

John Carter of Dell Comics

The Warlord of Mars was back on the comic book racks in the early Fifties when Dell adapted his opening trilogy of novels with art by Jessie Marsh in their Four Color series, where the long-running Tarzan series first debuted.

John Carter's first Dell appearance was in Four Color #375 in March-May 1952. "*The Prisoner of the Tharks*" adapts "*A Princess of Mars*" and opens fairly close to the original story with a mystical cave transporting John Carter to Mars. The time period of the opening scene is shifted from an Indian attack during post-Civil War to a modern battlefield, but it is never made clear if the setting is

World War II or the Korean Conflict, with the helmeted soldiers chasing him shown only in silhouette. After that, it is a straightforward adaptation until the end, when John Carter remains with Dejah Thoris at her home in Helium instead of being transported back to Earth.

As always, Marsh's storytelling was excellent and, having read the books first, I found his illustrations of the many bizarre Martian creatures to be very accurate, although the main characters seemed overdressed to an conspicuous degree, possibly as an editor's overreaction to Dejah Thoris' lack of clothing in novels.





John Carter returned in Dell Four Color #437 and "*The Black Pirates of Omean*." John Carter had remained on Mars at the end of the first comic, unlike in the book where he had been unwillingly teleported back to Earth. The second comic opens where *The Gods of Mars* that it adapts opens -- with John Carter having returned to Mars after an absence, but for comic readers that absence was never explained. This was not the only problem.

I have always been a huge fan of the screen coloring done during the archaic days of letterpress printing, and how these colorists often preformed wonders with a limited palette that still outshines much of modern computer coloring. The brilliant hues of the front and back covers are excellent examples of this, but that was not always the case with the interiors. Particularly in the third issue, I found the colors distracting and lacking in subtlety -- sometimes going to garish extremes. They tried something different in an attempt to convey an otherworldliness, and some might have liked it, but I was not one of them.

John Carter of Mars

The trilogy wrapped in August-October 1953 with Dell Four Color #488 and John Carter's battle with "*The Tyrant of the North*." The story opens when John Carter, Dejah Thoris, and Tars Tarkas have their journey home to Helium interrupted by an ambush from the Black Pirates of last issue.

Overall, these were daring adaptations of some of my all-time favorite novels. When you like the source material a lot, you hold the adaptations to a high standard. One of the things that I liked best about the Dell series was the cover below of Four-Color #488. Their painted covers always made Dell comics stand out from the other line drawn comics on the racks.



John Carter of Gold Key

Gold Key reprinted all three *John Carter of Mars* issues beginning in April of 1964 and concluding in October (#1 upper right, #2 lower left). Only #3 (lower right) had a cover not reprinted from the back of the Dells. I discussed in Volume 3 the many oversights by the Dell editors and how the *Tarzan* series improved after the Gold Key changeover. It must have been a coincidence, because in this instance Gold Key completely snarled the story by running the issues out of order.

Parts Two and Three were switched!

As flawed as the Gold Key reprints may be, both series command good prices on the collectors' market, with a high grade Near Mint copy of the first Dell John Carter currently guiding at \$700, and a Near Mint copy of the Gold Key #1 for \$100. The Dell #1 widened the gap by \$100 in just the last year, and a new edition of the annual price guide will be out by the time you read this.



House of Greystoke -- Part 2

The House of Greystoke was an imprint of the Burroughs Bibliophiles who, with Vern Coriell as editor, made a number of Tarzan reprints in the Sixties. They also did reprints of Burroughs' other creations. Some were significant.

Under the House of Greystoke imprint, *The Girl From Farris'* first edition hardcover was published by the Burroughs Bibliophiles in 1965. This edition included the nearly lost artwork from the newspaper serialization of the story (Volume 2 page 162).

The Efficiency Expert was another first edition 1966 (Volume 2 page 163).



David Innes of Pellucidar by John Coleman Burroughs in 1968 was a 60 page reprint of the *At the Earth's Core* from the Hi-Spot issue #2 (page 7), reproduced in greyscale.

John Carter of Mars by John Coleman Burroughs in 1970 (below) was a unique 16 & 1/2" x 10 & 1/4" size. This 78 page book collected all 72 of JCB's Sunday *John Carter of Mars* newspaper strips, which followed in sequence from his comic book run in the Funnies. Some of the newspapers carrying the half-page syndicated strip would at times drop the four colors down two. Here, the House of Greystoke went back to JCB's original art for

a black & white recreation, with a two-color black & red cover on the same textured mustard yellow paper as were their other books. This was a rare use of color by The House of Greystoke.

Another exception was the *Burroughs Bibliophile* #5 in 1971, which carries the circular label of *Burroughs Bulletin* #66/67/68. This 1971 reprint of the original Pulp publication of *The Master Mind of*



Mars was a 56 page self-covered (same paper used for the cover and interior) book with a color cover reproduction of the 1929 *Amazing Stories Annual* cover. Being a full-sized reprint of the original *bedsheets* (oversized) pulp, this was as good as amateur color reproduction got with the limited technology of the 1970s. The reprint was itself reprinted in 1977 as the *Burroughs Bulletin* #66/67/68 listed on the original cover, which was typical as the group often planned issues far in advance, some of which were never made. As technology evolved to put the power of a professional print shop into a box that fits onto your lap, the Burroughs Bibliophiles evolved their subsequent work into slick, professional looking magazines.

