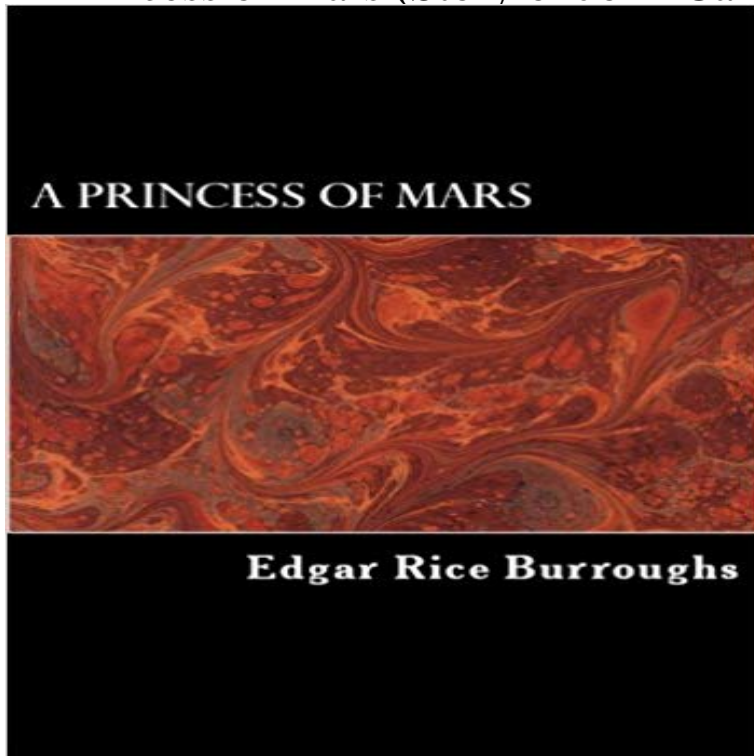


## A Princess of Mars (Story of John Carter, Illustrated)



A Princess of Mars (1917) is a science fantasy novel by Edgar Rice Burroughs, the first of his Barsoom series. The main character is John Carter, an Earthman from Virginia with a mysterious background. Captain John Carter fought in the American Civil War on the Confederate side. At the wars end he goes prospecting for gold in Arizona. After various adventures, including an attack by Apaches, he is miraculously transported to Mars. During his nine years on that planet he effectively disappears from Earth and is believed dead, but he re-emerges in New York in 1876, settling in a house overlooking the Hudson River. He apparently dies again in 1886, leaving instructions for a fictionalized Burroughs, who refers to Carter as his Uncle Jack, to entomb him in a crypt. He also leaves Burroughs with the manuscript of A Princess of Mars, with instructions not to publish it for another 21 years. John Carter states that he has no memory before the age of 30 and has always appeared the same, without aging. He is adept at strategy, horsemanship, and all weapons, including firearms and swords. He is 62 tall, clean-shaven, with close-cropped black hair and steel gray eyes. He is honorable, courageous, and eternally optimistic, even in the face of certain death. From the Green Martians he received the name Dotar Sojat, after the first two green warriors whom he slew after his advent on Barsoom. He sometimes uses this name as an alias in later books of the Martian series. Full of swordplay and daring feats, the novel is considered a classic example of 20th century pulp fiction. It is also a seminal instance of the planetary romance, a sub-genre of science fantasy that became highly popular in the decades following its publication. Its early chapters also contain elements of the Western. The story is set on Mars, imagined as a dying planet with a harsh desert environment. This vision of

Mars was based on the work of the astronomer Percival Lowell, whose ideas were widely popularized in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The series was also inspirational for many scientists in the fields of space exploration and the search for extraterrestrial life, including Carl Sagan, who read *A Princess of Mars* when he was a child. While the novel is often classed as science fantasy, it also belongs to the sub-genre of planetary romance, which has affinities with fantasy and sword and sorcery; it is distinguished by its inclusion of scientific (or pseudo-scientific) elements. Planetary romances take place primarily on the surface of an alien world, and they often include sword-fighting and swashbuckling; monsters; supernatural elements such as telepathic abilities (as opposed to magic); and cultures that echo those of Earth in pre-industrial eras, especially with dynastic or theocratic social structures. Spacecraft may appear, but are usually not central to the story; this is a key difference from space opera, in which spacecraft are usually key to the narrative. While there are earlier examples of this genre, *A Princess of Mars* and its sequels are the best known, and they were a dominant influence on subsequent authors. Initially published in magazines with general readership, by the 1930s the planetary romance had become very popular in the emerging science fiction pulp magazines. The novel also shares a number of elements of Westerns, such as desert settings, women taken captive, and a climactic life-or-death confrontation with the antagonist. *A Princess of Mars* is similar to many of Burroughs tales: it is characterized by copious violent action. It is basically a travelogue, a tale of a journey and various encounters on that journey, which does not necessarily have a defined plot. It is also a captivity narrative, involving a civilized hero being captured by an uncivilized culture and being forced to adapt to the primitive nature of the captors to survive.

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