



Smartass of Mars

Jim Gavin

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CJ Shifflett is 29 years old, unemployed, and living in his mother's basement. He has a BA in Philosophy from a 2nd-tier state university. When his great-grandmother dies, they go to her funeral at their estranged family's historic mansion in Richmond. There, Chance discovers a legacy left for him -- the secret of his Civil War-era ancestor's adventures on the planet Mars, and a way to get there! For a skinny, weak, bookish young man to land on a planet full of dangerous aliens haunting ruined cities, where every man considers himself a warrior, nothing is as likely for Chance as a painful death delivered swiftly. But it's the most amazing opportunity of anyone's life, to be asked to explore a world unknown where flying boats shuttle between ancient metropolises, where a man can live by the sword and rise to become Emperor of the entire planet. It's a chance to finally start living, even if it means dying. Chance goes. Maybe something of his ancestor John Byrd resides in Chance after all. His quick thinking, incisiveness, and knack for narrow escapes make up for his lack of swordsmanship. Of course, at one-third of Earth's gravity Chance is strong and quick, capable of great leaps -- and it doesn't hurt that he's not shy about using his radium pistol. Imprisoned and exiled, challenged to survive both the ritual of the duel and the chaos of battle, Chance makes friends and enemies and even rescues a princess. Along the way, he'll discover why Viking didn't tell us the truth about the red planet, and what's really going on in our solar system. SMARTASS OF MARS is "postmodern" sword-and-planet fiction, not parody but homage, a tribute to Burroughs, Brackett, Klein, Howard, and even Farmer and Norman that isn't just another museum-piece pastiche. I turned genre conventions on their heads while striving to stay true to the spirit of the classics. I flouted current conventions to get to the heart of what these stories should be. Men are men and women are women. Princesses still need saving. Aliens are mostly unfriendly. People from the 19th century are casually racist. It's Men's Adventure for the Internet Male. Before the modern era, Mars was a place where a man could truly be a man. In 2015, it's a place where you learn how to be a man, or you die.

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