

A Princess of Mars Study Guide

A Princess of Mars by Edgar Rice Burroughs

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Plot Summary

A Princess of Mars is a science fiction novel by Edgar Rice Burroughs, forms the first part of his Mars Trilogy, and follows the adventures of American Confederate captain John Carter on the planet Mars as he attempts to rescue the Martian Princess Dejah. When the novel begins, John has traveled to Arizona after the Civil War with fellow Confederate veteran James Powell. When James is killed by Indians, John seeks refuge in a cave – but a strange gas knocks him out and when he awakens, he is on the planet Mars.

Because of the gravity of Mars, John has immense strength he did not have on Earth. He encounters a race of green Martians, as well as Tars Tarkas, the second-in-command of his particular Martian tribe. Because John proves himself in combat with the Martians, he is given respect and standing among the Martians tribe. When the Martians attack a Heliumite expedition they believe to be martial, they capture a Heliumite human princess named Dejah Thoris. Dejah makes the case her expedition was to benefit all Martians, and the green Martians must make friendships with other races. John quickly falls in love with Dejah, and the two become very close.

However, when the Martian ruler of all Martians declares that Dejah will be killed in the great games, John, along with his Martian friend Sola, his Martian dog Woolah, and Dejah, make their escape. John is captured by the Warhoon Martians while protecting the escape of Dejah and Sola. In Warhoon prison, John meets and befriends a Heliumite human named Kantos Kan, who explains he is part of a search expedition for Dejah. John and Kantos are made to fight in the arena where he pretends to be dead so he can escape. Kanto, the winner of the fights, is given his freedom. The two meet up again in the enemy city of Zodanga, where it is learned Zodangan forces have besieged Helium. The war will end only when Dejah marries Prince Sab Than of Zodanga.

John then decides to travel to Helium, but along the way observes the Martian tribe of the Thark in combat with the Warhoon tribe. John joins the battle to protect Tars against the Warhoons, and Tars recognizes a friendship with John has happened. Tars then faces down the ruler of all Martians in a trial by combat, at which time Tars wins and becomes supreme ruler of all Martians. Tars and John then join forces to take Zodanga, and prevent the wedding between Dejah and Sab. During this time, Dejah confesses her love for John. John and the Martians then move on to save Helium, and a friendly alliance is struck between the Heliumites and the Martians. John and Dejah are married.

Nine years pass. One day, it is discovered that the atmosphere factories of Mars have been stopped, their attendants murdered. The entire planet will suffocate and die. John rushes to the factory to try to save the day, but passes out. When he awakens, he is back in the Arizona cave. He becomes wealthy from the gold there, moves to New York, and writes the manuscript which becomes the book the reader has just read. John hopes that Mars has been saved, and has a feeling that it has. He believes it is only a matter of time until he sees his Martian world again.



Foreword – Chapter 6

Summary

Foreword, to the Reader of This Work – In a foreword to the reader, the nephew of Captain Jack Carter recalls meeting his uncle for the first time just before the Civil War. The nephew writes that Carter was a strong, handsome man, and despite disappearing for 15 or 16 years Carter did not appear to have aged. The nephew writes that upon Carter's return, Carter explained he had been gold prospecting in Arizona, and went on to buy a little place on the Hudson River in New York where the nephew visited him, saw him writing the manuscript about to be presented, and saw him reaching toward the skies at night until his death in the 1880s. The nephew reveals himself to be none other than Edgar Rice Burroughs, and that his uncle's tomb has a gold-plated lock on the door that can only be opened from the inside.

Chapter 1, On the Arizona Hills – John "Jack" Carter, of Virginia, reveals that he has never told the story that is about to be related, and that the average person will not believe what is to be read. He explains he did not wish his story to be told until after his death in order to avoid public scrutiny and mockery. John explains that after the Civil War, he and fellow Confederate officer Captain James K. Powell of Richmond were prospecting for gold in Arizona.

The novel now shifts back in time.

John and James locate a tremendous find of gold, which John agrees to hold down in a claim while James heads into town to find proper machinery and men to excavate. When he sees dots on the horizon in the direction Powell had gone, John goes to investigate. He realizes that Powell must be being pursued by Apache Indians. John rushes to catch up, hoping to save Powell. Powell is shot through with arrows by the time John arrives, and the Apaches give chase to John. John loses the Apaches, then circles back to see about Powell. John must sadly leave Powell's body where it is while he takes refuge in a cave. He is suddenly overcome with a kind of exhaustion and falls to the floor.

Chapter 2, The Escape of the Dead – John notices a foul-smelling gas seeping through the cave. Just as the Apache Indians come upon him, they see something and hear something terrifying behind John. This causes them to flee. Late that night, John has an out-of-body experience and flees the cave. John sees the planet Mars in the night sky, and reaches his arms out for the planet. He closes his eyes.

Chapter 3, My Advent on Mars – When John opens his eyes, he is suddenly on Mars (Barsoom). John is amazed, but does not question the reality of the situation. John must practice to adjust to the gravity on Mars, and then goes exploring. He comes upon a small farm-like place, with eggs and recently-hatched six-legged yellowish-green creatures - Martians. Several full-grown Martians on a horse-like creature approach



John from behind, so John leaps to the top of the incubator, easy for him since his muscles are strong from life on Earth with a stronger pull of gravity. The Martians are amazed. Their leader approaches John and disarms himself of all weapons. John comes down to meet him, recognizing his peaceful overtures. The Martian leader gives John some Martian armor, then John accompanies the Martians into the hills.

Chapter 4, A Prisoner – John is taken as prisoner to a city of roughly 1,000 Martians ten miles away. John explains that Martians are very, very healthy, and rarely die of illness. Normally, they die violent deaths in anything ranging from hunting, to war, to great white ape attacks. John explains that Martians can be 1,000 years old, but normally only reach about 300 thanks to the rate of their deaths.

John is taken into a massive, white marble hall full of Martians and various other kinds of beings and creatures. John learns that the Martian who entreated him peacefully is Vice-Chieftain Tars Tarkas. Tars brings John before the Martian chieftain. John learns that Martians make torturing and killing prisoners a pastime. John is given to perform as he had outside, and he leaps around the room, astonishing all. A Martian grabs John and attempts to subdue him, but John punches him in the face and knocks him to the floor. John then continues jumping to amaze everyone. The chief instructs a young female Martian named Sola to act as a guide for John, bringing him to a lounge room where Sola calls a dog-like creature to her.

Chapter 5, I Elude My Watch Dog – John realizes the creature Sola has called to her is a Martian watch dog. When Sola leaves, the dog lays down in the door's threshold. Sola returns with food and drink for John, and John detects kindness and sympathy in her. John, observing the night, notes Mars has two moons, and a Martian day cycle is something around thirty hours. John, who is curious and likes to push the envelope to learn, decides to learn how the dog will react to him when he tries to leave. The dog gets out of John's way, and follows him around. John realizes the dog is meant to protect him, not harm him. John then decides to charge the dog, startling it, and causing it to charge him in turn. John takes refuge on a windowsill before being knocked down by a strange, white creature with hair only on its head.

Chapter 6, A Fight That Won Friends – John finds himself surrounded by Earthlike humanoid men who resemble apes. Instantly, John's dog comes to his rescue, attacking the ape men. John then comes to the defense of the dog, who has been injured. Suddenly, Tars Tarkas, Sola, and a number of Martian warriors arrive. They settle the situation, and prepare to kill the injured dog, but John intervenes to protect the dog. This startles them. John now realizes he has two friends on Mars: Sola and a Martian dog.

Analysis

From the start of Edgar Rice Burroughs's classic science fiction novel *A Princess of Mars*, two things are very clear to the reader. First, not everything will make sense or be fully understood. This is the case regarding John's sudden departure from Earth and arrival on Mars following an out-of-body experience. How or why he suddenly finds



himself on Mars is unknown to anyone but ultimately proves irrelevant to the plot itself; it is simply something which, though not understood, must be believed. John himself does not expect to be believed about something so extraordinary, which is why he will not have his account published until many years after his death.

The manuscript – which forms the novel – itself also makes something very clear to the reader. The formal and generalized way of speaking (often shortening events to avoid unnecessary details or to give a quicker accounting) is a classic staple in the science fiction and fantasy genres, owing themselves to writers like Jules Verne. This very solidly places *A Martian Princess* in the category of novels like *From the Earth to the Moon* and *Journey to the Center of the Earth*. The formal and generalized writing style of John Carter is reflective both of his genteel Southern roots, his broad education, and his later life of wealth lived along the Hudson in New York.

When John arrives on Mars and encounters green Martians, as well as their animals, buildings, cities, and farms, he is struck both by the number of similarities and differences there are. The Martians look different, speak differently, and carry themselves differently, but many things – such as having an order of some sort to their civilization, doing what they must to survive, having a culture of their own – all make them recognizable as fellow lifeforms to John. This is incredibly important for readers, especially American readers and readers in the West at large, for at the time the novel was written and published (1912), dangerous ideas like socialism were taking root in Europe just as the world was gearing up for war (World War I, which would erupt in 1914). Burroughs is reminding readers, no matter where they may be, that they have more in common than they do not – and that war is not a good idea.

Nevertheless, the reader should note that the green Martians with whom John has been tentatively accepted among, are amazed by John because of gravity. Gravity here becomes an important factor in the plot, for it gives John the appearance of super strength. Due to Earth's heavier force of gravity, and Mars's lighter force of gravity, John appears stronger and more agile on Mars than he does on Earth. The Martians, bound wholly by the conditions of their own world, can only be amazed at John's abilities. This is in large part because the Martians place such value and emphasis on war, combat, and brutality. John, by being so powerful, in effect speaks their language. He is to be contrasted with Sola, whose tenderness is seen as an outlier to the Martian way. As Burroughs will come to argue through the course of the novel beginning with the friendship that arises between John and Sola, there is much more to life than brutality and war – especially important given the rising tide of antagonism and the prospect of war in 1912.

Discussion Question 1

How does John come to be on Mars? Why do you believe there are no specific details about his coming to be on Mars? Does this ultimately matter? Why or why not?



Discussion Question 2

Why do the Martians so quickly accept the human John as one of their own while holding one of their own, Sola, in suspicion? What points do you think Burroughs is trying to make here regarding the Martian civilization?

Discussion Question 3

What similarities does John find Earth and Mars, human beings and Martians, to have? Where do they differ? What seems to account for this?

Vocabulary

supplication, pilloried, substantiate, imprecations, reconnoiter, pungent, vocation, protruded, denizens, alloy, imbue, telepathic, transfixed, diminution, antiquity, perfunctory, equilibrium, proffered, ministrations, solicitous



Chapters 7 – 12

Summary

Chapter 7, Child-Raising on Mars – After breakfast, Sola brings John to the city plaza, where hundreds of massive chariots and elephant-like creatures are arrayed. Sola and John join the procession of chariots and heavily-armed Martian men, women, and children journey back into the desert landscape of Mars to the structure with eggs from the day before. The leader of the Martians, the chieftain, is revealed to be Jed (Chief) Lorquas Ptomel. Tars encourages John to repeat his performance of the day before, which John does. John is then allowed to watch things as they proceed. Regardless as to which Martian girl has laid which eggs, the Martian young are all instructed by anyone in the arts of speaking, walking, and war. Mars, John explains to the reader, is a dying planet, so from the earliest days, Martians are taught to survive. Martian women lay 13 eggs a year, and only the best are permitted into the incubators to hatch. Most of the eggs in the incubator hatch on the day the procession arrives. John admits he does not know why the Martians did not build their incubators closer to home, but accepts it as one of many Martian mysteries. In addition to caring for John, Sola is assigned to raise a Martian child not her own. Slowly, John becomes versed in telepathic understanding thanks to Sola, though the Martians themselves can never catch any of John's telepathic thoughts.

Chapter 8, A Fair Captive From the Sky – After several days of the incubator ceremony, the procession starts toward home. On the outskirts of the city, the Martians take cover as a group of enemy craft arrive. The Martians attack and damage several enemy ships. A damaged enemy ship, unable to retreat, is seized by the Martians. A prisoner is taken, and the ship is looted and stripped. The ship is set aflame and cast adrift in the sky. John is saddened for reasons he cannot understand. John, who has now named his dog Woola, notices that Woola continues to remain close by his side. While moving through celebrating Martians, John discovers the enemy taken prisoner – a stunning beautiful girl very much like the people of Earth, except with reddish copper skin and coal black hair. Apart from some small pieces of armor, she is totally naked and is physically appealing to John. She makes a sign to John, but before John can respond, she is dragged away.

Chapter 9, I Learn the Language – Sola and several other Martian women now properly outfit John in Martian armor and clothing. John undergoes combat training with the young Martians, and begins to understand the Martian language. John also comes to stay in a large sleeping quarters with Sola, several other women, and several Martian children. Among the Martian women is the elderly Sarkoja, who reveals the female prisoner is to be brought back with them to Thark where she is to be tortured at the great games before Tal Hajus. Sola is not happy about this, having hoped the girl would be ransomed instead. She goes on to declare that the girl never harmed any of them, and that Sola herself would gladly face punishment for having such thoughts because



she can conceive of no worse fate than living under such conditions. The other Martian women are stunned, and go to sleep.

Chapter 10, Champion and Chief – John is given free range in the Martian city, but warned against going beyond the city's limits, or he might again be attacked by white apes. Woola, now recovered, continues to follow John around. At the boundary of the city, Woola unthreateningly tries to stop John from going further. John shows Woola affection by scratching and petting the dog, who responds happily to the kindness given him. John realizes he has reached a perfect understanding with Woola. John then sits in on a public council trial in the plaza, where the captured girl is being questioned. The girl reveals her name to be Dejah Thoris, daughter of Mors Kajack of Helium. She explains the fleet with which she traveled was a purely scientific research expedition ordered out by her grandfather, the Jeddak of Helium, to rechart air currents and to take atmospheric density measurements. She goes on to say the colors and banners of the fleet denoted them as being peaceful, and that their work would benefit the Martians as well. She explains the human race on Mars has maintained the air and water despite attacks from Martians, and that their work also benefits the Martians.

Dejah goes on to question why the Martians would rather go extinct than work together, and that their system of owning everything in common has led to them owning nothing in common. Because of this, she explains, Martians hate each other as much as they hate everyone else. Dejah says the hand of the red man is outstretched to them in friendship. Tars rises, but not angrily, appearing as if he may say something kind. He is interrupted by an angry young Martian warrior who hits Dejah across the face. John immediately leaps to action, attacking the young Martian warrior, killing him in the process. He then tends to the bleeding Dejah. Dejah asks why she should be the recipient of such kindness, and asks who John is and where he is from. John says he will explain everything in full detail later, but does introduce himself. He then receives the belongings of the dead Martian, and realizes he has earned his spurs and a chieftain status through trial. This is why the Martians respect him and give him free range. Tars approaches John and explains that only when Tal Hajus, ruler of the Martians, considers John worthy of service will John be afforded true acceptance in the Thark Martian community. John says he will act in accordance with things, but will do whatever it takes to protect Dejah.

Chapter 11, With Dejah Thoris – Sola reaffirms her support of John, telling him that thanks to his killing of the Martian warrior, he is now the eleventh most powerful Martian chieftain in the community. John explains he will now personally oversee Dejah's captivity. Sola heads out to gather sleeping and cooking gear while John and Dejah get to know one another. Dejah admits it is difficult for her to accept that John is from Earth, but that she will have to take his word. Dejah reveals Mars had once been a thriving, technologically-impressive, culturally stunning, and resource-rich planet, but that drying seas and a loss of resources led to war between Martians like the Thorkians and the red-skinned Martian peoples like Dejah, though Dejah's people are peaceful. A summons later arrives for John, in which he is to appear before Lorquas Ptomel and Tars Tarkas.



Chapter 12, A Prisoner with Power – John comes before Lorquas Potmel and Tars Tarkas. Lorquas observes that John is in a strange position: he is a prisoner, but he has power; he is an alien, yet he is a Tarkan chieftain; he is small but he has killed a larger Martian. Lorquas explains it has been rumored John is planning to escape with Dejah. Lorquas says this cannot be allowed, or Tal Hajus will force Lorquas and Tars to fight for command of their tribe of Martians – and that neither of them wants this because they rule well together. Only under two conditions can John be killed: either being caught in an escape attempt, or in personal combat in self-defense. John now secretly focuses on finding a way to escape. He decides to choose his own quarters, leaving Sola to tend to Dejah and wanting no servant to himself except in preparing food. Several young Martian girls then bring in all of the belongings formerly owned by the dead Martian warrior John killed, including ten or 15 women and children. John now technically owns these Martians and is responsible for them. He makes sure they are well-taken care of, but does not wish anything more with them.

Analysis

As John gains more respect and freedom among the Martians, he comes to learn more about them as well. Everything the Martians do is for the good of the state, or the tribe. No individual life matters when it comes to the life of the overall tribe. Everything is shared and owned equally, and children are not even permitted to be raised by their own parents. This is a clear representation of socialism, its sweeping hold in parts of Europe, the dangers it can bring about, and its consequences. The idea that the tribe (the state) matters more is also reflective of authoritarian nations in Europe, such as Austria and Germany, both ruled by kings rather than their citizens. Burroughs makes an American-styled appeal for democracy, peace, freedom, and friendship through Princess Dejah. Dejah reveals that such lack of freedom, be it monarchy or communism, can only lead to hatred of one another (consider the violence of the French Revolution) or hatred of others (the brutal relationship between Austria-Hungary and Serbia which sparked the outbreak of World War I in 1914).

There are important things in life other than brutality and war, argues Burroughs – such as love, loyalty, and friendship. John quickly begins to develop a romantic interest in Dejah, wanting to constantly be near her and to get to learn more about her. He finds in her much that he recognizes – both in her human form and her state of being (her kindness, intelligence, etc.). At the same time, John appreciates these same qualities of humanity in Sola, which furthers the bond between them as friends. John, Dejah, and Sola have more to gain as friends than they do as enemies – yet another reminder to the nations of the world in 1912 as Burroughs was writing *A Princess of Mars*.

At the same time, John continues to be accepted and tentatively approved of by the Martians. The lack of gravity and his strength from Earth makes him an equal match for even the strongest Martian. John demonstrates great humanity when he intercedes on Dejah's behalf after a Martian warrior strikes her. The Martians, owing to their kill-or-be-killed Darwinian existence, do not interfere but allow the fight between John and the Martian to play out. This will continue to be the case through the rest of the novel. The



Martians rarely intervene in such situations, but allow them to play out in order to help keep the peace and prevent factions from forming among their own. As Dejah has previously noted, the Martians already hate one another.

Discussion Question 1

How does John continue to gain traction among the Martians? What rights and freedoms is he afforded? Why is this so?

Discussion Question 2

What arguments does Dejah make to the Martians when she is brought before their leadership? Do her arguments have any merit? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 3

Why does John get along so well with Dejah and Sola despite the differences he has with both of them? What important things does John's unfolding relationships with both Dejah and Sola have to say about moral character qualities?

Vocabulary

replica, commodious, mastedonian, intricacies, edification, debouched, fusillade, requisitioned, fathom, astute, exquisite, desultory, atavism, atrophied, countenance, benignity, deviltries, guttural, retinue



Chapters 13 – 18

Summary

Chapter 13, Love-Making on Mars – While the green Martian community hunkers down in the city in the event they may be attacked by Dejah's people, Tars explains many Martian customs and traditions to John. The horse-like creatures are revealed to be thoats, two of which are now owned by John thanks to his defeat of the Martian warrior. With kindness and discipline, John quickly wins over his thoats, who now obey him and follow him around like loyal dogs. Tars is amazed that kindness can do such a thing. John shows him how, while Tars further instructs John in Martian combat. Despite John's advancement in Tharkan Martian ways, he remains friends with Sola, which delights her. John comes to learn that the Martians use radium powder in the bullets for their guns, which cause small explosions upon impact. While walking with Dejah that night, John puts his cloak around her and their shoulders brush. John realizes he is in love with Dejah.

Chapter 14, A Duel to the Death – John wishes to tell Dejah of his love for her, but she rebuffs him. John is saddened by this, for he has never loved anyone before. He is now in misery because of it. The procession is then readied for departure in the city. John is angered to find that Dejah has been chained up for the journey, and tells Tars so. John realizes this must be the doing of the cruel Sarkoja, who is in deep conversation with a warrior named Zad. When John tries to speak to Dejah, she will not speak to him. Sola says this is because Dejah has said that John has angered her by humiliating her.

As the journey commences, the Tharkian Martians are angered to discover the Warhoon Martians have built an incubator for their own young, and cannot be a day ahead of them. The Tharkians then commence to destroying the incubator and its eggs. It is during this time that John learns Martian eggs take five years to grow and hatch. While resting some time later, Zad strikes John, challenging him to a duel. John engages, and must stop Sarkoja after she attacks Dejah and Sola. He is stabbed by Zad while leaping upon him and stabbing at him. All goes black.

Chapter 15, Sola Tells Me Her Story – When John recovers, he sees he has killed Zad, but that his own injury is not life-threatening. Many of the Martians applaud John, and some Martian women treat his injury. John then learns that Sola has survived the attack by Sarkoja, and discovers Dejah is weeping because she believes John has been killed. Sola reveals she has only ever seen two others cry in her life, with one being her mother. John is stunned by this, and asks how Sola could know her parents. She reveals that her mother was not slated for reproduction because of her small size and emotions, but fell in love with a Martian warrior with whom she shared her love for six years in secrecy. Sola reveals that her mother incubated, kept, and raised her in secret while the warrior was off fighting on an expedition; and Sola reveals it was Sarkoja who finally discovered the secret. Sola explains she was hidden among other recently hatched children to avoid punishment, while her mother was taken in and killed. Sola



believes Sarkoja suspects her true origin in the present. Sarkoja reveals her father's name to be Tars Tarkas, and that he is biding his time, plotting revenge against Tal Hajus and all those who have wronged him.

Chapter 16, We Plan Escape – The procession journey continues on to Thark. There, some 30,000 Martians gather, divided into 25 different communities, all overseen by Tal Hajus, Jeddak of Thark. After arriving in Thark, the Martians settle in and John goes to see Dejah. John tells Dejah he loves her and offers himself in service to Dejah. Dejah accepts this, and the two plot escape. They invite Sola to come along with them, knowing what her life is like among the Tharkian Martians. Sola agrees to come along, taking John's throats to make the escape toward Helium, home of Dejah. However, Sola and Dejah are late in meeting at an appointed place that night, so John goes looking for them. He discovers Sarkoja has tipped off the Martians, who are laying a trap for John.

Chapter 17, A Costly Recapture – As John sneaks into the building, he realizes Dejah and Sola have been brought before Tal Hajus himself. Tars is also present, and looks on angrily as Tal says he will ensure Dejah's death lasts for ten agonizing days. Before that, Tal plans to have his way with Dejah. John instantly leaps forward, punches Tal, and knocks him out. John, Dejah, and Sola then make their escape. Woola loyally follows along. Martian warriors are dispatched after them. A party of Martians comes upon them, so John remains behind to fight them off. John is quickly overcome.

Chapter 18, Chained in Warhoon – John awakens, his wounds healing, and is brought to the Warhoon tribe by Dak Kova, lieutenant of Bar Comas, jeddak of the tribe. Dak wants to see John killed at the great games, but Bar is noncommittal. When Dak protests this, Bar attacks him. The two fight, and Bar is killed when one of Dak's female servants intervenes. Dak now becomes jeddek of the Warhoon Martians. John is chained up in prison in the city of Warhoon, where John must fight and kill his jailer in order to try to escape.

Analysis

Not everything will make sense in science fiction; this is clear in this section of the novel as John comes to learn much more about Martian civilization. As John himself has previously noted, not everything makes sense to him, but he must accept things as they are. For example, the Martians – despite being of a similar state of advancement in terms of civilization with humans – have atomized weaponry, such as exploding bullets containing radium. At the same time, John struggles to understand how something as simple as love and the raising of a child could lead to betrayal and death, as in the case of Sola's mother. While John accepts that the Martians live as they live because they believe it is their only way to survive, he cannot understand this as it does not make much sense to him.

There are important things in life other than brutality and war – such as love, loyalty, and friendship. John now has loyalty from Sola and Woola, as well as his throats. John has gained the trust, loyalty, and friendship of Sola and these other creatures through



kindness, not cruelty. These things are important not only because of the good things they bring about – such as Sola helping John and Dejah to escape – but because they are simply good things in and of themselves. They are a benefit to human life, making that life fuller and richer, and thereby making that life better and worth living. This is another reminder to readers that violent systems like socialism and the gathering storm of World War I are not beneficial.

It is also in this section of the novel that John confesses his love to Dejah. He is rebuffed by Dejah because he has declared his love for her in a manner inconsistent with Martian custom. Nevertheless, Burroughs's newly emerged theme is clear: True love is worth fighting for, and is the greatest motivational force in the world. Through the rest of the novel, everything John does will ultimately be due to his love for Dejah. Despite his difficult situation – he is both a prisoner and a chieftain, for example – John is determined to find a way to help Dejah escape the fate that surely awaits her at the great games. He does this not only because it is the right thing to do, but because he is in love with Dejah. This is something nearly all other Martians have no concept of, for it is not their custom. John must accept things as they are, and John himself knows something about custom; he is from the Old South, where custom and tradition are unwritten laws. They may not make sense to outsiders, but they make sense to those of that society.

Discussion Question 1

When John declares his love for Dejah, how does Dejah respond? Why? Why does this rejection not serve as enough to keep John from fighting for Dejah?

Discussion Question 2

How does John's kindness and friendship toward Sola benefit both him and Dejah in their escape from the city? Why does Sola go to such lengths to help them?

Discussion Question 3

How does love for Dejah come to form the core part of John's life? What does this inspire him to do? Could it be argued that love is the greatest motivational force there is? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

disconsolately, vehemently, agility, phantasmagoria, bestial, haughty, majesty, verily, putrid, omitted, maudlin, maniacal



Chapters 19 – 24

Summary

Chapter 19, Battling in the Arena – When John tries to find the keys from the body of the jailer, he discovers the body is gone. After two days, a red human Martian is imprisoned alongside John. John greets the man, who reveals himself to be Kantos Kan, a padwar (lieutenant) in the navy. Kantos listens to John's account of how he came to be in the jail, and assures him that Dejah and Solis entered the hills by a waterway and are probably safe. Kantos reveals himself to be a member of the expedition that was attacked by the Martians some days before, and that a great search-and-rescue effort has been unleashed to find Dejah.

Over the next few days, John and Kantos become friends. They and other prisoners are put into the great games of the arena against hordes of enemy troops, vicious and hideous creatures, and at last, each other. John whispers to Kantos, telling him they must prolong their fight. John then allows Kantos to pretend to kill him, thus gaining his freedom, and allowing John to tell Kantos to meet him in the hills east of the city. With John left for dead, John easily escapes the Martians.

Chapter 20, In the Atmosphere Factory – John waits for Kantos for two days in the hills, but Kantos does not come so John moves on. For two weeks, John travels through the hills. He comes across Woola, and the two are happy to see each other, but John can only wonder why Woola is not with Dejah and Sola. John at last comes upon a great wall and small door, which is retracted when John explains to an unknown voice who he is. Inside, John realizes he is in a factory that produces the air elements needed to sustain an atmosphere on Mars. An old red Martian brings John through the factory, who promises to help John on his way to Helium by way of a letter of introduction and passage through the city of Zodanga. John is warned not to tell the people of Zodanga where he is headed, as Zodanga is in a state of war with Helium. The old man explains he and his factory associates belong to no country, as they are tasked with preserving the atmosphere of Mars.

John continues his journey through Martian farmlands, where friendly families tell John he should change his color and join the army or the navy in order to prove himself to make his travels easier. The House of Ptor becomes a benefactor to John, giving him proper clothes and money to travel. John promises to pay them back if he can.

Chapter 21, An Air Scout for Zodanga – As John continues to travel, he learns Martian irrigation occurs underground so that no water is wasted on the surface. John learns many of the people of Zodanga are unhappy with the war against Helium that their leaders have forced them into. John also learns of rumors circulating that Dejah is dead and that Zodangian forces have besieged Helium. John must separate from Woola at the city, for Woola draws too much attention being that he is a creature commonly domesticated by other Martians.



In the city, John comes upon Kantos, who explains he is in the city to find Dejah, for rumor has it that Prince of Zodanga, Sab Than, is keeping her hidden away, is madly in love with her, and plans to marry her. Kantos also explains that Than Kosis, Jeddak of Zodanga, has made the marriage a condition of peace between Zodanga and Helium. The proposal, Kantos explains, has been rebuffed, and Helium has celebrated the rebuffing.

Kantos and John decide to join the navy as air scouts to gain leverage and standing in the city. John therein learns about solar rays being used to provide power for devices like air scout ships. While flying around, John discovers three green Martians chasing a Zodangan man. John chases off the Martians, saving the Zodangan. The Zodangan turns out to be the cousin of Than Kosis, and John is promoted and celebrated for his heroism.

Chapter 22, I Find Dejah – John comes to be a body guard for the ruling family. He is assigned to protect Than Kosis himself. John is to remain on guard with Than, out of sight but close enough to protect him. John is shortly stunned to see Dejah arrive to speak with Than. Dejah says she will marry the prince if Helium can be spared. Than Kosis agrees to this. Sab Than interjects, wanting the war to end immediately, but Than Kosis is not ready to end the war until Helium itself finally accepts the terms.

When John later tries to speak with Dejah in her chambers, he is confronted by four guards whom he manages to defeat. He then speaks with Dejah, who does not recognize him at first. She is both elated and saddened to see John, for it is clear she loves him, but says she has promised herself elsewhere. John does not care, and is determined to make Dejah his wife. Dejah says this is not possible because of customs on Barsoom, and that everyone is bound to custom. Dejah rejects John's romantic advances, and John leaves with a broken heart. Shortly thereafter, the four dead guards are discovered and the entire palace goes on alert looking for John. Notan the psychologist confirms all four men are dead from the same assassin. It is decided that Dejah should be questioned about events.

Chapter 23, Lost in the Sky – John searches for Kantos Kan, finds him, and fills him in on everything that has happened. Kantos is thrilled Dejah is alive, and is determined to do all he can to help John – not only for John's love of Dejah, but Kantos's own love of Helium. That night, the two meet in the machine sheds beyond the barracks where they commandeer an air scout flyer. John is to head to Helium while Kantos vows to kill Sab Than. After flying more than 1,000 miles, John will come at last to the twin cities of Helium, adorned by twin towers. He has not yet arrived, and looks forward to finishing the journey.

Chapter 24, Tars Tarkas Finds a Friend – John comes upon a terrific battle between thousands of green Martians. John realizes it is an epic battle between Tharkians and Warhoons. John joins the battle in defense of Tars Tarkas, and the Warhoons are defeated. Tal Hajus knows John has returned, but Tars will not follow orders and bring John to Tal. Tars will help John escape, instead. John then tells Tars he knows about Sola and the past. John then asks to actually speak with Tal.



Tal is enraged to see John after their last encounter in which John punched Tal. Tal wants John destroyed, but John argues for a right to speak, saying he helped the Tharkians in battle while Tal did not. Most Martians demand John be given the right to speak. It is declared that Tal must now prove his fitness to rule by combat. Tars himself then challenges Tal. The two battle. Tars wins, and becomes ruler of the Martians. John proposes freeing Dejah, allying with Helium, and defeating and looting Zodanga. The Martians all approve of this plan of action, and set out at once. Nearing the city of Zodanga, John and a small party of Martians capture the gates and throw them open to the Martian forces.

Analysis

Not everything will make sense in science fiction and fantasy, which is true of the atmosphere factory that John encounters. The technology and the machinery that create livable atmosphere on Mars are not understood either by John or the reader (how does one generate oxygen, for example?) but it is something John and the reader must accept. The willing suspension of disbelief here is irrelevant to the course of the rest of the novel. It is a missing puzzle pieces that Burroughs chooses to fill in with a general explanation in which something can be accepted, but not understood. This only adds to the magic of the novel's form, making it all the more fantastic. The same is true of the customs of love and marriage, sadly reflected upon by Dejah. Dejah herself says everyone is bound to custom – something John knows much about as a Confederate officer of the Old South.

John's travels through the atmospheric factory and his journey to Zodanga are fueled wholly by his love for Dejah. Burroughs argues convincingly that love is the greatest motivational factor there is. This is important given the time period in which the novel was written: territory, nationalism, power, fear, and military glory were rampant in 1912, especially in Europe and the Ottoman Empire. Burroughs counters this by pointing out that love will compel people to do things that other motivational factors will not. Love is something deeply personal and something life-changing in ways that power and fear are not. Because of this, John is willing to do whatever he must in order to find Dejah and save her, from fighting in the arena to escaping hordes of Martians, to involving himself in diplomacy, politics, and war –such as when he backs Tars Tarkas and helps Tars unite the Martians against the Zodangans.

Despite the altruistic reasons of love that John involves himself in the politics and international relations of Mars, Burroughs uses John's actions to take a very strident antiwar position. The violent tendencies of socialism and the approach of World War II seem just as quick and cursory as John's efforts in Martian relations. Nations are quick to entangle themselves in alliances and quick to set in upon one another given the right pretext. Pre-World War I Europe can be considered a powder keg with a thousand fuses, just like Mars. And it is John who lights off the right fuses that brings the Martians to war against Zodanga within a matter of moments. This is the danger that Burroughs correctly asserts the world faces in 1912.



Discussion Question 1

Although John continues to pursue Dejah and fight for her out of love, he accepts that he cannot be with her then because of Martian custom. Despite everything John has been through to be with Dejah, why does he not shirk custom and take Dejah anyways?

Discussion Question 2

What important points does Burroughs illustrate through John's involvement in Martian politics and tribal relations? What real-world relevance does this have?

Discussion Question 3

How does love continue to be the single dominant motivational factor in John's life on Mars? What does it lead him to do? Do you believe John could do such things had something like fear or the hunger for power compelled him? Why or why not?

Vocabulary

essayed, ill-fated, edifices, delinquent, cordiality, cursory, mortal injuries, erstwhile, ornate, demurred



Chapters 25 – 28

Summary

Chapter 25, The Looting of Zodanga – John and his party continue on into the city where they come to the wedding ceremony of Sab Than and Dejah. John realizes Kantos must have failed in his assassination attempt. John then disrupts the ceremony as Tars and dozens of warriors appear in the city. A great battle breaks out in which the Zodanagan Jeddak is killed, along with Sab Than himself. Only Martians remain alive at the ruins of the ceremony when everything is done. Kantos is found alive, having been arrested and imprisoned before he could carry out his plan. Dejah is amazed that John has done so much, to which John responds that his motivation was always love for her. With Sab Than dead by hands other than John's, Dejah is now free to be his. The two embrace and kiss.

Chapter 26, Through Carnage to Joy – Tars and Kantos announce to John that Zodanga has been taken. The Martians then move out to break the Zodangan siege of Helium. The Helium defenders join in a great battle that destroys the Zodangan fleet. The Heliumites are thrilled that Dejah is safe and now being returned to them. John Carter is cheered, but John humbly gives credit to Tars as well, for it was Tars who led the Martians on to help the Heliumites. Tars is also cheered, and the ground forces of Helium and the Martians unite to fight the remaining ground forces of Zodanga. A massive battle occurs in which the Zodangans are crushed. John and all of the Martian chieftains are honored by the ruler of Helium, Tardos Mors, as well as Mors Kajak, ruler of Lesser Helium, and father of Dejah.

Chapter 27, From Joy to Death – The Martians and the Heliumites celebrate their victory for ten days. Sola is officially acknowledged as the daughter of Tars Tarkas. John and Dejah are formally married. For nine years, John serves the house of Tardos Mors. Word comes one day that the keepers of the atmosphere plant have not made contact for two days. The ruler of Helium reports to John that the keepers have been found murdered. Because of the lack of atmospheric production, the people of Helium have three days to live. John suddenly knows how he can save Mars. He takes to a flier and races to the plant. He wrenches open the doors and directs men to turn loose the pumps. Just as he does this, he loses consciousness.

Chapter 28, At the Arizona Cave – When John opens his eyes, he is back in the cave in Arizona. John strikes a match and discovers the cave is actually a tomb. He finds the mummified remains of a woman with black hair bent over a basket where she had been burning green powder on a charcoal burner. John heads outside and discovers he is indeed back in Arizona, and he wonders whether or not Mars has been saved.

In the meantime, John becomes immensely wealthy from the mine, but he does not care for the wealth because his true love and his true life are back on Mars. John now



says he can feel the call of Mars as he writes his manuscript, and says he knows the inhabitants of Mars are waiting for him once again.

Analysis

There are important things in life other than brutality and war – such as love, loyalty, and friendship, which Burroughs makes this abundantly clear as the novel comes to a close. John successfully brings friendship and peace between the Martians and Heliumites, marries Dejah, and enjoys life on Mars for nine years in service to the Heliumites. Burroughs indicates by his ending that truly barbaric civilizations, such as the Zodangans, must be confronted and defeated while other countries with more in common than not must unite in peace and friendship. It is another warning about the war that is threatening Europe in 1912.

As the novel ends, readers are reminded that not everything will make sense in science fiction. The atmospheric factory has been attacked, but by whom and for what reason are not clear. John's fainting as he enters the factory, and his waking up back in Arizona, also seem to have no clear rhyme or reason. Readers must accept that John has returned to Earth, even if the reason and logic behind it are absent. In fiction, such reasons and such logic are not necessary. Their absence can make the book all the more special or fantastical – and clearly, this is the aim of Burroughs. John's own inability to cogently explain things adds both to the frustration and enchantment of readers that they cannot know exactly why. Even John is frustrated by this, but has faith he will again return to Mars someday.

Discussion Question 1

Despite earlier rejecting John, Dejah is now free to embrace, kiss, love, and marry him. Why? What has changed? Is this in keeping with Martian custom? Why or why not?

Discussion Question 2

What great mystery relating to the atmospheric factory remains at the end of the novel? Can you find any explanation that might be possible for this? Explain.

Discussion Question 3

What ultimately leads to John's return to Earth? Why is John so frustrated by this return?

Vocabulary

discernible, labyrinthine, abashed, exultation, veritable, shambles



Characters

John Carter

John “Jack” Carter is a Confederate captain from Virginia who, after the Civil War, heads west with good friend and fellow officer James Powell to mine for gold. John is transported to Mars after taking refuge in a strange tomb-like cave to escape Apache Indians. John, ever adventurous and willing to push boundaries, takes his arrival on Mars not with fear but curiosity. As such, he comes to live among the Martians, meets and falls in love with Dejah, then spends the majority of the novel working to win her love, save her, and free her. John ultimately marries Dejah, and spends the next nine years of his life with her on Mars until he is transported back to Earth.

Dejah Thoris

Dejah Thoris is the titular Martian Princess. Of the Heliumite people, Dejah is physically and emotionally beautiful in addition to being extraordinarily intelligent, traditional, and insightful. Dejah, the daughter of the ruler of Lesser Helium, is captured by the Martians while participating in a scientific research expedition. Dejah is ultimately saved and rescued by John from being forced into an arranged marriage with Sab Than of Zodanga. Dejah gently turns down John’s romantic advances despite her own love of John in order to keep with Martian custom until it is proper for her to return his advances. The two are ultimately married.

Sola

Sola is a young female green Martian, and is an outlier among her people due to the love and tenderness she displays. The daughter of Tars Tarkas and a mother killed for secretly raising her, Sola immediately connects with the kindhearted John, and fast becomes his friend. Sola helps John and Dejah to escape the Martian camp, and remains steadfastly loyal to them through the end of the novel.

Woola

Woola is a dog-like Martian creature who becomes John’s constant companion in the novel. Woola becomes so loyal to John due to the simple kindness and affection John shows him. Woola remains loyal to John through the end of the novel.

Tars Tarkas

Tars Takas is the second chieftain of his green Martian tribe, and the father of Sola. Tars has long harbored a grudge against Martial ruler Lorquas Ptomel for killing the woman



he loved many years before. Tars comes to befriend John, and becomes steadfastly loyal to John after John joins him in battle against the Warhoon. Tars challenges Lorquas to rule the Martians, and defeats him in single combat. Tars then becomes the ruler of all Martians, and works with John to defeat the Zodanga and liberate Helium.

Lorquas Ptomel

Jed Lorquas Ptomel is the supreme ruler of the Martians. Cruel, bitter, and combative, Lorquas is feared and hated by many of his own people. Lorquas is ultimately challenged and killed by Tars for leadership, and in revenge for Lorquas having killed the woman Tars loved many years before.

Sarkoja

Sarkoja is a female Martian who serves as a constant antagonist through the novel. It was Sarkoja who discovered Sola being raised in secret by her parents, and it was Sarkoja who betrayed them to Lorquas. During the course of the novel, Sarkoja attempts repeatedly to have John killed, and is herself arrested for attempting to kill Sola without provocation.

Sab Than

Sab Than is the Prince of Zodanga. He falls helplessly in love with Dejah, wanting her to marry him in exchange for peace with the Heliumites. Sab is killed in battle with the Martians during the attack on Zodanga.

Mors Kajack

Mors Kajack is the ruler of Lesser Helium, and the father of Dejah Thoris. Mors is a just and kind ruler who is known to be a fierce warrior. He openly weeps with joy and is unable to properly thank John for saving Dejah because he is so happy his daughter is alive.

Kantos Kan

Kantos Kan is a Heliumite warrior who is tasked with finding Dejah. Kantos has a tremendous love for his country, and befriends John when both are imprisoned by the Warhoon Martians. Kantos later works with John to help free Dejah, but is captured and imprisoned before he can make good on his plans to kill Sab Than.



Symbols and Symbolism

Manuscript

A Princess of Mars manuscript forms the core of the novel A Princess of Mars, and represents the necessity of suspending disbelief on the part of readers. The manuscript, written as a memoir of his adventures on Mars, is the work of John Carter who knows readers will disbelieve that he was ever on Mars at all. John has ensured the manuscript would not be published until years after his death, saving him from being scrutinized by the public. The manuscript is reflective of the idea that not everything can be rationally explained, though these things can be rationally accepted.

Belongings

Belongings of Martians are demonstrative of their communal way of life, which in turn is reflective of socialism. Martian goods, apart from a few very personal possessions, belong to no one in particular. As a result, the belongings in common create suspicion, distrust, and even hatred of one another – evidence, Dejah says, of a failed system that predates the rise of Communism.

Gravity

The gravity on Mars is symbolic of the differences between Earth and Mars, and serves John Carter very well. The lighter threshold of gravity on Mars means that John's muscle, agility, and strength appear to be superhuman when in reality, they are normal on Earth. This gives John a great advantage in battle against the creatures and peoples of Mars, who do not expect such physical feats from someone as small in stature as John.

Martian armor

Martian armor is symbolic of both belonging and rank. Martian armor is given to Martians who have proved themselves in battle or combat, offer protection in war, and denote one's level of power and respect. John is given armor through proving his physical capabilities, and defeating numerous Martian warriors. Because of this, John becomes the eleventh-most powerful man in Tars's tribe – and this is denoted by the armor that he wears.

Scientific expedition

The Heliumite scientific expedition is symbolic of Helium's civilized and technologically-advanced, peaceful state. Sent out under Dejah's command to study the atmosphere for



the benefit of all creatures on Mars, the expedition is mistaken for a militant foray and is attacked by the Martians. During the fight, Dejah's ship is forced adrift, captured, and Dejah is taken prisoner.

Natural resources

Natural resources are the lifeblood of the inhabitants and creatures of Mars, and are symbolic of the desperation of survival. The drying oceans and collapsing atmosphere, propped up by the atmosphere factories, mean resources on the planet are still scarce. As a result, groups like the green Martians become militant and base their whole existence on survival: nothing except that which is fundamentally needed for survival is honored.

Atmospheric production

Atmospheric production is symbolic of the good will of the Heliumites. Though the people who work the atmospheric factories come from Helium, they have given up belonging to any country in order to protect the atmosphere of the planet for the good of all. Atmospheric production is essential for Mars, as without it, the planet would become a wasteland within four or five days.

Alliances

Alliances are symbolic both of friendship and serve as cautions against war. During the novel, the Heliumites ally with the Martians against the Zodangans to defeat the Zodangans, a greater enemy. However, alliances can also bring about unwanted wars, as demonstrated by the network of alliances in Europe and the Middle East on the dawn of World War I. Burroughs cautions readers about the international situation, urging alliances be used for peace primarily, and only for war when absolutely necessary.

Banners, flags, and colors

Banners and colors are symbolic of nations and intentions in the novel. Each nation in the novel has a distinctive set of identifying colors and flags (though specifics are never given). Even the intents of nations and groups are reflected in their colors and flags. For example, Dejah is incensed when her fleet is attacked, for they had been flying the colors denoting them as a scientific research expedition.

Tomb

A tomb is symbolic of the fact that John Carter will return from the dead. The tomb is equipped with a door lock that can be opened only from the inside. This means that

John's body will rise from the dead and leave the tomb – something only possible if he actually does rise, and opens the door from the inside.



Settings

Mars/Barsoom

Mars, known as Barsoom to its inhabitants, serves as the main setting for the novel. With a desert-like red landscape, Mars is a world in decline. Shrinking oceans and an atmosphere both maintained by the Heliumites speak of hanging on rather than thriving. Mars is populated by various races of human beings, various tribes of green Martians, all with their own civilizations, cultures, and political systems; and by numerous creatures that are similar to, but different from animals on Earth. It is to Mars that John suddenly finds himself transported early in the novel.

Korad

The Dead City of Korad is a formerly magnificent city once populated by the Martians until Mars fell into decline. Its decaying ruins are now inhabited by the Tharkian tribe of Martians. Korad is a manifestation of what the Martian civilization used to be, and what it could be again if the Martians would join with the humans of Mars in restoring their world. It is to Korad that John is first taken and where he becomes accepted among the Martians.

Atmosphere factory

The atmosphere factory is located several days away from the city of Zodanga. Established by the Heliumites to maintain the atmosphere of Mars to ensure the air and water supply stop decreasing, there is an unspoken rule among all the civilizations that none shall attack the factory or use it politically in any way whatsoever, for the good of all of Mars. At the end of the novel, however, unknown assailants have killed the factory's operators and shut the factory down.

Zodanga

Zodanga is the eponymous capital city of a nation of human beings that happens to be particularly imperialistic. Advanced militarily and technologically, Zodanga has its sights set on conquering Helium either through war or through marriage. Only John's intervention and the arrival of Martian forces stops the Zodangans. The city itself is looted and left behind by the victorious Martians.

Helium

Helium is one of the most scientifically advanced of the human city-states on Mars. Helium is divided into twin cities overseen by two towers, and a supreme ruler and



lesser ruler (the latter being Mors Kajack, the father of Dejah). Helium is a peaceful city and civilization more concerned with the preservation of Mars than any personal power or glory. Helium is targeted for conquering by the Zodangans, but the intervention of John and the Martians saves the city and paves the way for greater peace.



Themes and Motifs

Not everything will make sense in science fiction or in life

Not everything will make sense in science fiction or in life, argues Edgar Rice Burroughs in his novel *A Princess of Mars*. A huge part of the success of science fiction, fantasy, and other similar fiction comes through the willing suspension of disbelief for the sake of storytelling. This is certainly the case with *A Princess of Mars*. The novel is replete with things that must be accepted though they are little understood if they are understood at all.

The greatest leap of faith comes early in the novel, and is repeated later in the novel. This is when John Carter passes out, has an out-of-body experiences, and steps out of the cave onto the Martian landscape. It is repeated later in the novel when John passes out on Mars and reawakens in his Arizona cave. What exactly has happened can only be guessed at, but is also irrelevant to the plot. How John ends up on Mars does not matter short of the fact that he has ended up on Mars. John himself says he cannot understand how he is on Mars, but does not question the fact.

When John later meets Dejah, Dejah expresses the same amount of disbelief at John's having simply arrived on Mars from Earth. Dejah herself says she will simply have to believe John though she cannot understand how such a thing has happened. For Dejah, like John and the plot of the novel, how John has arrived on Mars is immaterial based on what he does while he is on Mars. As the novel progresses, John encounters many strange and extraordinary things that he must accept though he cannot understand – such as how a single factory provides a stable atmosphere for an entire planet, the use of radium bullets (with radium not being discovered for several decades after the American Civil War), or many of the Martian customs regarding love. The details of such things are irrelevant for the overall plot.

The suspension of disbelief is what actually makes novels like *A Princess of Mars* more readable because the details are not essential to the story. Indeed, the generalizations of the novel and the avoidance of details in certain places adds a sense of wonder to the novel, making it all the more believable despite the illogic of everything contained therein.

The world of Mars is a metaphor for the rise of Communism and the approach of World War I

The world of Mars is a metaphor for the rise of Communism and the approach of World War I, as Edgar Rice Burroughs details in his novel *A Princess of Mars*. The human, Martian, and rogue nations of the world that is Mars serve as an argument from



Burroughs against war, and a warning that great dangers are on the horizon if nothing is done to prevent them. Burroughs's arguments come largely through Dejah and the events surrounding her.

The green Martian civilization reflects the rise of socialism, which will pave the way for Communism. The Martian civilization shares and owns everything communally, except in subordination to the will of the tribe (the state). Because of this, Martians are very jealous and hateful of one another, let alone civilizations other than themselves. The Martians are symbolic predictions of the Soviet Union and the Cold War. The roots of such horrors were being sown in the early 1900s, and at the time of the writing of *A Princess of Mars*, the Oktober Revolution, which saw the rise of what would become Soviet Russia, was only five years away.

The martial endeavors, nationalism, and hatred of other nations exhibited by the Martians, Warhoons, Heliumites, and the Zodangans reflect the growing animosity and antagonism between European powers, and between European powers and the Ottoman Empire. War ultimately breaks out between the Zodangans and Heliumites which invariably draws in the Martians. A massive war is head between these nations, which can be seen as reflective of the advent of World War I – a mere two years away at the time of the writing of *A Princess of Mars*.

Until Germany attacked American vessels in 1917, plunging America into World War I, the United States attempted to remain neutral in what was considered to be a European and Middle Eastern war. America's entry into the war tipped the balance to the side of the Allies. However, prior to this, Americans had cautioned against war – a fact reflected by Dejah, who encouraged the Martians to be friendly rather than hostile, and who urged peace and good will rather than war and antagonism. Dejah herself provides a inarguably powerful critique not only of the socialist system, but of the state of European affairs in 1912 through the representative situation on her home world of Mars.

There are important things in life other than brutality and war – such as love, loyalty, and friendship

There are important things in life other than brutality and war – such as love, loyalty, and friendship, argues Edgar Rice Burroughs in his novel *A Princess of Mars*. Burroughs contends that these are the important things in life, and that these are things that must be focused on. This is especially important given the fact that the world appeared poised for war when Burroughs wrote in 1912. Burroughs's arguments are thus as much an antiwar statement as they are a statement about the moral qualities of the human experience.

John's encounter with the Martians, the Warhoons, and the Zodangans demonstrate three nations who are obsessed with themselves, their own power, their own prestige, and their own appetites. Such is the case of many of the European nations and the Ottoman Empire on the dawn of World War I. John is stunned by how focused on war these nations are. Though John comes from America, a country renowned for its warrior



spirit, John's society is not primarily informed by war - it is informed by love, by loyalty, by tradition, with honor paid to war only in necessary situations. Americans fight for love, not out of love for fighting. This is what sets them apart.

The Martians, as such, cannot understand things like love or loyalty based on friendship since their society is Darwinian in the extreme; their survival, they believe, depends upon fighting. Yet, in their quest not only to survive, but to outdo other countries, they have forgotten about things like love and friendship. Because of this, they see things like love and friendship as weakness. It is why Sola is an outlier among her own people, of whom are suspicious of her. Indeed, Sola almost becomes something of a pariah based on her friendship with John.

In fact, love is held in such suspicion by the Martians (because love means loving someone other than the tribe, i.e., the state) that it is punishable by death. This involves romantic and familial love. Sola's own mother was brutally killed for daring to love another Martian rather than simply mating with him, and for daring to raise her own child. Yet, because of this, Sola is able to bond with John through friendship, and their loyalty toward one another helps them to escape and survive punishment at the hands of the Martians. Love and friendship accomplish far more than war.

True love is worth fighting for, and is the greatest motivational force

True love is worth fighting for, and is the greatest motivational force, argues Edgar Rice Burroughs in his novel *A Princess of Mars*. In keeping with the previous theme (that there are things other than brutality and war in life that are important), love is expounded upon primarily through the character and actions of John Carter. It is John's love for Dejah that propels him forward through the novel.

When John arrives on Mars, he does what he does to survive, to explore, and to adventure. Yet, when he meets and gets to know Dejah, his world is transformed. He quickly falls in love with her. All he wants is to be near her, to make her happy, to protect her, and to free her. Indeed, he even comes to want her to love him as well, though this cannot happen yet according to Martian custom. Only later in the novel, at the proper time, can Dejah return John's love.

John's primary focus in the novel, therefore, becomes Dejah. Everything he does, he does for her – from defending her escape to fighting in the arena to disguising himself to interfering with international politics – all in order to find, rescue, and marry Dejah. John's love proves to be a far more powerful force than war itself. As noted previously, John, an American, fights so well not because he loves to fight, but because he fights for love.

Elsewhere in the novel, love can be seen in other places and in other ways. Dejah's fellow humans take love seriously. Dejah's father is so overcome with Dejah's return that he weeps and cannot bring himself to actually speak thanks to John because he is



so happy. Tars harbors a grudge against the Martian ruler for killing his own true love so many years before, and because of this long lost love, Tars succeeds in killing the leader and taking command of the Martians, himself.

Even different races and kinds of beings have more in common than they have differences

Even different races and kinds of beings have more in common than they have differences, argues Edgar Rice Burroughs in his novel *A Princess of Mars*. Burroughs makes this argument on the eve of World War I, as the war is less than two years away from breaking out. Burroughs has seen the march toward war in Europe, as people of the West – who have so much more in common than their borders, nationalities, and personal societies might have them believe otherwise – are poised to kill one another.

When John arrives on Mars, he is at first struck by the similar landscape of Arizona, and by the creatures of the planet – including animals similar to horses, dogs, and elephants. When encountering his first green Martians, John is struck by their physically dissimilar appearances, their different language, and their very warlike nature. Yet, John discovers he does have many things in common with the Martians – such as a fierce respect for his own people. He also discovers that not all Martians are heartless. He discovers kindness and tenderness in common with Sola.

Among the human inhabitants of Mars, John discovers familiar physical appearances and feelings. Love is common among the people of the human civilizations, both romantic and familial love. Although they do have different customs from John and other races relating to things like love and marriage, John realizes that even the humans and the Martians have much more in common than they might otherwise imagine. They have to stave off threats from truly vile people like the Zodangans and the Warhoon. They have much to gain from friendship, and nothing to gain from war.

At the same time, all races of the world of Mars have a vested interest in Mars remaining hospitable to life. Though often at war with one another, the nations of Mars have an unspoken code that the atmospheric factories will never be used politically or combatively, for the life of everyone on Mars depends upon these facilities. John's urging of alliances and friendship helps ensure the safety of the factories, while also encouraging friendly dealings between civilizations for use and tending to of natural resources. Again, they have much to gain from friendship, and nothing to gain from war. This is Burroughs's warning for Europe.

Styles

Point of View

Edgar Rice Burroughs tells his novel *A Princess of Mars* in the first-person reflective omniscient perspective, from the point of view of main character and principal protagonist, John Carter. Because the novel takes the form of a manuscript in which John Carter details his personal experiences on Mars, it is only natural that the novel be told from the perspective of John Carter in the first-person point of view. Because John is writing decades after the experiences contained in the manuscript, he is able to provide important contextual details, often interrupting the narrative to do so. This helps give the reader a better sense of events, and a better understanding of the world in which John finds himself. At the same time, the reflective perspective of the narration – in which John references events long past – is only natural given the fact that the experiences recorded by John happened a long time ago, and he now reflects on them in the present day. For example, the narrative mode of the novel is on clear display when John assesses his having arrived on Mars: “I opened my eyes upon a strange and weird landscape. I knew that I was on Mars; not once did I question my sanity or my wakefulness... You do not question the fact; neither did I” (20).

Language and Meaning

Edgar Rice Burroughs tells his novel *A Princess of Mars* in language that is formal and generalized. The novel is meant to be in the great tradition of adventure and science fiction novels of the original age of such stories – such as the mid-to-late 1800s when Jules Verne was writing books like *Journey to the Center of the Earth* and *From the Earth to the Moon*. The formal nature of the writing is reflective of this era of writing, as well as the generalizations necessary to advance the plot of a story. Details were only ever dealt with when absolutely necessary. The language of the book is also reflective of how John, now aged and wise in his years, writes the manuscript as a wealthy retiree who is well-educated. It only makes sense the language he uses be both formal and reflective. Finally, *A Princess of Mars* was originally published serially in magazines. For the sake of space constraints, unnecessary details had to be dispensed with, hence the very generalized descriptions of certain things, such as battles.

Structure

Edgar Rice Burroughs presents his novel *A Princess of Mars* as though it as an unpublished manuscript written by his uncle, John Carter. In a foreword, Burroughs explains John did not intend the manuscript to be published until long after his death, and that what follows is the manuscript as his uncle wrote it to be. The novel is then divided into 28 consecutive, linear, and chronological chapters, numbered from one to 28, and each bearing a title denoting events in that particular chapter. This is reflective



of the tradition of writers like Jules Verne, and the standard practices of writing novels at the time at which writers like Jules Verne wrote, but also helps to orient the reader to the events of the novel as they unfold. This helps create a clear and concise reading experience, which is in turn also reflective of the fact that the novel was originally published serially: to keep readers on track, and to help orient them to events between serializations, chapter titles as well as numbers were immensely important.



Quotes

I have never told this story, nor shall mortal man see this manuscript until after I have passed for eternity.

-- John Carter (Chapter 1)

Importance: In writing his manuscript about his Martian adventures, John Carter admits that much of what the reader is about to read will seem unbelievable. As such, he refuses to have it published until after his death in order to avoid being mocked and challenged in the public square while still alive. The manuscript becomes something of a last testament, speaking for John after John dies.

I opened my eyes upon a strange and weird landscape. I knew that I was on Mars; not once did I question my sanity or my wakefulness... You do not question the fact; neither did I.

-- John Carter (Chapter 3)

Importance: After escaping a horde of Apache Indians, John Carter nearly passes out in a cave. He has an out-of-body experience where he leaves the cave and heads outside to look at Mars. He closes his eyes, raises his hands toward the planet, and then when he opens his eyes, he is suddenly on the planet itself. John recognizes this at once, and though he cannot explain it, it remains true.

I have ever been prone to seek adventure and to investigate and experiment where wiser men would have left well enough alone."

-- John Carter (Chapter 5)

Importance: John explains here that much of the trouble he gets himself into is because he is naturally very curious, and eager to learn more by pushing boundaries. By testing boundaries, John's Martian dog is very nearly killed until Tars and Sola intervene to help them against a group of ape-like creatures.

A people without written language, without art, without homes, without love; the victim of eons of the horrible community idea. Owning everything in common, you own nothing in common... You hate each other as you hate all else except yourselves.

-- Dejah (Chapter 10)

Importance: When the Martians confront Dejah after taking her prisoner, they ask about who she is and what she was doing so close to the deserted Martian city. Dejah not only explains this, but goes on to offer a gentle critique of the Martian civilization that mirrors Communism. The Martian civilization, like Communism had been, is a corrupt, decaying system that does immense harm not only to others, but to itself. Rather than working together with the rest of the planet, the Martians choose war.

I shall have to believe even though I cannot understand.

-- Dejah (Chapter 11)



Importance: When speaking with John, Dejah is stunned to learn he is from Earth. She cannot understand how this is possible, but says she must believe it. Her statement is reflective of a theme in the overall novel, in which not everything can be easily explained, or even explained at all. Such is the case in science fiction, and such is the case in *A Princess of Mars*.

Your position is a peculiar one.
-- Lorquas Ptomel (Chapter 12)

Importance: Here, Lorquas comments on the strange place John occupies in the Martian tribe. He is a prisoner, but he has power; he is an alien, yet he is a Tarkan chieftain; he is small but he has killed a larger Martian. John defies everything the Martians are, but is accepted among them. John cannot be killed outright, but is not free to be able to escape Martian justice. John uses this paradox of circumstance to motivate him to wanting to escape.

I loved Dejah Thoris.
-- John Carter (Chapter 12)

Importance: As John and Dejah get to know one another, he realizes he has fallen in love with her. He is struck by how quickly it has happened, but is not surprised because love is so valued on Earth. John's actions through the rest of the novel will be focused around keeping Dejah safe, and doing all he can to protect her.

I am glad that you have so decided.
-- Than Kosis (Chapter 22)

Importance: When Dejah is captured, Than Kosis offers her a deal: she can marry his son and save her home city of Helium, or she can refuse marriage and Helium will be destroyed. Dejah at last accepts the agreement, wanting her people and her city to be spared. This makes Thank Kosis very happy.

We are ruled by custom upon Barsoom.
-- Dejah (Chapter 22)

Importance: Even though Dejah is now bound to Sab Than by marriage engagement, John is still determined to make her his wife. John is determined to do whatever it takes. Dejah, however, says this is not possible as it is not the custom on Mars. Dejah rejects John's romantic advances, leaving him heartbroken.

It was not I who did it, it was love, love for Dejah Thoris, a power that would work greater miracles than this you have seen.
-- John Carter (Chapter 25)

Importance: When Dejah questions how John has managed to do so much – forming alliances, causing battles, saving cities, and rescuing her – John explains it is all very



simply. Everything he has done has been because of his love for Dejah. Here, Burroughs reaffirms his thematic argument that true love is worth fighting for, and that it is the greatest motivational force in the world.

He tried a dozen times to express his gratitude to me, but his voice choked with emotion and he could not speak...

-- John Carter (Chapter 26)

Importance: When John restores Dejah to her father, her father is absolutely overcome with happiness and emotion at her safe return. John realizes how much family means to the red Martians of Dejah's kind, and how important what he has done has been to the people of Helium. John and the Martians are welcomed among the Heliumites as friends and allies, signaling a new era on Mars.

I believe that they are waiting there for me, and something tells me that I shall soon know.

-- John Carter (Chapter 28)

Importance: As the novel comes to a close, John wonders if his final efforts on Mars managed to save the planet and its people from extinction. As John writes his manuscript, he believes he has indeed managed to save Mars, for he feels its call once again. He believes indeed that he will again see the people of Mars – and this sets things up for the second installment of Burroughs's Mars Trilogy.