i>The Warlord of Mars</i> (1919) | 9. <i>Synthetic Men of Mars</i> (1938) |
| 4. <i>Thuvia, Maid of Mars</i> (1920) | 10. <i>Llana of Gathol</i> (1948) |
| 5. <i>The Chessmen of Mars</i> (1922) | 11. <i>John Carter of Mars</i> (1941) |
| 6. <i>The Master Mind of Mars</i> (1927) | |

Historical Overview

The Progressive Era in the United States was a time characterized by rapid change. The old society of the Victorian period and the Gilded Age was giving way under the onslaught of technological innovation, scientific discovery and the new wealth of powerful industrialists. The sudden changes in a stratified society caused increasing class conflicts.

Labor unions were on the rise, trying to bring better working conditions to the poor. Muckraker journalists added fuel to the fire, exposing corruption and reporting scandals among wealthy businessmen. Women fought for the right to vote, while Temperance Leagues thought to better society by banning alcohol. Other reformers sought to improve education, streamline government and limit the influence of the richest members of society.

The sinking of the *Titanic*, carrying among its passengers both the wealthy elite and the poorest immigrants helped bring the sharp class divisions into the public eye. Accusations of preferential treatment given first class passengers, and accounts of locked gates blocking escape out of steerage, called previously accepted social norms into question. The stunning wins of Native American Jim Thorpe in the decathlon and pentathlon at the Olympics that year also caused many to rethink views on race and ethnicity.

The world was continuing to shrink as explorers reached the darkest corners of the world, including the South Pole. Faster transportation was becoming available with the advent of the automobile and airplane. A series of wars in the fractured Baltic States, and the subsequent interlocking and overlapping treaties, entangled the entire western world in a complex set of alliances that would lead a few years later to World War I and the end of the era.

Historical Events of 1912

Jan 11	Norwegian Roald Amundsen reaches the South Pole five days ahead of British explorer Robert Scott.
February	The first installment of "Under the Moons of Mars," is published in <i>All-Story Magazine</i>.
Feb 3	New rules are set for U.S. football, shortening the field to 100 yards and awarding 6 points for a touchdown.
Feb 12	China becomes a republic following the abdication of the last Manchu emperor.
Mar 12	Juliette Gordon Low organizes the Girl Guides, later known as the Girl Scouts of America.
Mar 23	The Dixie cup is invented.
Apr 14	The <i>RMS Titanic</i> collides with an iceberg and begins sinking in the North Atlantic.
May 7	The Pulitzer Prize is established at Columbia University.
Jun 4	Massachusetts passes the first minimum wage law in the U.S.
Jul 27	Native American Jim Thorpe is awarded the first Olympic gold medals for the decathlon and pentathlon.
Oct 8	Montenegro declares war on Turkey, kicking off the 1st Balkan War.
Dec 18	The discovery of Piltdown Man is announced. It is later revealed to be one of science's greatest forgeries.

Discussion Questions

1. All novels, but especially science fiction and fantasy, require the reader to willingly suspend their disbelief while reading the story. Was there any place in the novel where you lost this through the implausibility of the story or characters?
2. Life on Mars is divided into three distinct races, the red people, the green men and the white apes. What typifies each of these? How do they compare to different societies on Earth at this time? What about the three extinct races that preceded the red people?
3. Given Burroughs' depiction of Native Americans on Earth, which Martian race most closely resembles them? What does this imply about Burroughs' own racial beliefs?
4. Burroughs frequently mentions the "finer feelings" such as love and loyalty. What role do these play in both the current and extinct societies of Mars? How are they used to measure civilization?
5. What role do the concepts of honor and dignity play in the story? How do the different interpretations of these concepts affect the characters?
6. At what is sometimes considered to have been an optimistic and innocent time in the history of the United States, Burroughs was writing about a planet and civilization in decline. How might the rapid changes accompanying industrialization in the US have influenced his writing?
7. At one point John Carter refers to Mars as "the planet of paradoxes." What leads him to give the planet this name? Do the same contradictions exist on Earth in 1912? What about now?
8. Atavism refers to the reappearance of a previous characteristic that has not been seen in several generations. In cultural terms, it is usually used to describe a slide into brutality. The other Martian women refer to Sola as atavistic for her views. John Carter uses the same term to describe Tal Hajus. How do their views of atavism differ? What point was Burroughs making?
9. How do the most prominent female characters, Sola, Sarkoja and Dejah Thoris compare to one another? How do they compare to the male characters around them? How do the gender roles on Mars compare to Earth, both then and now?
10. What did you think of the telepathy and other mental powers used in the latter half of the book? Did they tie into the story's themes, or were they just a convenient plot device?
11. There are a lot of 'nick-of-time' rescues in the story. Did these stretch the story's credibility or simply make it more enjoyable?