Gulliver of Mars

Gulliver of Mars by Edwin L. Arnold is a science fiction novel in which Gulliver, after an extraordinary journey, is transported to Mars, where he encounters alien civilizations and navigates thrilling adventures on the red planet.

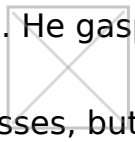


Chapter I - Gulliver of Mars

Chapter I begins not with triumph but with quiet discontent. The protagonist, Lieutenant Gulliver Jones, is weighed down by the burden of unrealized dreams and the ache of a love that never fully bloomed. Walking the rain-washed streets of New York, he drifts through alleyways as if the city itself has grown tired of offering him meaning. The night seems ordinary, dreary even, until his path crosses with a figure slumped in the shadows. This old man, clad in unfamiliar garb and cradling a thick, foreign-looking rug, seems displaced from time and place. Something in the old man's silence demands attention. The moment feels heavy, and Gulliver senses that this encounter is no accident.

Acting on instinct, he carries the dying man to the hospital. But by the time help arrives, life has already slipped away. Nothing remains but mystery—and that strange rug, humming with secrets of its own. Left in Gulliver’s care almost by fate, the rug feels like more than fabric. The patterns twist subtly when viewed from different angles, and the colors shift like a dream fading at dawn. Though the city sleeps on, something has changed. Gulliver now holds a fragment of another world in his hands. Its presence haunts him in ways he can't yet name.

That night, unable to sleep, he unfurls the rug across his floor. The bead the man dropped rolls silently beside it, pulsing with a soft light. Gulliver’s thoughts drift toward escape—escape from failure, from a lifeless career, from love unreturned. The rug, as if listening, begins to respond. The threads ripple without breeze. Symbols once dormant begin to glow. Gulliver touches one, and for a heartbeat, he feels his body pulled—not physically, but spiritually. A force, ancient and unknowable, tugs at the roots of his being. He gasps. The room narrows, spins, and settles.



The sensation passes, but not the yearning it awakens. Gulliver finds himself unable to let go of the rug. The hospital, the city, the routines—they all seem less real now. The bead, though small, hums with strange power. In it, he sees glimpses of landscapes that do not exist on Earth. Volcanoes shaped like thrones. Rivers that shimmer like glass. Faces that are beautiful and impossible. Gulliver laughs bitterly, brushing the visions away. Yet they return. Again and again.

He begins to question whether the rug is a hallucination born of despair, or an artifact of something far greater than he can imagine. Each night, he returns to it. Each night, the rug gives him more—more patterns, more warmth, more impossible dreams. And slowly, a quiet certainty grows. He has been chosen. Not by the government, not by lovers, not by fate as defined by Earth. But by something older, more playful, more dangerous.

Then one evening, as lightning cracks the sky and the city groans under a sudden storm, he places the bead at the rug’s center. The light flares. Wind rises from nowhere. Furniture trembles. He steps onto the fabric, not knowing why. A whisper—low and rhythmic—fills the room. It says nothing clearly, but the message is unmistakable: come. He closes his eyes. A deep silence falls. When he opens them, the world has changed.

He no longer stands in his apartment. Around him are red sands, a pale violet sky, and air that tastes both sharp and pure. He is no longer just Gulliver Jones, disillusioned officer of a stagnant post. He is a stranger on a strange world. His heart pounds with

fear and wonder. There is no turning back now. The rug has fulfilled its silent promise.

This opening chapter offers more than a prelude—it captures the precise moment where possibility is born from despair. For readers, Gulliver’s journey is a metaphor for every unspoken desire to break from monotony. His longing, his love, his failures—these become the very fuel for transformation. Adventure begins not in triumph, but in the aching space between who we are and who we might yet become. And in that space, anything—yes, even a Martian sunrise—can unfold.



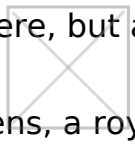
Chapter III - Gulliver of Mars

Chapter III begins with the protagonist regaining consciousness under Martian skies, greeted by An’s gentle teasing. Blaming his dizziness on a lack of local wine, An urges him to rise and explore the strange new world. The two begin their journey across the landscape, which gleams with canals and is dotted by radiant gardens filled with carefree Martians. The environment feels peaceful, even too serene, like a dream in motion. People engage in leisure rather than labor, their laughter echoing between the tall, delicate towers. There’s no urgency in their steps, only an elegant drift from one pleasure to the next. An’s way of teaching is by doing, not by lecturing.

As they walk, An offers little explanation and simply urges Gulliver to observe. There are no signs of hardship here. The people wear intricate clothes and seem to live without stress or schedules. An, though dressed differently in plain yellow, blends in quietly with others like him. Gulliver notices this contrast. Half the city appears vibrant and adorned, while others—like An—are less adorned, seemingly overlooked. His questions are met with silence or laughter. The Martians, it seems, avoid deep conversation. They simply live, and expect others to do the same. But the silence hides something more complex.

The canal system that threads through the land is more than decorative; it supports life, beauty, and travel. As the pair board a long, slender craft, the city grows closer with every gentle stroke. Crowds gather, not to labor or protest, but to simply exist and observe. Gulliver draws eyes as they pass, his unfamiliar appearance sparking curiosity among the Martians. To them, he is a walking novelty. But as they look, he realizes these glances aren’t hostile—they’re fascinated, even quietly delighted. His presence is like a ripple in their still waters.

An begins to explain his own place in Martian society, his words careful yet open. The yellow robe marks him as part of a group once revered, now relegated to service. These individuals, once spiritual guides, had imitated aspects of the opposite sex in their rituals. Over time, misunderstanding turned reverence into disdain. Now they serve but are denied affection, family, or standing. Gulliver listens with growing discomfort. Martian society, for all its grace, is marked by division and subtle cruelty. There’s beauty here, but also deep inequality.



As the canal widens, a royal procession appears—barges draped in silks, golden pennants fluttering. At the center is Hath, the ruler of Mars, carried in elegance. Gulliver, enthralled, steps closer. But it is not Hath who draws his focus—it is Princess Heru, radiant and still, seated like a figure from myth. The boat glides past, but a sudden jolt causes a tree limb to strike. Heru tumbles into the water. Without pause, Gulliver dives in, pulling her from the depths with steady arms.

The crowd’s gasp turns to cheers. His action, spontaneous and brave, has pierced through a world used to quiet observation. Heru, drenched and silent, clutches his arm with an expression that says more than thanks. Martians may not speak of affection, but this moment speaks loudly. Gulliver is not just a visitor now. He has acted. He has changed something. And the people, despite their detachment, recognize it.

The rescue alters the mood. Gulliver is invited aboard the royal barge, and suddenly finds himself among silk-draped seats and curious nobles. The warmth from Heru’s hand still lingers. But their interaction isn’t prolonged. Martian customs quickly reassert themselves. Hath speaks not of gratitude but of fate. A lottery system, he explains, determines all marital unions. It’s simple, efficient, and leaves no room for choice. Gulliver recoils inwardly at the thought. The very idea erases love and individuality.

As the city unfolds in greater detail, Gulliver senses a contradiction. The Martians worship ease, yet maintain rigid customs. They avoid suffering, yet quietly inflict it through tradition. Beneath the calm, a quiet struggle continues—a culture too proud to

admit its flaws. Gulliver is caught between admiration and discomfort. He sees beauty but also feels the weight of absence. Their world is peaceful, but not free.

Later that day, in a quiet garden, Heru walks near him again. Their conversation is light but charged. She speaks carefully, as if watching every word. Gulliver tries to find meaning in her expressions. He begins to sense that Heru, too, may be quietly questioning the system that governs her life. Though Martians speak little of rebellion, perhaps not all have forgotten the power of choice.



This chapter does more than push the narrative forward. It exposes readers to the complexities beneath Martian elegance. Gulliver’s presence acts as a catalyst, nudging against long-held beliefs. His instincts—to act, to question, to care—represent a contrast that quietly stirs those around him. Mars may be still on the surface, but its depths are beginning to shift. Through one bold act, Gulliver has stepped into a future no longer controlled by chance.

Chapter IV - Gulliver of Mars

Chapter IV – *Gulliver of Mars* begins with a moment of stillness. The protagonist wakes in an elegant Martian chamber, surrounded by silence and strange luxury. As he steps out onto a high terrace, he takes in the vivid colors of sunrise spilling over a city unlike any he’s known. Below, people gather for food in a spectacle of shared ease, but the labor is clearly managed by a distinct group in yellow attire. These slaves, quiet and efficient, form the backbone of a culture that has otherwise surrendered to comfort. There’s no rush, no conflict, only a sense of timeless leisure. It is a life without urgency.

Soon, his friend An appears, bright and welcoming. The government, An explains, is prepared to support Gulliver however he wishes. Politely but firmly, Gulliver declines. He senses that real living means more than resting in comfort provided by others. He craves purpose, not pampering. The ease of Martian life, though tempting, carries an undercurrent of numbness. Their help would come with quiet submission, and that does not suit his nature. He chooses freedom over assistance, even if it means uncertainty.

An invites him to breakfast, offering both food and insight into Martian society. As they walk the streets, Gulliver is entranced by the architecture—grand yet peaceful, aged yet pristine. The people drift about like dreams, enjoying the day without obligation or effort. In time, An explains the culture more deeply. There is no money, no trade, no personal ambition. Martians do not marry or raise families. Children belong to the community, not to parents. Everything is shared, including affection. This collective way of life is designed to eliminate conflict. But it also dulls the spirit.

The narrator listens, fascinated but uneasy. He admires the harmony but senses its cost. Without ownership, without aspiration, what drives a person forward? He wonders

if this culture, for all its beauty, has sacrificed growth for peace. An then reveals their deepest fear—invaders from the West. Long ago, these strangers brought ruin. Now, a tribute is sent to prevent more destruction. A girl, a ship, supplies—all offered quietly. It’s survival by surrender, safety through silence. Gulliver is shocked. Resistance, he argues, is better than submission. But An only smiles and says their people prefer peace at any price.

Inwardly, the protagonist cannot accept it. Martians live long, maybe forever, but seem to have lost the will to shape their destiny. Their history is written in stone, their future left untouched. Yet even in this world, there’s something stirring—small flickers of longing. As he walks among them, he sees that not all eyes are empty. The beauty of the city cannot fully mask what has been lost. Without conflict, perhaps they have also lost joy.

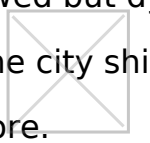
Later in the day, he explores more of the city on his own. He sees laughter, love, and calmness, but always with a strange detachment. Romance exists but is shallow, passing like clouds. No bonds form. No commitments hold. Everything is temporary. This unsettles him. It’s not just that the customs are different—it’s that nothing seems to matter for long. Time flows, but nothing leaves a mark. Even the people speak of love like a hobby, not a life-changing force.

Searching for some form of emotional connection, the narrator asks An for a drink that can soften the sharp edge of his longing. What he receives is a Martian wine that alters mood. Upon sipping, he is filled with soaring happiness. He laughs uncontrollably, dancing with strangers, forgetting for a moment the ache of his isolation. The euphoria is total, like sunlight in liquid form. But just as quickly, a second drink is offered—a sobering draught that brings him gently back. The high fades, and he’s left reflective, aware of how thin the line is between joy and illusion.

This interaction reveals something vital about Martian life. Emotions, like everything else, are controlled, moderated, dosed. Even feelings are regulated by custom and potion. Yet Gulliver sees the danger in too much ease. It can become a prison made of

silk. He begins to understand why the Martians fear conflict—they have built a paradise too fragile to withstand it. But without struggle, there can be no real triumph.

By the end of the chapter, Gulliver stands at a crossroads—not in location, but in mindset. Mars is seductive in its peace, but peace without purpose feels hollow. The people may have conquered time, but at the cost of forgetting passion. And he, a visitor from a flawed but dynamic world, cannot help but see both the splendor and the sorrow in that. The city shines under a still sky, and yet he walks with questions heavier than before.



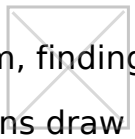
Chapter V - Gulliver of Mars

Chapter V – *Gulliver of Mars* opens with a moment of quiet awakening as the protagonist regains consciousness under the unfamiliar Martian sky. He finds himself beside An, his companion, and the two continue exploring this alien terrain where everything seems both ancient and dreamlike. Not long after, they arrive at a vibrant festival, where local Martians participate in games and theatrical displays. The air is filled with excitement, and though the customs appear strange to his Earthly eyes, the protagonist is compelled to join. He demonstrates his skill in javelin-throwing, stunning onlookers by striking down a figure believed to be invincible. The feat earns him admiration and sets him apart in a society that rarely experiences surprise.

As the festivities continue, a sense of quiet pride fills him. Yet there's also isolation in standing out so boldly in a world he barely understands. After parting ways with An, he journeys further and begins to encounter Martians in a more personal light. Conversations become warmer, and gestures of hospitality begin to emerge. He is welcomed into homes and treated with a friendly curiosity that softens the alien nature of his surroundings. The people seem gentle, though their habits and symbols remain mysterious. For the first time, he starts to feel not entirely alone.

A turning point comes when he is invited to attend an important cultural event—Princess Heru’s ritualistic reading of the year’s fate. Heru, already a figure of growing importance to him, is at the center of this enigmatic tradition. The ceremony takes place in a hall designed to channel elegance and solemnity, reflecting how deeply the Martians value this occasion. Heru’s dance, slow and otherworldly, seems to draw energy from the space itself. At its climax, a globe of water reveals swirling lights, casting strange patterns that eventually bleed into an ominous red glow. Gasps echo through the hall. The Martian crowd falls silent.

The red hue signifies doom—a prophecy that speaks to an entire year of misfortune. Heru, visibly shaken, is overcome by fear and grief, her composure lost. The crowd remains still, paralyzed by belief in the globe’s power. It is here that the protagonist breaks form. He rushes to her side, ignoring ceremony and custom, and lifts her away from the pedestal. This is more than an act of protection; it’s a challenge to Martian fatalism. In his world, a future is shaped, not surrendered to.



Heru clings to him, finding solace in his refusal to accept what the Martians view as destiny. His actions draw astonished glances, but no one stops him. Martian etiquette may demand stillness in the face of prophecy, but he defies that passivity. In rescuing Heru, he places himself firmly at odds with a society that treasures calm acceptance over emotional intervention. And yet, something shifts. There’s a flicker of admiration in a few eyes. His defiance is unfamiliar but not entirely unwelcomed.

The ceremony leaves Heru haunted by visions she cannot explain, and in the quiet afterward, she speaks to him in hushed tones. Her words reveal the emotional cost of the prophecy, not just for her but for a people who expect no control over their fates. For Gulliver, it becomes clear that Martian wisdom may be deep, but it is also bound by superstition. He begins to question whether eternal youth and elegance are worth such spiritual stagnation. In Earth’s flawed world, there is movement—chaos, yes—but also freedom. And now he sees how deeply he values that.

This chapter serves as a metaphor for the tension between emotional courage and cultural constraint. His bravery is not rooted in violence or dominance but in care—an urge to act where others have resigned. It reveals the quiet power of empathy and defiance in a world that masks apathy as grace. For readers, it’s a reminder that the most courageous acts are sometimes the simplest: offering a hand when everyone else stands still. It’s this very difference that makes him more than a visitor—he is now a force capable of reshaping the world around him.

Heru's connection with Gulliver deepens after the ceremony, subtly shifting the dynamic between them. She begins to see in him a truth that her own people no

longer embrace: the ability to question what is sacred. Their bond is no longer one of flirtation but shared vision. Though no words declare it, the affection is understood. Heru, once a passive symbol of beauty and ritual, now becomes a partner in uncertainty. Together, they represent something rare on Mars—unpredictability, hope, and resistance to despair.

By chapter’s end, Gulliver is no longer only a man caught between two worlds. He is a catalyst, a reminder that traditions must sometimes be questioned to regain meaning. His rescue of Heru isn’t just a romantic gesture—it’s a philosophical stance. Mars, with all its elegance and stillness, has never seen such bold sincerity. And in that moment, he becomes more than a guest—he becomes a story the Martians will remember.

Chapter VI - Gulliver of Mars

Chapter VI invites readers into a quiet but profound turning point as the protagonist contemplates his place on a world that dazzles yet alienates him. After the intense spectacle of a magical incident, he is left adrift in a place that seems both dreamlike and indifferent. The grandeur of the Martian palace offers no comfort, only a reminder of what he’s lost. Mars, for all its elegance, feels lifeless without warmth or meaning. The people, beautiful and eternal, seem untouched by emotion. He longs for Earth’s imperfections—the noise, the flaws, the realness.

Haunted by this emptiness, he seeks Hath, a figure known for intellect and reason. What he finds instead is a man reduced to drunken ramblings in a dusty library filled with forgotten volumes. The image is symbolic—a place once meant to enlighten has become a shell. It mirrors Gulliver’s inner state. There’s knowledge everywhere, yet so little understanding. When Heru appears, her presence breaks the stillness. She’s not just a romantic interest; she’s a beacon of something living and present. Her candid offer to be his guide in place of books is more than flirtation—it’s a subtle challenge to embrace what’s immediate.

Even as he’s drawn to Heru, Gulliver cannot abandon the allure of knowledge. They stumble upon a book said to hold divine truths, but it's been repurposed for a trivial use. This absurdity—the sacred turned mundane—hits hard. It reflects a society that has lost sight of its own legacy. With Heru by his side, he begins reading. The book speaks of ancient light, cosmic origins, and civilizations beyond imagination. These are not stories but glimpses of something primal and vast. Yet even as the words fascinate, the damage to the pages keeps truth just out of reach.

Their reading session becomes a metaphor for every human search for meaning—driven by longing, disrupted by limits. The Martian society may live forever,

but it has forgotten to ask questions. Heru, by engaging with the book, shows a rare spark of curiosity. Gulliver sees in her not only a companion but a rare exception to Martian indifference. His emotions deepen—not just as love but as shared wonder. Still, before any conclusion can be drawn from the text, they are interrupted. The cosmic truths they seek remain locked away, perhaps forever. That frustration lingers longer than the moment.

Though the secrets of the universe slip through his fingers, what remains is just as important—intimacy, connection, and shared awe. The chapter doesn’t resolve its mysteries, but it reframes the journey. Meaning is not only found in answers but also in the shared pursuit. The damaged book serves as both a literal and symbolic commentary: that even the greatest truths can be mishandled, forgotten, or distorted. Gulliver isn’t just seeking facts—he’s seeking purpose. And through Heru, he catches a glimpse of it. But purpose, like the book, is delicate and fleeting.

Mars remains hauntingly beautiful, and its people curiously empty, but Gulliver has changed. His loneliness has transformed into awareness. The alien world no longer simply bewilders him—it beckons him to engage, to care, to act. The wisdom he hoped to find in Hath and in dusty volumes now emerges through interaction and emotion. Even in an eternal society, meaning can erode without curiosity. Gulliver's Earth-born perspective becomes a mirror held up to a civilization that has forgotten how to wonder. It’s not divine secrets that matter most—it’s how people treat them.

In a subtle way, the chapter invites readers to reflect on our own world. What knowledge have we overlooked? What beauty have we normalized? Gulliver's longing is not just homesickness—it’s a hunger for sincerity in a world dulled by repetition. His encounter with the book is poignant because it mirrors the modern condition: flooded with information, yet starved for understanding. Even in a library of gods, the greatest wisdom may be how we choose to read, and who we choose to read with. Mars might be otherworldly, but its lessons strike close to home.

This chapter doesn’t close with triumph or tragedy. Instead, it lingers in a space between—an unresolved tension between knowing and feeling. Readers are left with

questions that matter more than answers: What is wisdom without love? What is eternity without curiosity? And most importantly, can the heart learn what the mind cannot?



Chapter VII - Gulliver of Mars

Chapter VII opens with a shift in the protagonist’s inner world as he begins to grasp the surreal rhythm of life on Mars. Though initially disoriented by the foreign customs and lighthearted spirit of the Martians, a quiet admiration grows within him. Their culture, carefree and untouched by age or death, contrasts deeply with Earth’s grave outlook. It’s not just fascination; there’s a creeping sense of loss for his former reality. But the Martians’ playful way of living gradually softens this dissonance. He’s no longer just a visitor but someone beginning to feel the emotional weight of belonging.

This adjustment is mirrored in his deepening bond with Heru, whose presence stirs emotions he thought he had left behind on Earth. Her serene beauty and quiet strength make the foreign setting feel warmer, more intimate. When he’s invited to witness a local marriage ritual, he’s amused by the randomness—partners decided by drawing lots. What should be absurd becomes enchanting, especially when Heru is involved. There’s an unspoken tension between fate and desire that makes every moment with her feel precious. Despite the surface charm, he starts to question whether their customs hide deeper meanings.

The plot thickens when the ceremony is interrupted by ambassadors from a rival kingdom, altering the celebratory mood into one of uneasy diplomacy. These envoys, cold and commanding, are not just guests—they are threats cloaked in civility. Their request for tribute seems symbolic at first, until they demand Heru, the embodiment of Martian beauty. Her selection is not just an insult but an attack on the protagonist’s growing connection. A line is crossed. The choice is no longer about tradition—it’s personal.

Fuelled by courage and perhaps recklessness, the protagonist reacts with a mix of raw emotion and instinct. Despite being outnumbered and outmatched, he confronts the

alien delegation in a scene pulsing with tension and bravery. His actions may appear impulsive, but they’re rooted in a deepening sense of purpose. He’s no longer a drifting observer on this red planet. The clash is chaotic but symbolic; it shows how far he’s willing to go for something—or someone—that finally matters. Heru is not merely a Martian woman now; she is a symbol of his transformation.

After the confrontation, the protagonist becomes a figure of intrigue among the Martians. His defiance of custom stirs admiration and concern in equal measure. Martian society, while whimsical, clearly operates on rules he has now broken. The impact of his choice begins to unfold. What began as a romantic spark might now lead to unintended political consequences. Yet, his heart seems anchored. Heru remains his compass in a world that’s still very much unpredictable.

What makes this chapter rich is not just its action but its balance of internal and external conflict. The protagonist’s emotional evolution mirrors the chaos around him. He’s moved by forces larger than himself—love, honor, instinct—but also by quiet decisions that echo louder than his shouts. Even in a world of eternal youth and carefree customs, emotional gravity exists. Martians may not age, but they feel deeply. And the protagonist, though Earth-born, is starting to reflect that depth.

For readers, this chapter offers more than an alien tale—it touches on the timeless theme of confronting tradition with heart. It's a reminder that in every culture, love can defy rules, and courage often speaks in actions rather than words. There’s also an unspoken critique of blind adherence to customs, regardless of their charm or humor. The chapter invites readers to think: What happens when someone from outside a culture is the first to question it? In this case, the answer is messy, brave, and absolutely human.

By the chapter’s end, the protagonist is forever changed—not just by the atmosphere or the customs, but by his own decisions. His growing stake in Martian life signals a narrative turning point. No longer a traveler merely observing a strange world, he becomes part of its story. Readers are left wondering what other rules he will break, and at what cost. The emotional roots he’s planting will surely shape the path ahead.

As his bond with Heru deepens, so too does the complexity of the world around him.



Chapter VIII - Gulliver of Mars

Chapter VIII begins with the protagonist stirring from uneasy sleep, his head clouded by the wine and memories of a bizarre feast filled with unsettling visions. The lingering aroma of fruit and the ache of bruises confirm that the revelry was no mere dream. Heru’s face, once seen among candlelit laughter, now haunts his thoughts as he pieces together the truth. The remnants of joy have turned to dread as he realizes she may be in danger. The mood shifts quickly from hazy nostalgia to urgent concern. Driven by instinct and a growing sense of guilt, he hurries out to find her.

Outside, he meets Martians with vague answers and indifferent faces, telling him Heru was taken at daybreak. Anger bubbles inside him as he processes their apathy, unable to accept that no one had tried to stop it. He dresses swiftly, driven not just by duty but by something more primal—an unwillingness to let her slip away without a fight. When his call for help is met with silence, he heads for the harbor alone, unarmed but not unshaken. There’s no plan, only motion. His stride is fueled by desperation and the fading hope that she has not yet left.

The harbor teems with activity, but he finds her boat already leaving the shore, carried swiftly by the tide. Without hesitation, he leaps aboard, sword flashing as he confronts the abductors. His bravery is admirable, but the numbers are against him. Blades clang, voices rise, and chaos unfolds. In a moment of clarity, he spots Heru, her expression distant and fearful, before everything fades into blackness with the force of a club to his head. His strength may have failed him, but the resolve lingers even as consciousness slips away.

Waking on the open sea, he finds himself adrift on a floating heap of silk, the sun overhead and land distant on both sides. Pain throbs through his limbs, but he clings to awareness. The current is strong, dragging him to lands he does not know. With no

oars, no guidance, only the mercy of water and wind, he watches unfamiliar shores pass in silence. Nightfall nears, bringing with it a deeper chill—one born of fear, not weather. Just as hopelessness creeps in, something breaks the horizon.

A shape cuts across the water—graceful, strong, alive. A stag, foreign yet somehow majestic, swims in steady strokes toward the distant land. A spark ignites within him. Clutching strands of silk, he throws them toward the beast, hoping for connection rather than conquest. Miraculously, the fabric entangles in the creature’s limbs, linking their fates. The stag, alarmed but not aggressive, begins towing him, unaware of the burden it carries.

Dragged slowly to the shore, he feels the hard pulse of survival return. The creature does not falter, and the tide, for once, seems to help. The land becomes clearer, sharper in its form, promising either refuge or another trial. But this time, he does not approach it empty-handed—he carries hope born from chance and courage. The Martian world, strange and often cruel, has shown him that willpower matters more than weapons. Whether this shore brings danger or salvation is irrelevant. What matters is that he reaches it.

In this chapter, the narrative deepens its emotional scope by blending physical peril with internal reflection. Each scene reveals not just the alien beauty of Mars, but the very human qualities of fear, determination, and love. Though the path forward is uncertain, the protagonist’s ability to adapt—even in weakness—cements him as more than just a visitor. He has become a force within this world, not because of strength, but because he refuses to surrender. And in the unpredictable current of Martian fate, even a stag can be a lifeline.

Chapter IX - Gulliver of Mars

Chapter IX opens with the protagonist stepping into an alien wilderness shaped by murky lagoons, gnarled roots, and dense vegetation clinging to the edge of low, marshy islands. He finds no immediate signs of life, only the silence broken occasionally by the faint rustling of the underbrush. As dusk slips in, the forest’s shadows stretch wider, and the air becomes thick with unseen movement and ominous cries. Seeking a semblance of safety, he settles under a tree, trying to rest though each snap of a twig or stir of a leaf sends his imagination reeling. The solitude cuts deeper than fear; it makes the strange land feel even more unwelcoming. Yet beneath that fear lies a persistent drive—the memory of Heru and the obligation he carries. His exhaustion becomes a quiet companion, whispering that dawn may offer either new threats or much-needed direction.

During the night, heavy thuds echo nearby, making the ground beneath him vibrate. Whatever stalks the darkness is far larger than anything he has encountered before. The creature’s approach is slow and deliberate, suggesting awareness of his presence. Soon, another beast announces itself, not with a roar but with matching footsteps, and the two collide in a violent clash hidden by night. The sounds of tearing, shrieking, and crashing branches dominate the air, freezing him in place. What follows is a grim and primal battle, the victor left to devour the loser in a slow, grotesque ritual. He listens, helpless and transfixed, until the silence that follows is almost more disturbing than the fight itself. At no point does he dare move, hoping invisibility will shield him until morning.

By daylight, the scene is deceptively serene. The marsh glistens under the morning light, betraying no signs of the previous night’s horror. His hunger gnaws at him, and without provisions, the need to find food becomes urgent. Noticing a distant wisp of smoke curling upward from behind a cluster of trees, he walks toward it with caution.

There, he encounters a young woman sitting by the water’s edge, calmly cleaning her catch. She mistakes him for a spirit, reacting with awe and slight fear until he speaks. His explanation of his journey and condition wins her trust, and she shares her food—small roasted fish—and local knowledge in return.

Their exchange offers a brief reprieve from fear and uncertainty. She explains that others dwell nearby in a village not far upriver, reachable if he follows a shaded trail along the waterline. With gratitude and restored clarity, he absorbs every detail she provides, knowing that his time in this perilous region must be brief. The woman’s hospitality, though offered in modest form, is as valuable as any weapon or map. Her assistance reawakens his sense of purpose, pushing aside the unease from the night before. It reminds him that even in alien places, acts of kindness still persist. The reassurance strengthens his resolve and helps him mentally prepare for what lies ahead.

As he departs, he reflects on how quickly desperation can be lightened by a shared meal and kind word. The Martian landscape, while frightening, is not without moments of grace. That realization deepens his appreciation for the journey, even as it grows more dangerous. Walking away from the marsh and its monsters, he does not look back. What matters now is the path forward, the face of Heru still etched in his mind. Survival is no longer just about endurance—it has become a mission fueled by loyalty and conviction. The next village may hold allies or traps, but he will greet it with open eyes and steady feet, hardened by the night’s terrors and humbled by a stranger’s generosity.

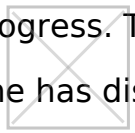
Chapter X - Gulliver of Mars

Chapter X begins with a sense of quiet resolve as the protagonist journeys deeper into Martian territory, drawn by the mystery of its uncharted wilderness. His curiosity, tempered by the need to understand this world, pushes him forward through vivid landscapes unlike anything seen on Earth. Vegetation pulses with strange colors and movements, almost sentient in its reactions to the environment. Some plants shimmer with iridescent leaves, while others retract or hiss when disturbed, making it clear that beauty here does not guarantee safety. These peculiar features, while enchanting, suggest a constant tension between awe and danger, as if nature itself is observing him. As the forest deepens, the trail becomes harder to follow, yet he presses on, compelled by both instinct and purpose. Time seems to bend as he loses himself among the thick foliage, the lines between reality and illusion beginning to blur in the Martian undergrowth.

Emerging from the tangled greenery, he stumbles upon a tranquil fishing village set beside a serene bay. The contrast is immediate—where the forest was alive with unknowns, the village feels safe and still, grounded in simple rhythms of life. Here, he observes the locals crafting boats not from wood or metal, but by nurturing massive gourds, coaxing them into the right shapes over time. The process, both biological and artistic, seems at once ancient and futuristic, revealing the Martians’ deep connection to their environment. These boats are flawless in form, shaped without tools or joints, gliding over water as though born to it. The protagonist is struck by the idea that progress does not always mean force or conquest; here, it means patience, respect, and adaptation. Every detail—from their construction to the way they are used—reflects a people who do not command nature but live within its design.

As the evening settles, he shares meals with the villagers, each course built around seasonal ingredients prepared communally. Conversation flows without hierarchy, and

laughter is shared freely, unaffected by suspicion or ambition. Their society, though simple in material terms, is rich in cohesion, where each individual’s joy and burden seem shared. Children learn by watching, not by compulsion, and elders lead by wisdom, not decree. This harmony disorients the protagonist, who is used to the busyness and structure of Earth. He begins to question whether complexity is always an improvement or if, somewhere along the way, humanity on Earth may have traded connection for progress. This realization sits heavily as he considers his next steps, unsure whether he has discovered a new world or rediscovered something forgotten.



As the night deepens, the gentle sounds of Martian life replace the silence of the forest, grounding the protagonist in a moment of rare stillness. He finds himself contemplating how cultures grow differently based on what they value—on Mars, simplicity has led to balance, not stagnation. The boats, the meals, the laughter all suggest a civilization content in its rhythm, not hungry for more but devoted to what it has. In contrast, Earth’s hunger often breeds dissatisfaction, chasing more without enjoying the present. The protagonist does not reject his origin, but the contrast opens his mind to new questions. What defines a civilization's success—its reach, its knowledge, or its peace? His time in the village doesn't provide answers, but it gifts him perspective, a new lens through which to view both Mars and Earth.

By morning, the forest path calls again, and the protagonist must continue his journey. He leaves with supplies and quiet farewells, feeling changed by the kindness of strangers and the lessons drawn from a world so different, yet strangely familiar. The gourd boats bob quietly behind him, silent reminders of nature's patience and potential. In those final glances back, something intangible lingers—not just gratitude, but a seed of understanding that may only bloom when his journey ends. Mars, in its quiet way, teaches without preaching, revealing truths through experience rather than doctrine. As he walks away, the wind carries with it not just sand and scent, but questions that will shape the rest of his quest.

Chapter XI - Gulliver of Mars

Chapter XI brings a shift in mood as Gulliver’s quest to find Heru takes him into unfamiliar and perilous territory. His departure is marked by an undertone of sadness despite a playful farewell with his companions. Alone in a sea canoe, he relies on a meager stock of cakes and water, unsure of the exact direction but certain of his intent. As the Martian current tugs him northward, he fails to notice he’s bypassing the intended route, eventually veering into a place entirely unlike the familiar warmth of his earlier adventures. This stark, colorless region feels abandoned by life, its stillness pierced only by distant cries from unseen creatures. The eerie silence begins to weigh on his thoughts, casting doubt on both his path and his purpose. The landscape’s lifeless nature makes it seem as though the planet itself has drawn a veil between him and salvation.

The journey soon takes a darker, almost spiritual turn as Gulliver is caught in a chilling procession drifting along the water. These are not travelers, but Martians in death—motionless and dressed in ceremonial grace, with one boat carrying a royal-looking woman whose face remains composed in eternal sleep. The sight is both surreal and tragic, a solemn passage of souls guided not by oars but by a current that seems to know its final destination. The river, called the River of the Dead in fearful whispers, begins to reveal its purpose. Gulliver’s horror intensifies when he realizes his canoe is being swept into the same flow. Though panic rises, a strange calm settles as he watches these frozen passengers surrender to fate. It's a scene painted not with drama but with quiet resignation, a vision of the Martian philosophy toward life’s end.

In a last burst of resolve, Gulliver attempts to steer his craft away from the relentless pull of the current, but the water resists. The effort only brings him closer to danger as towering cliffs and frothy falls loom ahead, threatening to drag him over the edge with the dead. Scrambling with what strength remains, he manages to beach the canoe

onto a narrow ledge, barely escaping certain doom. The brief relief he feels is quickly tempered by the freezing mist and haunting silence that surrounds him. With nowhere else to go, he climbs the slope above, hoping for shelter or guidance. What he finds instead is a cavern of ice that opens up like a shrine—an enormous natural archive where centuries of Martian figures remain suspended in death. These are not statues, but real beings, their lives frozen at the moment of passing.



Each face in the ice holds a story—some peaceful, others contorted in anguish. Together, they form a mosaic of a civilization that reveres the stillness after life as much as its fleeting moments. Gulliver stands among them, humbled, grasping that Martians don’t just die—they are remembered in the very fabric of their land. The wind that howls through the cave doesn’t just chill the skin; it whispers of legacies, traditions, and forgotten kings. In that frozen cathedral, time stands still. For the first time, Gulliver is not thinking of rescue or Heru, but of meaning—what it is to live, to be remembered, and to vanish with dignity. The solemn atmosphere doesn't offer fear, but reflection.

By morning, the sky remains dim and no clear path presents itself. Food is scarce, the cold intensifies, and the strange calm of the frozen crypt begins to weigh heavily on his spirit. He knows he cannot remain in this place without becoming part of it. Gulliver’s determination reignites as he resolves to find a way forward—not just to save Heru, but to escape becoming a relic like those surrounding him. Mars has shown him much, but it is not done testing him. His feet press forward even though the way remains uncertain, for surrendering here would mean being etched forever into the walls of an alien past.

Chapter XII - Gulliver of Mars

Chapter XII begins with a haunting stillness that blankets the icy Martian landscape. Gulliver, stranded in this frozen terrain, struggles to survive the biting cold by building a modest fire, unaware that his small flame will awaken more than just warmth. Nearby, encased in a sheet of ancient ice, rests a towering figure clad in regal grey, a circlet of gold bearing strange markings fixed around his head. Though motionless, the figure evokes a presence of immense dignity, as if royal authority had been paused mid-reign. Gulliver, both afraid and intrigued, draws closer, wondering what fate could have sealed such a being in ice. As the fire grows, so too does the tension, until the frozen shell cracks, unleashing an unexpected confrontation. Instinctively, Gulliver battles the icy figure, only to find himself wrestling not a ghost, but a thawing corpse—a relic of another time.

The encounter with the ancient body leaves Gulliver shaken yet fascinated. What history might this frozen noble have witnessed? What stories had been lost with his voice? These questions linger as dawn breaks over the desolate plateau. Hunger soon reclaims Gulliver’s focus, driving him to search the area for sustenance or a path forward. To his surprise, an elderly Martian emerges, collecting shining stones among the icy rubble. Initially frightened, the man assumes Gulliver to be a spirit, pale and out of place in this remote wasteland. Their meeting is cautious but turns cordial after Gulliver proves, through laughter and hunger, that he is very much alive and in need of help. The old man, hardened by solitude, shares his simple provisions—dried root cakes and mineral water—with surprising generosity.

Conversation reveals the woodsman’s strange occupation: he gathers gems flushed out from the ice cliffs by the melting process, remnants of ancient disasters that buried nobles and priests long ago. Gulliver is both awed and unnerved by the thought that so many powerful beings lie entombed beneath his feet, their treasures now scavenged

by wanderers. Yet, even in the face of potential riches, Gulliver's thoughts return to his goal—reaching the Martian capital and completing his mission. He offers his share of gemstones as payment for safe passage and information. The old man, moved more by purpose than by wealth, agrees to lead him through an ancient passageway. The route, seldom traveled, is said to cut through the heart of the glacier—a narrow trail filled with frozen remnants of Martian history.

Their journey through the icy fissure is grim and awe-inspiring. Towering walls of frost encase rows of long-dead figures, some noble, others monstrous, each one preserved in eternal silence. Their faces, still contorted with emotion, suggest moments of desperation or ritual long forgotten. The cold bites deeper as the trail winds further, light dwindling with each step. Gulliver feels both honored and haunted to walk among such relics. These Martians, once vibrant with ambition or faith, now stand frozen as silent witnesses to a world that moved on without them. It is a reminder of the fragility of both time and power, and how even empires are subject to nature's quiet claim.

The final stretch brings a faint glow, a soft golden hue that signals the end of the tunnel. Both travelers press forward, hearts lifted by the promise of sunlight and warmth. Emerging into a rocky valley fringed by firs and red moss, Gulliver inhales deeply, savoring the return of life’s simple pleasures. Behind him, the ice groans softly, as if whispering farewells from its eternal guardians. Ahead lies uncertainty, but also purpose. The protagonist’s resolve is sharpened, tempered by what he has seen. He now knows that his journey is more than personal—it is part of a story that began long before his arrival. Mars, in all its wonder and danger, has accepted him as a fleeting guest, and he intends to leave a mark worth remembering.

Chapter XIII - Gulliver of Mars

Chapter XIII opens as Gulliver descends from the icy highlands into a world both familiar and starkly different. The land is rough, clothed in pines and dark foliage that recall Earth’s primeval forests, though everything here feels exaggerated, as if nature on Mars is more ancient and more deliberate. Small villages dot the terrain, their people weathered but welcoming in a cautious way. Here, society values clarity and identity, so introductions matter more than in the ceremonial courts of the richer lands. Gulliver is cleverly presented as a mystical figure, which buys not only safety but an odd kind of admiration. Though skeptical, the villagers treat him with a blend of respect and superstition, allowing him to observe and move freely among them. Their sincerity provides a quiet comfort that stands in contrast to the layered flattery and veiled intentions he has recently left behind in Martian courts.

In the fishermen’s village by the shore, simplicity reigns. Daily routines are grounded in necessity—nets, boats, salted catch—and every person contributes to the survival of the whole. Gulliver watches with curiosity as men mend sails and women dry fish, their lives deeply tied to the rhythm of the tides and winds. There is no grandeur here, only a quiet strength formed through generations of endurance. The absence of luxury offers no discomfort; instead, it feels grounding, reminding him of Earth’s rural edges where dignity lies in labor. As night falls, fires flicker near the docks, and local elders share stories, some of sea serpents, others of travelers from beyond the stars. These tales, half believed, blur folklore with possible truths, as Gulliver realizes his own story may one day become part of this tapestry of myth and memory.

One tale particularly strikes him—of a man not from Mars, but claimed to have come from Venus, a brash wanderer who left behind confusion and insult rather than aid or wisdom. The villagers speak of this traveler with amused disdain, as though the cosmos itself has sent multiple guests, each shaped by their own homeworld's flaws.

Gulliver, hearing this, feels his own sense of mission sharpen. He does not want to be remembered as a distraction or a fool, but as someone who understood and respected the planet he was fortunate to walk upon. His journey, then, is no longer just about Heru or escape, but about discovering what it means to carry meaning from one world to another. With each new encounter, he understands the delicate balance between observing and impacting, between wandering and belonging.

As he continues inland, the natural world shifts once more. Among the scattered cliffs and moist ravines, new plant species appear—some striking, others haunting. One flower, vibrant and fragrant, releases a perfume so intoxicating it leaves a man dazed, vulnerable to its thorny trap. It’s both beautiful and deadly, an embodiment of desire with a cruel consequence. Another plant, barely a tree, turns to powder when touched, its golden bark disintegrating into pale dust that glitters in the air like pollen from a forgotten season. These moments linger in Gulliver’s mind, reminders that not all wonders are meant to be touched, and that on Mars, beauty may arrive with a cost. He begins to see that danger and elegance often walk together in this world.

Each step of his journey further strips away the naïve excitement with which he arrived, replacing it with a growing reverence for the unknown. The mysteries of Mars are not merely to be solved, but felt, endured, and contemplated. Here, time seems to stretch differently; his past on Earth is fading behind him, and his identity is reshaped by every village, creature, and strange wind. He no longer measures his value in Earthly accomplishments but in how deeply he understands the forces around him. And as his thoughts return again and again to Heru, the lines between personal longing and planetary wonder blur. Mars is no longer just a backdrop to adventure—it has become a living influence, silently guiding the shape of his transformation.

Chapter XIV - Gulliver of Mars

Chapter XIV begins with a tranquil moment of companionship as the protagonist, weary from his travels, accepts the hospitality of a Martian woodman whose simple generosity offers a welcome reprieve. The setting, a modest cabin near a quiet lagoon, is both alien and familiar, evoking the charm of a backwoods retreat with its fragrant tannin-rich air and rustic calm. As they sit down to a shared meal of toasted fruit and fish-seasoned bread, followed by pungent local ale, a bond is forged through conversation and shared humanity, even across the stars. Laughter echoes within the wooden walls, easing the burdens of an otherwise hazardous journey. These brief comforts, though alien in texture and taste, remind him of Earthly kinship found in simple rituals. The woodman’s easy manner belies a cautionary tone, however, as he recounts eerie tales of cursed lands, his weathered voice dropping when he warns against wandering paths tied to ancient sorrow.

Morning finds the protagonist determined yet distracted, a resolve dulled by curiosity and perhaps pride. Though he was urged to avoid a certain direction, the shimmer of a distant trail tempts him into ignoring those warnings. Drawn by instinct more than logic, he turns toward it, convinced that it might offer a faster route to Ar-hap’s domain. As he walks, the woods grow denser and the air heavier, with each step muting the cheerful clarity of the previous night. Strange symbols carved into tree bark begin to appear, and the usual birdsong is replaced by a low, ambient hum that seems to follow his movement. Time distorts in the gloom; what felt like minutes stretches into hours, and soon landmarks repeat in disorienting patterns. By the time he notices the fog creeping through the undergrowth, his path has fully vanished behind him, leaving only silence and a lingering chill.

Eventually, he stumbles upon a small clearing where a lone figure, a stone craftsman, sits among a scattering of primitive tools and finely shaped weapon fragments. The

man, wary yet civil, entertains the visitor's questions but keeps a suspicious eye fixed on him throughout their exchange. Their dialogue reveals that Mars, like Earth, has grown its knowledge from the seeds of survival—each blade shaped not for art, but to protect or dominate. Fascinated by this craftsman’s silent mastery, the protagonist lingers too long, and tension rises. A casual comment is misinterpreted, and a quarrel nearly erupts, halted only by a gesture of peace and retreat. The encounter leaves a sharp impression—on Mars, even the calmest surface can hide volatile emotion just beneath.



As he presses onward, the environment shifts again—less organic, more foreboding. The trees thin, and an unnatural mist hangs low over cracked stone paths leading to what appears to be ruins cloaked in gloom. A distant sound—soft, sorrowful, like children sobbing—floats across the stillness, growing louder as he walks. He recalls the woodman’s stories with a stab of regret, realizing too late that he has arrived at the haunted city ruled by the ghost of Queen Yang. Columns loom like petrified sentinels, and crumbled facades echo the weight of forgotten tragedy. Though nothing moves, the protagonist feels watched, as though unseen eyes track his every breath. He debates turning back, but something deeper—perhaps human arrogance, or irresistible wonder—pulls him forward.

The city reveals no signs of life, only symbols etched in walls, shattered statues, and whispers that rise from nowhere. Yet there is beauty here too—faded mosaics of stars and moons, fractured stories of a kingdom long consumed by its own power. His heart pounds, not with fear alone but with the thrill of proximity to something ancient, something Mars itself wishes to hide. As dusk dims the sky, he finally sees it: a mural depicting a radiant queen with eyes of fire and hands that hold both life and death. The silence feels heavier now, as if waiting for a voice to awaken the city once more. But none comes. He backs away carefully, unsure if what he’s trespassed will let him leave as easily as he entered.

This chapter reflects more than a physical journey—it underscores the peril of disregarding cultural knowledge, the fragility of trust in unfamiliar lands, and the allure

of the forbidden. In his quest to reach Heru, the protagonist continues to chase progress at the cost of wisdom, plunging deeper into Martian truths not found in maps or guides. Through this, readers are reminded that adventure is not always glory-bound—it often walks hand in hand with humility and consequences.



Chapter XV - Gulliver of Mars

Chapter XV begins with a confession that strips away pride and pretense, as the protagonist recounts the entirety of his journey to a woman whose hardened exterior conceals a warm heart. His tale of otherworldly arrival, unspoken devotion, and the hazards faced alongside Heru is received not with skepticism but with compassion. Her expression softens, her emotions breaking through the surface as she pledges her support with conviction that stuns him. This act of trust and kindness, given so freely, rekindles hope in a man who had nearly surrendered to despair. For once, assistance does not come with conditions—it comes from shared humanity and the inexplicable magic of love's urgency. Her suggestion to seek the help of her husband, a man with influence among ferrymen, becomes more than advice; it becomes a lifeline. The protagonist, moved and determined, prepares himself to seize this narrow window of opportunity.

The preparation is swift but not careless. A modest meal is shared, offering a moment of peace before plunging back into uncertainty. Though the plan is hasty, it feels destined, as if every event from the past days led to this point. The protagonist listens carefully to strategies and warnings, internalizing every detail that may aid his journey into Ar-hap’s stronghold. The night is quiet but heavy with meaning as he follows the fisherman through narrow paths toward the riverside. There, a stout boat waits like a silent ally, ready to drift through the estuary’s dark waters toward peril and hope alike. He boards with quiet resolve, bolstered not just by purpose but by the unexpected humanity found in strangers willing to risk for love. The boat pushes off, and with it, a new chapter begins, one defined not by chance but by chosen courage.

As the oars glide through the black water, each stroke pulls him closer to what may be a confrontation or a negotiation—but in any case, a reckoning. The river reflects the stars, a silent reminder of the vast unknown from which he came and the uncertain

future that lies ahead. Reflection is impossible to avoid in such solitude; the stillness forces him to face his own fears and question the measure of his own resolve. But the image of Heru—her voice, her grace, her unjust captivity—chases away hesitation. For her, there can be no retreat. He has become more than a visitor to Mars. He has become part of its destiny, woven into its fate through ties of affection and daring.

Though doubt still lingers at the edges of his mind, it no longer holds him prisoner. The kindness received from the fisherman’s wife and the risk her husband takes for a stranger prove that even in a world so alien, trust and loyalty endure. It’s not grand armies or legendary swords that move the world forward—it’s these small acts of belief, multiplied by those brave enough to act. These people had no obligation to him, yet they offered a chance, however slim, because they saw something in him worth backing. That kind of faith creates its own gravity. And as the boat disappears into the shadows upriver, he knows that the journey ahead will test him more than ever before.

At the heart of the coming challenge lies not just a battle for Heru’s freedom, but for his own place in this strange world. Every culture has its gatekeepers, and Ar-hap is one cloaked in both barbarism and contradiction. Yet even the fiercest rulers have blind spots—honor, vanity, or the fear of losing face. These must be found and used if diplomacy is to have any hope of success. Otherwise, force or flight may be the only options left. Still, even now, the protagonist doesn’t picture himself a hero. He’s simply a man who refuses to let love be decided by fate alone. And for that alone, he rows forward—not as a conqueror, but as someone who dares to believe he can make a difference.

Chapter XVI - Gulliver of Mars

Chapter XVI opens as the protagonist takes a pivotal step in his Martian odyssey by securing passage aboard a merchant vessel. Serving as supercargo, he finds himself immersed in the rhythms of Martian life, where the chants of the rowers echo like ancient lullabies against the stillness of the canals. These chants, haunting and repetitive, deepen his sense of dislocation from Earth and sharpen his awareness of how truly alien this world has become. The capital, upon arrival, bursts with vivid contrasts—sails from distant lands flutter in strange winds, while colorful markets buzz with goods unlike anything he has seen. The atmosphere is electric, yet underneath its surface lies a society shaped by rigid hierarchies and ritualistic customs. Although the city distracts him briefly, his mission to save Heru remains central in his thoughts, pulling him forward into the heart of danger.

The narrative turns when he meets Si, a slave girl who shares a bond with his homeland. Her tragic tale of being forced into servitude under Ar-hap adds emotional weight to the story and exposes the cruelty of Thither's politics. Si’s willingness to help, despite her lowly status, offers a rare spark of compassion in an otherwise brutal setting. She becomes more than a guide; she is a symbol of silent rebellion. Through her, the protagonist is introduced to the porter's wife, a woman whose modest role at the palace gate belies the strategic advantage she holds. From her lodgings, one can observe the steady stream of petitioners and guards—a perfect vantage point for someone plotting a rescue. The protagonist now finds himself closer than ever to Heru, yet the barrier of power and ceremony still looms large.

As their plans develop, the environment changes ominously. A harsh, stifling heat descends upon the city, casting a crimson hue over the land. This sudden shift unsettles the locals, whose whispers turn to prayers as they anticipate divine punishment or cosmic upheaval. Even the elite, usually indifferent to superstition,

begin to retreat behind guarded doors. The heat brings more than discomfort—it becomes a symbol of impending judgment, setting the stage for decisions that must be made quickly or not at all. Amidst this chaos, the protagonist remains steady. He refuses to see the heat as a deterrent but rather a reminder of the urgency behind his mission. In his mind, saving Heru is no longer just about love or honor; it is about defying fate itself.

With Si’s help, he prepares for his next move. Their connection grows stronger, not romantically, but in mutual understanding of what it means to resist. Si offers information, distraction, and guidance, while the protagonist brings courage and clarity. Together, they form an unlikely team—each driven by past wounds and future hopes. Their shared defiance gives shape to a plan, but nothing is guaranteed. Around them, the city trembles under the weight of its own rituals, and the sky burns red like a warning. Even so, there is no turning back. The journey has narrowed to a single point: reaching Heru before the city—and perhaps the entire Martian world—collapses under the pressure of its own myths.

These developments invite deeper reflection on how loyalty and courage often arise in unexpected places. Si, though broken by circumstance, refuses to yield to the cruelty of her captors. The protagonist, although far from home, embraces a cause larger than himself. The intensity of the moment strips away doubt and hesitation. As the chapter ends, there’s a quiet clarity in their purpose. The red sky may signal the end for many, but for them, it marks the beginning of a decisive stand. That clarity—borne of purpose, forged in adversity—offers a rare peace amid the coming storm.

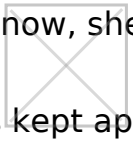
Chapter XVII - Gulliver of Mars

Chapter XVII begins with the stirring sight of Ar-hap’s return, his army trailing behind like the weary wind. The land remains gripped by drought, and overhead, a bright comet cuts through the dusty sky like a warning. As the gates open and the soldiers trudge in, the air thickens with tension, not celebration. The once-proud forces now limp into their city with hollow eyes and scorched armor. Among them, rumors spread like dry brushfire—of the stranger who dared to claim Heru, the captive princess. Ar-hap, both ruler and warrior, wastes no time summoning the protagonist, demanding justification for his defiance of Martian custom.

The confrontation is as formal as it is dangerous. Ar-hap, towering and fierce, lays down challenges laced with ancient symbolism, meant to crush spirit and ego. Yet each task, seemingly drawn from myth, has already been faced—and conquered—by the protagonist. An old jawbone is produced without pause, and when Ar-hap mocks the need for a long-lost crown, it too is revealed. The court, once eager to jeer, falls into stunned silence. These objects, carried unknowingly as trophies from previous adventures, now serve as seals of power. Ar-hap narrows his gaze. Either this is sorcery, or fate itself is meddling in his court.

Still unconvinced, the king orders one final test, a ritual of Martian lore designed to reveal liars and cowards. The protagonist, instead of crumbling, steps forward with unwavering resolve. His confidence confuses the onlookers. To them, he is either a fool or a prophet. The ceremonial fire, meant to expose impostors, bends unexpectedly. It seems to favor him, flickering blue and white, the colors of truth in Martian belief. Murmurs spread through the hall. Ar-hap watches, a slow realization dawning behind his guarded expression. Something larger than politics may be at work.

Before any decision can be cemented, the comet grows brighter in the sky, forcing the court to shift its focus. Martian priests gather in the palace’s high dome, their chants echoing like warnings through the city. The people, scared and superstitious, flock to temples. Ar-hap is pulled away, not by fear of the foreigner, but by dread of cosmic punishment. He declares a truce, short and unsentimental, buying time to address both man and sky. The protagonist, though uneasy, accepts. His goal remains Heru's freedom, and for now, she remains untouched.



Heru, however, is kept apart, guarded with silent reverence. Though she is technically safe, the separation gnaws at both hearts. A single glance exchanged in the courtyard says what no language can: patience, hope, and a vow to endure. They wait, unsure of what tomorrow’s sky may bring, but strengthened by silent unity. Around them, Martians whisper of omens and curses, believing the comet a divine mirror to their discontent.

As night falls, the city trembles not with war drums, but with ritual. Fires are lit in circles, offerings made from crops too dry to eat. The comet, brilliant and unblinking, commands the heavens. The protagonist watches from a palace window, reflecting not just on the day’s miracles but on the fragility of power when measured against fear. The people worship stars, yet they tremble before men who dare to hold the sky’s fire in their hands. Ar-hap, so certain of his own rule, now leans on superstition and ceremony.

The story unfolds not just as an adventure but as a study in power—earned, inherited, or misunderstood. While Ar-hap commands armies and rituals, the protagonist bends reality through resourcefulness and courage. On a world far from Earth, ancient traditions battle with the unknown, and a single outsider reshapes destiny. This chapter, grounded in myth and cosmic spectacle, invites readers to consider how belief, whether spiritual or strategic, often decides survival more than strength.

Chapter XVIII - Gulliver of Mars

Chapter XVIII opens with an unforgiving sun bearing down on a land parched to its core. The heat, searing and suffocating, leaves no creature untouched. Trees wilt, soil cracks, and the air hangs thick with stillness. Every movement is an effort; every breath feels borrowed. Heru, usually poised, now rests with hollow eyes and cracked lips, her royal composure worn thin by the unrelenting drought. The protagonist, too, is drained, body aching and mind dulled by the monotony of thirst. Even animals stagger about, crazed by dehydration, gathering near humans as if united by one silent plea for water. Each hour stretches long, filled with helpless glances at a cloudless sky.

When the wind stirs, it brings not relief but the scent of dust and decay. Tempers flare. Commands go ignored. Men once proud in armor now lie prone in the shade of shriveled trees. The discipline that held this Martian outpost together erodes like sandstone in a storm. Heru clutches her side, dizzy from weakness. Around them, silence grows louder. Then, distant thunder rolls. It is faint, almost imagined, yet it carries hope. Heads turn skyward. Could deliverance finally be near?

With the first droplet, disbelief meets joy. People cry out—not in fear, but gratitude. The rain falls in uneven bursts, cold and chaotic. It dampens sand and skin alike. The earth swells in response, releasing the scent of life buried beneath heat. Heru lifts her face, lips parted, catching droplets like blessings. The protagonist feels renewed, not just by moisture, but by purpose. If there is a moment to act, it is now. The storm has softened their guards, distracted their captors. Freedom hides in the noise of thunder.

As darkness falls, so does a plan take shape. With Heru at his side, the protagonist slips through weakened defenses. The rain masks their steps. Sand churns into mud, swallowing prints. They press forward, hearts racing with equal parts fear and resolve. Ar-hap’s men, focused on their own shelters and relief, barely register the missing

figures. Time, it seems, has lent the fugitives mercy for once.

The wharf lies ahead, drenched and quiet. Boats rock gently, untended and tethered loosely. The air smells of wet rope and algae. A narrow skiff offers their best chance. The protagonist secures it while Heru holds a lantern low, shielding the flame from wind. Their fingers brush. No words are exchanged, but everything is understood. This is the line between captivity and possibility.



Just as they prepare to cast off, a figure appears—one of Ar-hap’s scouts, drenched and scowling. Tension spikes. Hands hover over weapons. The rain falls harder, stinging eyes and blurring vision. The scout squints, unsure. The protagonist, feigning calm, speaks of orders and urgency. A bluff. One built on soaked uniforms and confident tone. Seconds stretch. Then, with a grunt, the scout moves on, accepting the lie or too tired to care. The skiff drifts into the current, swallowed by night and storm.

Behind them, the city shrinks into mist. Before them lies uncertainty. But it is theirs to shape. The protagonist pulls the oars slowly, careful not to splash. Heru watches the shoreline fade. Her fingers tighten around the edge of the boat, not from fear, but from hope. Their escape isn’t just physical—it is emotional, mental, and deeply symbolic.

This chapter, saturated with desperation and resolve, mirrors the real human experience under pressure. It’s a reminder that even in life’s harshest climates, hope can find root. Survival is not only about endurance but about choosing action when the moment appears. Gulliver’s escape, aided by weather and will, reflects the core of resilience. In fiction, as in life, it is not always strength that saves—it is timing, courage, and the decision to move when standing still means surrender.

Chapter XIX - Gulliver of Mars

Chapter XIX opens with tension concealed beneath the quiet hush of a Martian morning. Gulliver and Heru, cloaked in mist and uncertainty, guide their fragile boat through still waters, aware that a single sound could betray them. The war-canoe of their pursuers cuts through the fog like a shadow of fate. Yet, luck favors the bold. The soldiers sense something but dismiss the notion with grumbling indifference, swayed by what they assume is empty water. As the enemy drifts away, Gulliver and Heru push forward, hearts still pounding but paths finally clearing.

Reaching a sleepy harbor town, they find its people already stirring for the day’s work. There, Gulliver makes a gamble, placing his fate in the hands of a fishmonger, a man whose days are usually filled with nets and scales—not fugitives. Despite the risk, the fisherman listens. Heru, poised yet humble, speaks with sincerity that softens his suspicion. What begins as skepticism turns into sympathy. The fisherman, caught between fear and compassion, chooses the latter. His help is offered without condition, grounded not in strategy but in simple human decency.

Their plan unfolds with the elegance of desperation. A fishing boat, seemingly mundane, becomes their chariot of escape. Covered with rough-smelling nets and hidden beneath layers of bait and burlap, Gulliver and Heru wait silently as the boat rocks gently. When the soldiers arrive, the mood tightens. Questions are barked, suspicions voiced. But the fishmonger, grinning like a rogue with nothing to lose, answers with confidence and a promise of beer waiting at home. The threat passes not through strength, but through charm and cunning. His quick thinking shields the fugitives from capture, buying them the freedom they could not claim on their own.

As the boat glides past the last edge of the town, the danger finally feels distant. Gulliver, ever the gentleman, offers the fisherman a gold button—a token small in size,

but rich in meaning. Heru, with a soft word and grateful glance, offers a more heartfelt reward. The fisherman smiles, not for gain, but for the strange pride of having done something noble in an otherwise routine life. He returns to his village unchanged in appearance, yet marked forever by a secret act of courage.

The escape, though successful, leaves Gulliver reflective. Trust had been placed in a stranger, and that trust had been honored. Mars, for all its surreal landscapes and alien customs, remains familiar in this: kindness can be found in the most unassuming places. That the fisherman had no stake in their journey makes his loyalty more poignant. Against the looming backdrop of war and conquest, a single act of quiet defiance speaks louder than armies. It is not grandeur but solidarity that propels them forward.

Their voyage resumes under a calmer sky. The boat now moves beyond familiar shores, into uncharted sea and story alike. Heru sits beside Gulliver, no longer a captive but a companion, sharing silence and sea breeze. The danger behind them recedes, yet ahead lies uncertainty. Still, there is movement. That, in itself, is hope. They are not running—they are choosing.

This chapter doesn’t rely on sweeping battles or vast discoveries. Instead, it thrives on the human scale—on the risk taken by ordinary people in extraordinary moments. The fisherman’s role may be brief, but it embodies the courage to stand for something without promise of reward. Gulliver and Heru, once hunted and cornered, now float free thanks to a bond made in mere minutes but rooted in trust. On a world so strange, it is kindness that remains universal.

As their boat fades into the blue haze, the town shrinks behind them, tucked once again into its quiet rhythm. The fisherman returns to his stall, never to boast of his role. And Gulliver, now one step further from capture, feels something stir—an unfamiliar mix of gratitude and purpose. Not all victories roar. Some come wrapped in fishnets, hidden beneath barrels, and carried on currents of faith.

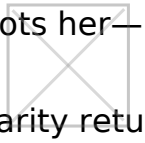
Chapter XX - Gulliver of Mars

Chapter XX brings the protagonist back into the heart of Martian civilization, only to find himself more disconnected than ever. While the people burst into celebration at the return of Princess Heru, he feels a strange distance from their joy. Their enthusiasm seems shallow, focused on flowers, music, and pageantry rather than the looming reality of conflict. The protagonist, once hailed as a savior, is now barely acknowledged. His concerns about the enemy remain unspoken by the crowd, swallowed in the festive haze. As he walks through the decorated streets, the gap between his experience and theirs grows larger.

To cope, he turns to the distractions that Martian life offers—wine, laughter, and dance. For one night, he joins them in their forgetfulness, trying to erase the bitterness of feeling forgotten. But the next morning, sobriety returns with a weight. The hero looks at the city with clearer eyes and feels the hollowness of their joy. Heru, though rescued, is now preparing to consult a ceremonial globe to determine the timing of her royal marriage. The act, rooted in Martian custom, feels foreign and absurd to him. Though he first reacts with a surge of jealousy, the emotion quickly fades into a strange, creeping indifference.

The apathy of those around him begins to shape his own thoughts. He watches the people gather in the palace square with vacant expressions, their anticipation more about ritual than reality. Even Heru seems distant, wrapped in the dreamlike order of tradition. Then chaos erupts. Without warning, Ar-hap’s army crashes into the city, scattering flowers and crowds in equal measure. Panic spreads, and the celebration collapses into screams and smoke. The hero, jolted from his trance of resignation, moves instinctively. The battle arrives not with honor, but with ambush.

Within the palace, destruction reigns. Yet in the eye of the storm, Prince Hath sits still. His calm is not courage but defeat. When the protagonist pleads for action, Hath explains that fate has already chosen Heru's path and that resistance is unnecessary. Such fatalism infuriates the hero. With fire climbing the palace walls and enemies seizing the city, he turns from words to action. He races through halls in search of Heru, pushing past guards and rubble, determined to free her from this collapse. Eventually, he spots her—held by slave hands, being led away like a prize.



In that instant, clarity returns. Heru, fragile but proud, meets his gaze as he tears her free from her captors. The moment hangs suspended between destruction and escape. Around them, the palace groans under fire and falling stone. But the urgency fuels his every step. He pulls her through shattered doors, through smoke-choked corridors, past the frozen nobles who can no longer distinguish bravery from blindness. Outside, the city is barely recognizable.

In the chaos, something unexpected appears—a magical rug, familiar and strange. It lies draped over debris, glowing faintly, humming with power. The same object that once flung him from Earth to Mars now calls again. Heru, weak and silent, is laid gently beside it. He hesitates only briefly, torn between love and survival, between staying to fight a lost cause and returning to a life that feels distant. Then he makes the wish—simple and desperate. He wants to go home.

The world spins. The air thickens. And then everything stops. He awakens on a stone step in New York, cold pavement under his hands, noise filling his ears. The city, uncaring and vast, embraces him with its usual indifference. Mars is gone. The palace, the battles, the stars—all replaced by the hard, familiar outlines of his own world. No fanfare greets his return. No one knows where he has been. But something inside him has changed.

Back on Earth, reality feels smaller. Yet within him remains the memory of a distant red sky, a princess with violet eyes, and a people too gentle to fight their fate. He cannot tell anyone where he was. Not in a way they'd believe. But as he rises and walks down the street, he knows that part of him will always belong to that other

world—a place where dreams were real, and where he once mattered deeply, even if only for a moment.

