

A PRINCESS OF MARS
Part 1 of the Barsoom Trilogy
by
Carly Bryann Young

Based on the series by Edgar Rice Burroughs

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Justonthehorizon@yahoo.com
541-264-6617

FADE IN:

EXT. ESTATE - VIRGINIA - DAY - 1860

Sun filters beautifully between autumn leaves. JOHN CARTER, an athletic, dark-haired 30 year-old, chases after his young nephew (BURROUGHS).

Watching from the sidelines, many of them on picnic blankets and fanning themselves, are:

-The boy's father, SEBASTIAN CARTER, grim-looking lout.

-stuffy, balding pastor MATTHEW SHANE

-HAL & SANDRA POWELL, married couple, plantation owners. Hal is fat and sneering, Sandra is sour-faced and agitated.

-a blonde woman in white dress and bonnet, FAYE DOREN, and her mother ILSA DOREN, a wrinkled older woman who still dresses and preens like she is still a young beauty.

BURROUGHS

(V.O.)

My first recollection of Captain John Carter is of the few months he spent at my father's home in Virginia, just prior to the opening of the Civil War.

Just as Carter catches the young Burroughs, a big shaggy collie, WOOLLY, jumps on both of them, wanting to play.

SALLY, a 16 year-old African slave girl in tomboyish work clothes, runs over and calls the dog away.

Faye snaps her fingers at Sally and makes imperious gestures, sending her off on some errand. Sally nods, gives a shy smile at Carter.

Carter smiles back. He can't help but notice:

Faye is staring at him suggestively over her lace fan, while Hal watches Sally leave, leering.

Carter goes to his horse grazing nearby, and mounts. Young Burroughs watches him ride away, and waves.

Carter waves back, disappearing into the sunlight.

BURROUGHS (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

When the war broke out he left us,
and I did not see him again for
some years.

EXT. ARIZONA DESERT - DAY - 1865

John Carter leads his packhorse by the reins. His hat makes him resemble a western gunslinger, scarf drawn upward to protect his face against the whipping sands.

BURROUGHS

(V.O.)

At the close of the Civil War, he found himself possessed of several hundred thousand in Confederate dollars, income earned in the cavalry of an army which no longer existed; the servant of a state which had vanished with the hopes of the South. Penniless, and with his only means of livelihood, fighting, gone, he traveled to the southwest to retrieve his fallen fortunes in a search for gold.

Trekking alongside him is TOBY POWELL, a robust figure dressed similarly in western hat and scarf.

It is not apparent, until he lifts his head, pulls down the scarf and drinks from a flask, that he is a handsome man of African descent.

BURROUGHS (CONT'D)

He spent nearly a year prospecting in company with another veteran of the war: Toby Powell. The slave of Hal Powell, business partner of John's father. Toby took the surname of his master and ran away, joining a regiment of Union soldiers. Carter met him on the battlefield, and through an odd quirk of fate, they became friends.

EXT. ARIZONA CANYON - DAY

Toby runs his hands along the rock, showing John the vein of glittering gold.

BURROUGHS

(V.O.)

Toby was a miner, and with his help they located the most remarkable gold-bearing quartz vein their wildest dreams ever conjured.

Toby's grin flashes brightly. John claps a hand on his shoulder, celebrating.

CUT TO:

Toby mounting a horse.

BURROUGHS (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

They decided one of them must return to civilization, purchase the necessary machinery, and return with a sufficient force of men to properly work the mine.

Toby rides off, leaving Carter in the shade of the rocks.

BURROUGHS (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

As Powell was familiar with the mechanical requirements of mining, they deemed it best for him to make the trip, and for Carter to hold down the claim.

Carter climbs the jutting, strangely-shaped rocks, to get a greater view of the valley's beauty.

He spots a lone rider, pursued by a group of riders.

Carter's face registers alarm, and hurriedly begins his descent back to camp.

BURROUGHS (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

Since entering the territory they saw not one hostile Indian, and were wont to ridicule stories of the great numbers of vicious marauders that were supposed to haunt the trails. They had become careless in the extreme.

Carter arms himself with two belts of cartridges, a carbine, and two Colt Revolvers.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

Powell was well armed, but Carter had lived and fought for years among the Sioux in the North, and knew his chances were small against a party of trailing Apaches.

CUT TO:

Carter rides at a thundering gallop through the gorge, lit with the red of the setting sun.

He's following the trail of the horses through the sand.

Dark clouds give way before a shining moon, as night falls.

Suddenly, he reigns in his horse:

The gorge is pale with tents. In the center of the camp, white SOLDIERS are clustered.

BURROUGHS

Instead, what he found was a camp of intruders, on orders to harass the native Apaches. Savages, it would appear, come in all colors.

Carter lifts his two revolvers.

BURROUGHS (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

My Uncle was, evidently, free of the tiresome mental processes that sap away men's courage.

John gives a loud, savage, whooping yell, and spurs his horse into a mad charge, firing his revolvers wildly. The soldiers, spooked, disperse and run for the their weapons, revealing:

TOBY POWELL

Lying on the ground, his body bristling with arrows.

John leans dangerously from the saddle, lifts Powell up by his cartridge belt, and draws his body up over the horse's withers.

John's attention, however, is drawn to:

A BEAUTIFUL APACHE WOMAN

Being led roughly by a soldier through the camp. She has a mass of coal black hair, and an oval face with chiseled features. Her name is DYANI.

There is moment where time slows, the woman gazing at him with hope that turns to disappointment as he passes. She looks away, assuming he does not care about her plight.

Carter wheels the horse around, charges at the soldier holding the girl, and punches him in the face.

The girl runs off fleet as a deer, into the foothills.

The soldier raises his PEARL-HANDLED PISTOL, and fires at Carter's back.

The shot breaks John's reverie, and he spurs his horse to ride out of the camp.

Carter keeps riding until he reaches the jagged rock formations. He dismounts, pulls Toby off the horse, and drags him into a cave.

Carter checks for every sign of a pulse, or breath. Then he pulls the arrows from Toby's body. No response.

Blood covers Toby's body, and now there's blood on Carter's hands as well. Carter opens a water canteen, tries to wash it off himself and Toby, before throwing the canteen aside and dissolving into a tearful rage.

Carter feels his back, and discovers the gunshot. His vision clouds, and he falls over.

Carter looks up at the starry night sky framed by the mouth of the cave.

Without warning, he finds himself standing upright. He looks down, and sees his own body staring outward, unmoving. He bends, tries to touch it - his ghostly hands pass through like a ghost.

His attention focuses in on a particular spot: a red star close to the horizon.

He exits the cave, gaze focused on the star, like a sleepwalker drawn by an unrelenting force.

Carter closes his eyes, and reaches out his arms.

EXT. CAVE - ARIZONA DESERT - DAY

John Carter's eyes slowly blink open. He is face-down in a pillow of dried moss. Smoke drifts past him.

He stares at a RED-EYED DEVIL grasshopper, legs and wings splayed in a fighting pose.

Small hands traps it in a piece of pottery - Carter sees that it is a Native American child, who runs to--

--other children nearby, burning incense, wafting it onto John with leaves.

Dyani sits behind him, using implements stolen from the camp to carefully take the bullet out of John Carter's back.

BURROUGHS

(V.O.)

Dyani, the Apache girl he helped escape from the soldiers, found him dying outside the cave.

Dyani picks up her thorn-needle and thread, stitches the wound closed.

BURROUGHS (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

She used a thorn to stitch his wound. 'Thorn' became the name Carter called her by henceforth.

Carter gazes at her, too delirious to feel pain.

CUT TO:

EXT. APACHE VILLAGE - DAY

Carter sits with the Native American children - two of them pretend to fight, and Dyani stops them, and turns to Carter to explain.

BURROUGHS

She brought him back to the village, and taught him her language. She spoke of Killer-of-Enemies, their folk-hero.

CUT TO:

EXT. APACHE VILLAGE - DAY - 10 YEARS LATER

Carter kisses Dyani, and hugs his young daughter, TALA, who proudly shows him a nest of eggs she has been playing with.

BURROUGHS

(V.O.)

He wrote journals detailing his ten years among the Apaches, which later came into my possession.

The sound of thundering hooves. John and his family see:

A party of soldiers approaching the village.

BLACKOUT.

INT. HOSPITAL - DAY

John Carter, on an army cot with a massive head injury, attended by a NURSE. He awakens with a start, gasping for breath. He finds Sebastian standing beside him.

BURROUGHS

(V.O.)

There was a battle, and John sustained an injury to the brain. That is when his brother Sebastian, my father, found him.

EXT. UTICA PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL - NEW YORK - DUSK - 1875

Burroughs, now a young well-to-do man, walks the snowy path, breath clouding the air, as he makes his way to the UTICA PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL. The building and surrounding area is very well-kept, very peaceful.

BURROUGHS

(V.O.)

My grandfather, Kevin Carter, had died during Carter's stay amongst the Apaches, leaving a massive fortune to be claimed. My father committed Uncle John to a hospital for the mentally infirm, taking over his estate - which included both the inheritance owed John as a firstborn son, and the gold mine. Suspecting my father's motives, I set out to visit Uncle John, and make my own layman's appraisal as to what was truly broken: his mind, or his heart.

Before he reaches the hospital doors, he spots:

JOHN CARTER

A moonlit figure on the edge of a frozen cliff, dressed only in a patient's gown with arms outstretched, against the backdrop of the red, setting sun.

Burroughs frowns, and moves toward him.

Before Burroughs can get close, alarmed ORDERLIES rush out of the hospital and approach Carter, speaking and gesturing to him as if afraid Carter will throw himself down the ravine.

Carter notices their approach and lets his hands fall. He lets them take hold of his arms, and lead him toward the hospital without struggle.

John and the orderlies pass Burroughs. John smiles.

JOHN CARTER

Hello, son.

Burroughs watches him go, jaw agape and eyes wide.

INT. JOHN'S ROOM - UTICA PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL

Burroughs sits in a chair, cautious and concerned.

Carter sits upright in bed, examining a KING CHESSPIECE.

He places it on a black-and-orange CHESSBOARD on his NIGHTSTAND, in its proper place next to the QUEEN CHESSPIECE.

BURROUGHS

(O.S.)

How are you feeling, Uncle?

Carter's expression betrays surprise and confusion, but only for a moment before it is replaced with a warm smile.

JOHN CARTER

Quite well, thank you. Nephew.

Burroughs looks crestfallen, hesitates to break the silence.

BURROUGHS

You don't remember me, do you?

Carter's smile fades.

JOHN CARTER

I know a Carter when I see one.
Beyond that...

BURROUGHS

Actually, I took 'Edgar Rice
Burroughs' as my nom de plume.

(takes out a notebook)

I was told you had sustained memory
loss. How far back does it extend?

JOHN CARTER

I do not recall any childhood. I am
a very old man; how old I do not
know. Possibly I am a hundred,
possibly more.

Burroughs is deeply unsettled by this response - it is worse
than he thought. He smiles, tries to make light of it.

BURROUGHS

Well, you certainly don't look it.
You are the same as when last I saw
you... in every physical respect.

JOHN CARTER

I have not aged as other men do.

Burroughs studies his Uncle for a beat, changes the subject.

BURROUGHS

I thought you weren't a religious
man?

JOHN CARTER

Not in the strict sense of the
term, no.

BURROUGHS

But outside it looked as though you
were praying.

JOHN CARTER

Your eyes did not deceive you.

BURROUGHS

What were you praying for?

JOHN

To return to a world, and a woman,
I love more than life.

BURROUGHS

Woman?

JOHN CARTER

(nods)

A princess.

Carter looks out his room window.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

A princess of Mars.

BURROUGHS

What did you say?

CARTER'S POV

Focusing on the brightest light in an array of stars.

JOHN CARTER

(O.S.)

Mars. For me, the fighting man, it had always held the power of irresistible enchantment as the god of my vocation. It seemed to call, one fateful night, across the unthinkable void, to lure me to it as the lodestone attracts a particle of iron.

As if propelled by a rocket toward Mars, the surrounding stars blur into streaks as Mars overtakes our vision.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(O.S.)

And with the suddenness of thought it drew me, through the trackless immensity of space.

OVER BLACK:

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

There was an instant of extreme cold, and utter darkness.

EXT. MARS - DAY

Carter awakens to vision blurred by unconsciousness and heat-waves, lying face-down in yellow moss.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

I opened my eyes upon a strange landscape. I knew I was on Mars.

BURROUGHS

(V.O.)

How did you know? Did you not wonder if you were asleep, or victim to a sudden lapse of sanity?

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

My inner consciousness told me as plainly that I was upon Mars as your conscious mind tells you that you are upon Earth. You do not question the fact; neither did I.

CARTER'S POV

The moss extends for miles in a desert-like valley, broken up only by outcroppings of strangely-shaped, quartz-bearing rock which turn into foothills around the valley's circumference.

FROM ABOVE

A naked John Carter lies prone in the moss, sun glistening on the sweat of his exposed body.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

The midday sun was shining full upon me, and the heat of it was rather intense upon my naked body.

BURROUGHS

(V.O.)

You were naked?

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

I do not pretend to understand the mechanism by which I was projected to Mars, but my clothes were not able to make the journey. If the thought makes you uncomfortable, you may imagine I kept the pants.

Pants suddenly appear on John Carter's lower half, just in time before he rolls over, blinking against the sunlight.

BURROUGHS

(V.O.)

Was the heat as intense as would have been true, say, under similar conditions on the Arizona desert?

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

Possibly. But there was a stark difference.

Carter raises his legs up and then down again to spring to his feet, but the action sends him into the air a few yards - he floats down onto his feet, softly.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

I had to learn to walk all over again. Due to the lesser gravitation and air pressure, the muscular exertion which carried me easily and safely upon Earth played strange antics with me upon Mars.

It's like walking on the moon - each step turns into a trampoline-like bounce, and he loses his balance, flips and falls into the moss several times.

He stops experimenting for a moment, and takes a look around: he spots a circular enclosure with a low 4-ft wall.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

I was determined to explore the structure which was the only evidence of habitation in sight, and so I reverted to the first principle in locomotion: crawling.

Carter crawls toward the building, and clammers over the side of the wall.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

There appeared to be no doors or windows on the side nearest me, but I was able to peer over the top of the wall upon the strangest sight it had ever been given me to see.

The structure turns out to be an INCUBATOR, with a ceiling of glass. Through the glass, Carter sees:

HUNDREDS OF EGGS

Round, white, and about 3-ft in diameter. Some are broken open already.

Something quickly scampers to the wall edge: a scrawny little green alien, with white tusks curving upward, little antennae, an extra pair of limbs, independent-moving eyes. It moves both eyes forward, toward John - they are blood-red.

Carter startles. The feisty creature bangs against the glass with its four little fists, wiggling its antennae.

More of the creatures appear, clambering from the stash of eggs, which break open before John's eyes. Half of them are females, distinguished by spotted, translucent wings.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

I was given but little time to speculate on my wondrous discovery.

A massive, padded paw treads silently on the moss, toward an unaware John Carter - the indentations of the footprints stay for a few seconds on the moss, which slowly puffs back up.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

Watching the hideous little devils break from their shells, I failed to note the approach of their full-grown replicas behind me.

The leader, TARS TARKAS, is a 15-ft, muscular version of the creatures in the enclosure. He wears only GAUNTLETS and a LEATHER TORSO HARNESS for his SWORDS.

His two right arms grasp a metal spear. His legs sit his glossy and hairless mount: an eight-legged, paddle-tailed, long-necked and wide-mouthed THOAT.

A gleaming WHITE RIFLE hangs at the side of his saddle - as Tars Tarkas aims his spear at Carter's back, the butt-end of the spear clanks against the rifle. He charges forward.

Carter hears this, whirls around to see the gleaming spear-end, the charging Throat, and the towering silhouette of Tarkas, a score of other green riders at his heels.

Carter tries to jump on onto the incubator wall, but ends up leaping over the entire thing.

The Green Martians' antennas perk up in surprise, tusked jaws dropping down. They begin pointing, gesturing and talking in low, impressed tones amongst themselves.

Behind the warriors are females: smaller in stature, breasts, thinner waists, nails, and wings. They rush to look inside the incubator, astonished the little Martians are unharmed.

Tars Tarkas dismounts, hands off his spear, and walks around to the other side of the incubator.

He unclasps a gauntlet, offers it to John Carter and speaks in ceremonious-sounding Martian.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

Their leader addressed me in what I guessed were overtures of peace, but in a language, it is needless to say, I could not understand.

Silence, just the sound of wind as it kicks up bits of moss.

Carter gapes at the towering Martian, unsure what to do.

Tars Tarkas' eyes cross, his antenna moving forward as if straining to hear a response.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

As the silence became painful, I concluded to hazard a little conversation on my own part.

John Carter bows low.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

I do not understand you, Green Martian, but I appreciate...

(places fist over heart)

...the laying aside of your...formidable arms.

Carter's own eyes cross, looking at the four gigantic arms. He takes the offered gauntlet.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

I take this as a token of peace and friendship between us.

(regards it doubtfully; to himself:)

...I sincerely hope it is.

Carter clasps it around his wrist, examines it to see if it does something harmful. It doesn't. Relieved, he smiles at Tarkas - who smiles back, revealing rows of gleaming fangs.

Tarkas' middle arm is at the right height to place across John's shoulders, and motions toward the warriors to advance.

They charge toward them (leading Tarkas' mount), but Tarkas holds out his free arms, shaking his head and gripping John tightly. The warriors halt their Thoats abruptly, an effect like slamming on the brakes.

Tarkas looks at Carter, as if worried he might flee, then mounts the Thoat. Tarkas picks John up gingerly, and places him up on a back-seat of the saddle with two arms.

Female Green Martians form a ring around the incubator.

Tarkas fires his gun at it--

--blasting a hole big enough to release the little Green Martians. They scamper about, until they are caught by one of the women.

The women line up and return to the chariots they arrived in, which are pulled along by ZITIDARS (mastodon-like creatures).

Carter watches the faces of the other Green Martians, and they aren't as friendly as Tarkas.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

I was taken at once to the city of Thark by my captors, for such I now considered them despite the suave manner in which I had been trapped.

Carter is concerned, but the Thoats take off fast and he has to hold on to the saddle for dear life.

FROM ABOVE

The cavalcade rides toward the jagged foothills, disappearing into a narrow gorge - one of the dried-up canals of Mars.

The canyon pass leads them along a ruined stone pathway to the enormous, ancient city of THARK, nestled in what was once a lake, and is now a valley surrounded by steep, natural walls of rock 30-ft high.

EXT. THARK - DAY

Entering the plaza via a flight of broad stone steps, Thark comes gradually into view. It looks like a well-kept ruin of ancient Earth.

High buildings of white marble decorated with faded mosaics, dusty gardens bare of any vegetation and dry fountains.

The doorways are human-sized, making it awkward for the Thark families exiting to see the stranger. The Green women are thinner and shorter than the men and have nails, but are otherwise indistinguishable and just as muscular.

Tharks clamor, trying to grab Carter and pull him out of his seat. Tarkas reaches back with one arm to secure John, and swats away his fellows with the other three.

The procession goes up an incline into the canopied hall of the largest, most impressive THARKIAN PALACE.

INT. AUDIENCE CHAMBER - THARKIAN PALACE - THARK - DAY

On a raised, stepped platform squats TAL HAJUS, a Thark of particularly grotesque visage, covered in jeweled ornamentation, helmet and cape of white fur and red silk.

There are two other platforms of descending height from the first - upon one of these sits LORQUAS PTOMEL (Jed, equivalent to a duke) and the third, a JEDWAR (marquis).

The lesser nobles sit around the platform at desks of elegant carved wood in chairs that are clearly too small for them.

Among them is the sour female, SARKOJA, fanning herself.

Waiting upon her is the slender young SOLA - golden armor plates protect her modesty, and she is armed with sheathed swords and a Martian rifle at her hips.

Tars Tarkas approaches, and speaks in Martian to Tal Hajus.

JOHN CARTER

My captor, whose name was Tars Tarkas, was virtually the second-in-command of the community. He evidently explained to their king, or Jeddak in their tongue, the incidents connected with his expedition, including my capture. When he concluded, Jeddak Tal Hajus addressed me at some length.

Tal Hajus rises, and points at Carter.

TAL HAJUS

Sak.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

...Which is to say, a short one.

Carter looks to Tars Tarkas, who glances about as if worried how this will look, and then awkwardly hops.

Carter is even more confused.

Tarkas rolls his eyes, embarrassed, then jumps again.

TARKAS

...Sak.

(leans in; commanding)

Sak.

Carter nods, and Tarkas lets go of him - Carter wobbles and falls, but his attempts at recovery cause him to bounce, repeatedly, like a rubber ball.

The Tharks laugh at his exclamations of pain as he ricochets off desks and chairs.

Carter stops bouncing, resorts to crawling, but an annoyed THARK NOBLE jerks him up roughly by the neck and bangs him down on his feet. The noble cackles, as if he did something funny, but Carter ends his laughter with a punch to the face.

The noble goes down like a felled ox, and Carter wheels around with his back against the nearest desk, prepared to be set upon by the other Tharks.

The Tharks, instead, are respectfully nodding and clapping. Tal Hajus laughs and claps the hardest.

Carter's stomach growls loudly.

Composing himself, Tal Hajus clears his throat.

TAL HAJUS

Sak.

(off John shaking his
head)

Sak! Sak!!

Carter rubs his stomach and points at his mouth, making chewing and drinking motions.

Tal Hajus gibbers at Tarkas, who answers back reassuringly. He beckons to Sola.

Sola walks forth gracefully to receive directions, glancing shyly at Carter through her wings.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

I was given an attendant, eight feet tall but not yet her full height, having just arrived at maturity. Her name, as I afterward learned, was Sola, and she belonged to the retinue of Tars Tarkas.

Sola gently takes Carter by the hand and leads him away, to:

INT. CHAMBER - DUSK

A living/bedroom, with furs and sleeping silks. On one of the piles is a little Martian, napping.

Sola motions for him to be seated, which he does, and then makes a rattling hiss at the door. A frog-like creature with bristly hair waddles in on ten short legs: WOOLA. Woola squats by Sola, like an obedient puppy.

SOLA

Woola.

Sola points to John Carter, before exiting the chamber.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

Sola momentarily left me with Woola, a guardian watch-thing-

BURROUGHS

(V.O.)

A Martian dog, I expect. You had a dog named Woolly, do you remember?

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

I cannot bring myself to call so hideous a thing a dog. Also, it received commands telepathically, in the universal language of Mars.

Woola cocks his head at Carter, questioningly.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

However my thoughts, I came to learn, were an impenetrable mystery to all Martian beings.

Woola shrugs and lays down over the threshold of the door. It yawns, revealing three rows of sharp tusks.

Carter tries to ignore the staring watchdog, and examines the murals on the wall:

They show trees, flowers, lakes and ocean. It could be a scene painted on Earth, except for the colors of the vegetation. He keeps going along the scene, and finds, hidden behind some furniture, depictions of copper-skinned humans.

Sola returns with a block of white food, a white fruit, and a horn-cup, which she places on the floor and sits a ways off. Her own platter consists of a DARSEEN (large reptile), which she daintily eats raw, as well as a slice of prickly cactus.

Carter picks up the block and takes a bite.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

The food consisted of the usa fruit, which ranks high in nutritive value but low in taste - as the principal ration of both armies and navies upon Barsoom, it has won a Martian sobriquet which translates as 'The Fighting Potato'. Along with it came a pound of some pale, semi-solid substance-

BURROUGHS

(V.O.)

Fighting-cheese?

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

That would be the closest equivalent, yes.

(Carter sips from cup)
Green Martians do not drink anything, gaining moisture through food. But they brought me white liquid-

BURROUGHS

(V.O.)

Milk?

JOHN CARTER

No. It came not from an animal, but from a large plant which grows practically without water.

BURROUGHS

(V.O.)

Sounds like cactus.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

Nephew, this myopia of yours needs to be addressed - nothing on Mars has any direct counterpart on Earth. Such comparisons will only serve to confuse you.

When he sets down the glass, Carter realizes his cheese block is missing - he finds the little Martian nibbling on it beside him. The child Martian smiles wickedly - Carter hands him the drink, and the child looks at him in awe.

CUT TO:

INT. CHAMBER - A LITTLE LATER

Carter and the little Martian write hieroglyphics on animal-hide parchment as Sola instructs.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

As Sola's young student and I were both equally advanced in Martian education, Sola took it upon herself to train us together. The Martian language is simple, and I mastered it within a week.

Sola turns her back on Carter, and Carter closes his eyes, concentrating, and speaks aloud her thoughts.

Sola turns around again and nods, approving.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

Likewise, under Sola's tutelage, I developed my telepathic powers so that I could sense practically everything that went on around me.

The young Martian gestures with its four arms behind Carter's head, and Carter mimics each one perfectly, without looking - including one gesture where the little Martian raps on his head, and is gleeful when Carter does the same.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

What surprised Sola most was that while I could catch telepathic messages easily from others, even those not intended for me, no one could read a jot from my mind.

Sarkoja peers in through the doorway, nosy. She frowns, unable to read anything from Carter, and slinks off.

CUT TO:

Now it's John's turn to stand behind the little Martian, and make different gestures. The little Martian concentrates, tries things, but they're all wrong and Sola shakes her head.

The little Martian is frustrated at first, but then turns a cup upside-down and points to Carter's head to indicate that both are equally empty. Carter frowns.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

At first this vexed me, but later I was glad of it, as it gave me an advantage over the Martians.

INT. CHAMBER - THARK - NIGHT

Sola is asleep, furs and silks piled on top of her. The little Martian scampers past, awakening Sola who sits upright: to her left, Carter shivers on his pile, covers gone. He gropes for them blindly in the darkness.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

The Martian nights are extremely cold, and as there is no twilight or dawn, the changes in temperature are sudden and most uncomfortable, as are the transitions from brilliant daylight to darkness.

To Sola's right, the little Martian has way too many covers. With her long arms, Sola reaches over and takes the stolen blankets, tucking them around Carter and going back to sleep.

John smiles and goes right to sleep too.

From the door behind the sleepless Woola, the silver moonlight of two moons disappears, and is replaced by the orange daylight.

Carter throws off his covers, sweating and overheated instantly. He locks gazes with Woola.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

I have ever been prone to tempt fate where wiser men would have left well enough alone.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

It therefore occurred to me that the surest way of learning my guardian beast's attitude toward me would be to attempt an exit from the room.

Carter crawls to his feet, carefully.

JOHN

(V.O.)

Once I was outside, I felt fairly secure in my belief that I could escape him should he pursue me, for I had begun to take great pride in my ability as a jumper.

Woola rises to his feet.

JOHN (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

I could see from the shortness of his legs that the brute was no jumper, and probably no runner.

Carter puts a foot down, and feels it bounce a bit - he shuffles his feet along the floor and creeps toward Woola.

Woola backs up at his approach, all the way out the door and to one side to let him pass, and falls in behind him as Carter walks down the deserted street.

EXT. THARK - DAY

Carter keeps an eye on Woola, following ten paces behind him.

Carter raises his eyebrows and shrugs.

Reaching the edge of the city, Woola waddles in front of Carter, snarling.

Carter's face glints with mischief.

He springs into the air, over Woola's head, and alights far beyond him away from the city.

Woola wheels around, and zooms toward Carter.

Carter's eyes widen.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

I had thought his short legs a bar to swiftness, until he charged with the most appalling speed.

As Woola almost reaches him, he jumps over him toward the city. Woola croaks, frustrated, and tears after him again.

John leaps upward 30-ft, toward a building that overlooks the valley, grabs and hangs onto the window sill.

DOWN BELOW

Woola's legs scratch uselessly against the steep valley walls. Conflicted, Woola paces around himself.

Carter sits on the sill, chuckling.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)
Sak, Woola! Sak!

Woola whimpers piteously at him.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)
(V.O.)
But I was right about the jumping.
I eluded my watch-thing, unaware
that he had good reason to keep me
within the city bounds: for the
abandoned outskirts had acquired
terrible new residents...

A white arm grasps Carter and yanks him inside--

INT. ABANDONED HOUSE - THARK

Carter finds himself thrown violently to the floor, and stares up into:

THE BLUE EYES OF A COLOSSAL FEMALE WHITE APE

With four massive arms like a Thark, skin the color and texture of porcelain, and a golden mohawk.

It jabbars at a MALE WHITE APE, which bounds toward Carter, swinging a STONE CUDGEL which whacks him across the face.

OUTSIDE

Woola scampers up several buildings, each one taller and closer to the valley wall than the next, until he is able to make a running leap and land on the cliff edge.

Sola, searching frantically through the city, spots Woola on the cliff.

She makes a sound, beckoning - Woola ignores her, disappears from her sight.

We follow Woola as he finds the broken front entrance of the building.

INSIDE

The male white ape raises his cudgel to deliver the finishing blow upon John Carter, Woola leaps in and sinks his fangs into the ape's shoulder.

The ape drops the cudgel, and howls so horribly it shakes the rotten rafters of the building. The female ape shrieks, jumping up and down, mouth frothing.

Carter, head and nose bleeding, drags himself to a corner of the dilapidated building, watching Woola and the ape struggle viciously, rolling through the building.

The male white ape tears Woola off its shoulder, losing huge chunks of skin and flesh in the process, and chokes Woola and pulling his head backward. Woola's eyes bulge, nose bleeding.

Carter sees the cudgel on the floor.

The female white ape stops shrieking, spots it too.

Carter grabs the stone cudgel and breaks through the male ape's skull like an eggshell, as Woola slumps to the ground.

Without hesitation, he throws the cudgel at the pursuing female, striking her in the knee. The female grabs its knee with one arm, as the others try to steady her.

Carter looks toward the window, but then at Woola.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

Having killed one white ape and maimed another, I aimed to escape; but then I saw my guardian, his great eyes fastened upon me in pitiful appeal.

Woola gives him a sad, teary-eyed look, gasping.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

I could not withstand that look, nor could I have deserted my rescuer without giving as good an account of myself in his behalf, as he had in mine.

The female grabs Carter, who turns around and punches the ape in the midsection. He then leaps and grabs the cudgel, finishing off the ape.

This last blow is accompanied by applause - Carter looks at:

Tal Hajus, Clapping and laughing horribly, accompanied by his grinning entourage and Sarkoja. Tarkas and Sola are the only ones not amused. Sola comes forth and examines Carter's injuries. She smiles with relief, and leads him away.

Woola, rising to his 10 legs, almost follows - but the soldiers surround him, blocking his path. The soldiers argue with Tars Tarkas, who gives a command and follows Carter.

Carter pauses at the doorway, to watch:

One soldier unholsters a white rifle, and aims it at Woola.

John Carter rushes forward and strikes the Thark's arm upward. The gun discharges, blasting apart the wood and masonry around the window.

Carter kneels next to Woola, embracing him, and motions for Woola to follow - he does, gratefully.

The would-be executioner looks enquiringly at a stunned Tars Tarkas, who motions for him to leave John Carter be.

Carter walks out with Woola at his heels and Sola taking his arm, proudly. Tal Hajus watches them, expression full of confusion and growing envy.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

I had at least two friends on Mars:
a kind young woman, and a dumb ugly
brute, both of whom held more love,
more loyalty, more gratitude than
could be found in the millions who
rove the deserted cities and dead
sea bottoms of Mars.

Behind them Tars Tarkas watches them go, in awe. Conflicted emotions play out on his face.

EXT. ABANDONED HOUSE - THARK

Outside, John Carter notices:

GREY FLIERS

Swing slowly over the crests of the Martian hills, a floating armada of twenty over the Martian landscape.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

Like a flock of enormous grey birds, flying ships appeared in the Martian skies, drifting toward us.

Dual buoyancy tanks full of helium descend from underneath the body, like talons.

At their prow is a large clockwork navigation compass, taking in sunlight and readings of the atmosphere.

Copper-skinned figures work the mechanisms, and runs across the boat-like deck. At the stern is a strange propeller, able to tilt and angle like the bird's 'tail'.

They are flying banners and sails of blue, adorned with a silver insignia of a winged tower.

The Thark soldiers, who have left the abandoned buildings, open fire on the incoming ships.

Carter watches in horror:

The first target on the ships is the navigation device on their brow, which explode as the Tharks fire upon them.

The closest flier turns broadside, protecting their device and aiming their guns much as a naval ship would.

But the Tharkian fire snipes at the complicated sights and steampunk targeting systems on the guns, destroying the gunmen in rapid succession, before picking off the rest of the crew on deck.

From Carter's vantage point, he sees the dead falling from the sides of the ship.

The next hit is the propeller of the closest ship, which blasts apart.

The ships begin to list. All except the closest ship wheel about and retreat the direction they came, disappearing behind the cover of the rocky Martian hills.

The closest one, however, is so badly damaged that it cannot follow the others. Only its buoyancy tank are keeping it afloat, and it veers on an erratic trajectory toward Thark.

The soldiers and Sarkoja cheer and laugh, mounting their Thoats, and ride toward buildings nearer to the ship. Carter breaks away from Sola and Tarkas, leaping after them.

Dismounting, the soldiers enter the abandoned dwellings, some going to the roof. John Carter lands directly on the roof, concerned and wanting a first-hand look.

The ship almost crashes straight into the building, but the Tharks hold out their spears from the windows and the roof to absorb the shock of the collision.

The Tharks on the roof throw grappling hooks onto the deck of the ship, pulling it downward, and climb aboard.

Sarkoja supervises as they swarm the deck, looting the cargo chests of furs, jewels, food, pottery, and casks of water. She opens a hatch, directs Thark soldiers to enter the hold.

John Carter can see, even from his position, that all the crewmen - copper-skinned, human-looking - are dead.

The Tharks reemerge from the hold, dragging a petite, copper-skinned woman: DEJAH THORIS (identical to Dyani/Thorn).

Her feet, as she struggles to resist the pull of the Tharks, are shod in sandals of zitidar hide.

Her hair is pulled loosely into an elegant coiffure, held in place by blue diamond pins, her modesty protected only by ornaments of highly-wrought, turquoise-encrusted silver.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

From the bowels of the doomed flier
they brought forth a fair captive.

The Tharks slide down the ropes, holding Dejah.

John Carter watches as she descends into view in front of him, and alights on the roof.

Dejah's eyes meet Carter's, and her look is one of renewed hope and courage. She yanks one hand free and makes a scooping/lifting gesture toward him.

John Carter gapes at her, not understanding.

Dejah looks disappointed.

The Tharks distract Carter, outfitting him in a harness, white fur cape, and weapons from the loot stash. Carter looks back at Dejah.

Dejah has a look of utter disgust, and tears her gaze away as the Tharks lead her off.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

Her signal... I intuitively felt she had made an appeal for protection, which my unfortunate ignorance of Martian customs had prevented me from answering before they dragged her away, into the depths of the deserted city.

The last Tharks on the ship pour oil all over dead bodies, deck and works of the vessel. They clamber over the sides, and slide down the ropes.

The last one throws what resembles a high-tech version of a stick of dynamite down the hold, and follows down a rope.

Just as the last of the Tharks touch the ground, they release the ropes - the flier, lightened of its load, lifts and floats into the air like a balloon.

The tech-dynamite explodes.

Debris is sent high in the air. The banner-sails catch flame.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

As I contemplated the mighty floating funeral pyre, drifting unguided through the lonely wastes of the Martian heavens... I hoped the fleet would return, and demand a reckoning from the Tharks, to whom fate had delivered their beautiful kinswoman.

Carter watches, grim and awe-inspired at once. Finally, he's seen enough, and turns his back to follow Dejah Thoris.

EXT. PLAZA - THARK - DAY

Sola trains Carter, and the young martian, in the use of swords, in front of a crowd of watching Tharks and the critical eye of Sarkoja, who has arms crossed. Dejah Thoris is beside her, flanked by female guards.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

Having now been outfitted in the panoply of war inherited from the doomed red men, Sola proceeded to instruct me in the mysteries of the various weapons.

Carter watches as Sola performs various maneuvers with the swords, both graceful and intimidating.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

Such training was conducted solely by the women. In time of actual warfare they form the reserves, and when the necessity arises fight with even greater intelligence and ferocity than the men.

Carter mimics her, catches on quicker than the bumbling little green martian, much to the latter's annoyance.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

My familiarity with similar, earthly weapons made me an apt pupil, and I progressed in a satisfactory manner.

Carter flashes a grin at Dejah.

Dejah glares, and turns her back on him. Sarkoja turns her back around, digging her nails into her shoulders.

One of the other green women examines Dejah:

GREEN MARTIAN LADY

(to Sarkoja)

When will we enjoy the death throes of the red woman?

SARKOJA

Our Jeddak has decided to exhibit her last agonies at the great games.

Carter overhears this, and stops with the lesson. Sola looks worried by his reaction - she sheathes her sword.

SOLA

What will be the manner of her going out?

SARKOJA
What is it to you?

SOLA
W-well, she is very small and
dainty - she would not last long in
the arena. I had hoped that they
would hold her for ransom...

SARKOJA
Hmph. You *hoped*.

Sarkoja steps toward her, peering down at her menacingly.

SARKOJA (CONT'D)
It is sad, Sola, that you were not
born a million years ago, when all
the hollows of the land were filled
with water, and people were as soft
as the stuff they sailed upon.

SOLA
I do not think it is weakness to
let the woman live.

SARKOJA
The only good foe is a dead one.

Sola looks into the reflection of her sword.

SOLA
I have ever thought that their
attitude toward us is but the
reflection of ours toward them. We
are at peace with none; it is one
continual period of bloodshed from
the time we break the shell, until
the river Iss carries us to an
unknown fate.

Sola sheathes her sword, meaningfully.

SARKOJA
It would go ill for you if my
superiors were to learn that you
hold such degenerate sentiments,
for they do not entrust such as you
with the grave responsibilities of
maternity.

Sola recoils, hurt.

SOLA

Say what you please to the Jeddak!
He can mete out no harsher
punishment than a continuation of
this horrible existence!

Sola storms away, into the palace. Carter follows, as does an exasperated Sarkoja dragging Dejah along.

INT. THARKIAN PALACE - DAY

Sola addresses Tal Hajus. Tars Tarkas and the nobles watch from their desks.

SOLA

Jeddak! Tell me that you are not so
unjust as to kill the red woman?!

Tal Hajus sits back, letting his eyes pass over her.

TAL HAJUS

Does this... displease you, girl?

JOHN CARTER

Yes - and it displeases me.

Everyone except Sola stares at Carter, astonished.

TAL HAJUS

You speak the tongue of Barsoom
quite readily for one who was deaf
and dumb to us a few short days
ago.

JOHN CARTER

(smiles at Sola)

Tars Tarkas is responsible, in that
he furnished me with an
instructress of remarkable ability.

TAL HAJUS

She has done well. But your
education in other respects needs
considerable polish. This red woman
is an enemy.

(off Dejah's haughty face)

Look at her! Do not let her
pleasing form fool you - she would
gladly kill every one of us, had
she the means.

JOHN CARTER

I suggest you let her speak for herself.

Dejah looks surprised, then approaches Tal Hajus.

DEJAH THORIS

I am Dejah Thoris, daughter of Mors Kajak, granddaughter of Tardos Mors who is Jeddak of Helium.

BURROUGHS

(V.O.)

Could I trouble you to repeat those names? There are an awful lot.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

There is only one you need remember: Dejah Thoris. Princess.

DEJAH THORIS

The nature of our expedition was purely scientific, to chart currents and atmospheric density. Were it not for our labors throughout the ages to maintain the air and water supply, there would not be a single trace of life upon the face of Barsoom.

Sarkoja jerks her backward by the hair.

SARKOJA

Your fleet did not enter blasting distance of Thark for tests!

DEJAH THORIS

Had we been prepared for battle, you would be reduced to ashes!

SARKOJA

Aha! Yes, that sounds more like your kind! What, you expect us to believe, with all your equipment, you could become lost?!

DEJAH THORIS

We were not lost! The blue of our banners clearly denoted our intent!

Carter grabs the hand Sarkoja has fastened onto Dejah's hair.

SARKOJA

Unhand me!

JOHN CARTER

Let go with three of yours, and we shall be even.

Sarkoja takes her hands off Carter and Dejah, folding both sets of arms indignantly. Dejah composes herself, resumes.

DEJAH THORIS

If you would put aside your all-consuming greed, you would see our work is as much in your interests as ours - together, we may regenerate our dying planet. Come back to the ways of our common ancestors, and you will find the hands of the Red men stretched out to aid you. The first will be mine.

Dejah stretches her hand outward, and waits.

There is silence in the room. Tarkas rises, but another soldier intercepts, striking aside both Dejah's hand with one arm and her face with another.

She falls, and he places a foot on her prostrate form, cackling, even as her nose bleeds onto the floor.

Carter pounces like a mountain lion, tackling the warrior. The warrior tries to pull his gun and unsheathe his swords, but he falls to the ground, bleeding and lifeless.

Carter scoops Dejah up, sets her on the vacated bench.

Tars Tarkas checks the fallen warrior.

TARS TARKAS

He is dead.

Tal Hajus and the other Tharks laugh. Tarkas begins to strip the warrior of his accoutrements.

Carter staunches Dejah's nosebleed with the silk of his cape.

DEJAH THORIS

Why did you do it?

JOHN CARTER

I am your friend, Dejah Thoris.

DEJAH THORIS
A friend who refused me recognition
in the first hour of my peril?

JOHN CARTER
Your ways are not my ways.

DEJAH THORIS
Indeed! Tell me, are you human, or
more than human?

JOHN CARTER
As you are: human, and a prisoner.

DEJAH THORIS
Then why do you wear the regalia of
a chieftain?

Tarkas taps Carter on the shoulder - in his arms is the
trappings of the warrior he stripped.

TARS TARKAS
Because he killed one.
(offers loot to Carter)
Now he has killed Lorquas, the Jed,
and earned his metal as well.

JOHN CARTER
How could he have died from a
single punch?

TARS TARKAS
You are fortunate he did. Do you
know what your unprecedented
temerity would have cost you, had
you failed to kill either the Jed
or the Jedwar?

JOHN CARTER
(smiling)
I presume the one whom I failed to
kill would have killed me.

TARS TARKAS
Only in the last extremity of self-
defense would a Barsoomian kill a
prisoner - we like to save them for
other purposes.

John Carter's smile falls.

TAL HAJUS

If a midget can kill a mighty
warrior with one blow of his fist,
I would set him upon the Warhoons.

JOHN CARTER

I fight on her behalf, not yours.

TAL HAJUS

Naturally. Rid us of the Warhoon
horde, John Carter, and I shall let
her live. If you do not, or if you
try to escape, she will be mine.

Carter, sickened, leads Dejah out. Passing by Sarkoja:

JOHN CARTER

Two Martians have met a sudden and
painful demise at my hands. Any who
would harm Dejah should figure on
joining that tally.

(at Sarkoja)

That includes you.

Sarkoja gives Carter an evil look as he exits the palace with
Dejah, Woola and Sola.

INT. CHAMBER - THARK

The four enter the living chamber. Deliveries from the looted
ship are there - the little martian has gotten into it, using
the water to make mud and draw on the mural-covered walls.

Sola groans, grabs the little martian, and drags him to the
courtyard for discipline.

Dejah approaches the murals, picks up a water cask.

She washes away the mud, to reveal the paintings of her
ancient kin.

Carter crouches down to join her - she compares him to them.

DEJAH THORIS

You are like unto my people. And
yet, so unlike: you consort with
the green men, and your color is
little darker than that of the
white ape!

JOHN CARTER

Well, in time your sun will remedy that, such few clothes as I have been given to wear.

DEJAH THORIS

That is another thing: you speak my language, shared by all Barsoom from the ice-clad south to the ice-clad north, yet you but recently learned it.

OUTSIDE THE DOORWAY

Sarkoja is once again listening.

DEJAH THORIS (CONT'D)

Only in the valley Dor, where the mysterious river Iss empties into the lost sea of Korus, is there a different language spoken...

Dejah looks to another part of the mural, which depicts robed people with marble-white skin, golden hair and blue eyes.

DEJAH THORIS (CONT'D)

By people with pale skin...

Dejah and Carter both turn to see Sarkoja, who quickly flees. Carter runs to the door, Dejah following.

Carter peers outside, but Sarkoja is nowhere in sight.

As Carter turns back inside, Dejah grabs Carter by the front harness straps.

DEJAH THORIS (CONT'D)

Do not tell me that you have thus returned! They would kill you horribly anywhere upon the surface of Barsoom if that were true!

(shakes him)

Tell me it is not!

John Carter grasps her hands, smiling.

JOHN CARTER

The Iss remains a mystery and the lost sea of Korus is still lost. I am not of Dor, or of Barsoom; I claim Virginia, one of the United States of America, as my home.

DEJAH THORIS
 (lets go, puzzled)
 Not of Barsoom? Where else would
 this Virginia be?

JOHN CARTER
 I am of another world: the planet
 Earth, revolving about our common
 sun in a closer orbit than your
 Barsoom, which we know as Mars. I
 do not know how I came here.

Dejah relaxes, and looks excited.

DEJAH THORIS
 I believe you. It makes sense.

JOHN CARTER
 It does?

DEJAH THORIS
 Strangely, yes. You see, every
 planet with atmospheric conditions
 approaching those of Barsoom shows
 forms of life, including those like
 you and me. But Earth, as you call
 it, was the first and closest such
 planet to be identified.

JOHN CARTER
 You are familiar with Earth?

Dejah beams proudly.

DEJAH THORIS
 My father *discovered* it. The Blue
 Planet, associated in our mythology
 with the goddess of love.

JOHN CARTER
 To us the second planet from the
 sun, Venus, is the goddess of love.

DEJAH THORIS
 (makes a face)
 It is a boiling cauldron of lava
 filled with monsters. Your planet
 is the blue of water, peace, life.
 (pauses, demures)
 I became a scientist, like my
 father, because I was hoping to be
 the first Barsoomian to set foot
 upon the Blue Planet.

DEJAH THORIS (CONT'D)

But I share that dream with many,
now that our schools teach the
geography, ecology and history of
your planet as well as our own.

JOHN CARTER

Then why is it none of you
recognized me as an Earth-man?

DEJAH THORIS

Because Earth men cover their
bodies with unsightly layers of
cloth and other hideous things the
purpose of which we have been
unable to conceive.

John Carter bursts out laughing.

JOHN CARTER

I never thought I would say this,
but I am thankful I lost my
clothing in transit.

DEJAH THORIS

So am I.

Carter sobers - a moment passes between them. He looks away.

Tars Tarkas appears in the doorway.

TARS TARKAS

John Carter. Come with me.

EXT. THOAT PASTURE - DAY

Tarkas leads Carter to a fenced-in pasture of yellow moss,
where Thoats wander about, grazing.

TARS TARKAS

If you are to fight the Warhoons,
you must first learn to ride.

They enter the pasture with other Tharks.

The Thoats snarl and growl at their approach. The Tharks leap
upon their backs, and the beasts rear and thrash. The Tharks
bash on the thoats' heads with the butt of their pistols. The
one Tarkas mounts snorts and obeys his command.

One of the Tharks is unseated, and the thout goes after him.
The Thark shoots and kills the one that unseated him, but
another Thout seizes its toothy jaws upon him.

Carter looks horrified, hearing the Thark being torn apart. Tarkas rides toward him, and Carter tenses at the thout.

TARKAS

Your turn.

The women of the fallen soldiers retinue dispatch the killer thout and drag the mangled remains of the Thark warrior into a pit outside the paddock.

JOHN CARTER

What happens when you ride these temperamental things into battle?

TARS TARKAS

If they thirst for the blood of our enemies, they may win the battle for us. If they thirst for ours, victory can become defeat.

Carter approaches one of the thouts, and they all glare at him warily. He notices a struggling thout in the back.

It has a rock wedged in between its teeth, an accident during grazing. Carter approaches that one, and the other thouts clear away to let him pass, looking confused.

Carter warily steps toward it as it thrashes its head - he places a hand on its snout, letting it stop to breathe in his scent. He urges the thout's head down on the ground, places his hands on both jaws, and urges them open.

To the gasps of the watching Tharks, he then reaches inside, using the elbow and fist of one arm to prop the jaws open, and uses his free hand to grab and pull the rock loose.

The thout relaxes, letting Carter exit his mouth, and nuzzles Carter in thanks. Carter then mounts the thout, who shrieks indignantly before Carter raps him on the rump with his sheathed sword. The thout snorts and lowers his head, resigned. The other thouts gather close, in awe.

Carter concentrates, using his telepathy.

The thout nods, strides forward calmly. Other thouts follow.

Carter thus rides to shocked Tars Tarkas.

TARS TARKAS (CONT'D)

How have you bewitched them?

JOHN CARTER

By kindness. You see, Tars Tarkas,
the softer sentiments have their
value, even to a warrior.

Tars Tarkas reflects on this.

TARS TARKAS

Show me how to accomplish these
results.

EXT. THARK - DAY

Carter rides into the plaza on his thout, where chariots are
gathered for war. He spots Dejah inside one of them, with
Woola standing guard. Carter dismounts and approaches.

JOHN CARTER

Dejah! Where is Sola?

DEJAH THORIS

She was told by Sarkoja that you
had become a true Thark, and Sola
did not want to see.

JOHN CARTER

Sarkoja is a liar of the first
magnitude.

Dejah smiles, relieved.

DEJAH THORIS

I should have known. 'A warrior may
change his metal, but not his
heart,' as the saying goes.

JOHN CARTER

(offers his hand)

I think Sola needs to be reminded
of that. Come, let us find her.

Dejah hesitates, glancing down.

Carter peers inside the chariot too, and sees she is heavily
chained to the chariot.

SOLA

(O.S.)

Sarkoja thought it best.

Carter turns to see Sola approach, warily, hand on her sword.

JOHN CARTER
Where is the key, Sola?

SOLA
Sarkoja wears it, John Carter.

JOHN CARTER
The gall of that woman! Who does she think she is?

SOLA
She is second only to Tars Tarkas, and has the Jeddak's ear. He granted her authority over Dejah after her last report to him.

JOHN CARTER
Have they subjected you to other cruelties in my absence, Dejah?

DEJAH THORIS
Only in little ways, John Carter. Nothing that can harm me outside my pride. They know that I am the daughter of ten thousand jeddaks, that I trace my ancestry to the builder of the first great waterway. They do not even know their own mothers. I pity them.

SOLA
Dejah, I am sorry but you neglect to tell him the whole truth.
(to Carter)
While you have been gone, Dejah has been working in the pits.

John Carter turns to Dejah for confirmation.

JOHN CARTER
What?

DEJAH THORIS
You have noticed that their bullets explode when they strike an object? Well, the opaque outer coating is broken by the impact, exposing a glass cylinder, almost solid, in the forward end of which is a minute particle of radium powder-

JOHN CARTER

Never mind that! Why were you in the pits?

DEJAH THORIS

I was trying to explain: the powder for their projectiles explode upon contact with sunlight, so it must be mixed and placed in the shells underground with artificial light.

JOHN CARTER

They would subject you to such dangerous labor?!

SOLA

I have been in the pits many times.

JOHN CARTER

I warned Sarkoja to stay away. I will have her head for this.

Tarkas approaches.

TARS TARKAS

Men and women do not kill each other on Barsoom, John Carter. Sarkoja reported that you have been plotting to escape with the red prisoner who, from her own admission, half believes you are returned from the valley Dor.

John Carter exchanges looks with Dejah.

TARKAS TARKAS

Either one of these accusations, if proved, would be sufficient grounds for your execution. If ever you and Dejah Thoris escape the Tharks it will be upon this journey. We know that you will not go without her.

Carter sighs, frustrated.

JOHN CARTER

I see. But I would ask that Sarkoja be disciplined, so that no more of these indignities are heaped upon Dejah. This much, Tars Tarkas, you may do for me in return for the friendship that I feel for you.

TARS TARKAS

Friendship? There is no such thing; but I shall direct that Sarkoja cease to annoy the girl, and I will take custody of the key.

JOHN CARTER

(roguish)

Unless... you wish *me* to assume the responsibility...?

TARS TARKAS

Were you to give me your word that neither you nor Dejah Thoris would attempt to escape, you might have the key and throw the chains into the river Iss.

JOHN CARTER

(smile falls)

...It were better that you held the key, Tars Tarkas.

Tars Tarkas smiles, and leaves. John Carter jumps up into the chariot with Dejah.

DEJAH THORIS

You could have lied.

JOHN CARTER

A gentleman does not lie.

Dejah stiffens when Carter's thoat approaches, and John Carter pulls a bit of moss from a pouch and gives it to the thoat to eat. Dejah is puzzled, but amused.

DEJAH

I presume that should you accidentally wound an enemy, you would take him home and nurse him back to health.

JOHN CARTER

Precisely, as we do on Earth. At least, among the civilized.

Dejah laughs.

DEJAH THORIS

A Thark warrior with a soft heart. You are a strange one, John Carter.

Tars Tarkas has approached Sarkoja, who reluctantly hands over the key.

She gives a baleful look to Carter as she enters a chariot with hulking young Thark warrior, ZAD. She talks whispers to him harshly, and Zad keeps glancing toward Carter.

EXT. THARK - DAY

The cavalcade leaves the city of Thark, and makes its way from the narrow mountain gorge, into the open desert.

Dejah Thoris and John Carter look out over the valley.

DEJAH THORIS

This was ocean, centuries ago.

Dejah turns to look back at the mountain pass, leading to the ruins of Thark disappearing into the distance.

DEJAH THORIS (CONT'D)

The pass was a shipping channel, and cargo would be unloaded at the harbor steps. The city was a center of commerce, arts, literature... so many things were lost along with the seas of Barsoom.

Sola listens, seated next to them.

DEJAH THORIS (CONT'D)

We followed the receding waters, until our only salvation became the canals. It is on the banks of these that we built the city of Helium.

SOLA

While the Green Men, created for war and nothing else, overtook the ruins left behind.

JOHN CARTER

(quietly)

Sola, will you not accompany us in an effort to escape? I am sure that Dejah can offer you a home and protection among her people.

DEJAH THORIS

Yes. Come with us, Sola; were we to go without you, and they thought you had connived to aid us...

SOLA

No words will ever escape my lips,
even under torture. I am good at
keeping secrets.

DEJAH THORIS

We trust you. But we want you with
us, to live amongst a people who
know happiness and love. Say that
you will, Sola.

SOLA

The chances are small indeed for
escape. They would follow us to the
very gates of Helium, taking toll
of life at every step.

JOHN CARTER

Can you draw me a rough map of the
country we must traverse, Dejah?

Dejah nods, taking a diamond pin out of her hair, revealing
it to be long and sharp with a smooth handle - like a dagger.

She pulls aside the silks and furs covering the bottom of the
chariot, and etches a map crisscrossed with long straight
lines and circles.

DEJAH THORIS

The lines are waterways. The
circles are cities.

(points)

This is where we are.

(point to another)

This is Helium.

JOHN CARTER

So there are cities in between?

DEJAH THORIS

I caution against entering them.
Not all are friendly toward Helium.

JOHN CARTER

(points)

Does not this pierce your
grandfather's territory?

DEJAH

Yes, but it is two hundred miles
north of us.

JOHN CARTER

They would never suspect we would try for that distant waterway.

SOLA

Which is why it would be the best route for our escape.

Sola smiles, as does Carter.

Carter covers the map up with silks and fur.

EXT. THARK ENCAMPMENT - WASTES - DUSK

The Tharks have made an encampment of white tents, set up outside the crumbled ruins of a city.

The extra thoads are herded into a stone enclosure by Zad.

Tal Hajus and his council pass by Carter as he sets up the second of two tents, one of which is occupied by Sola.

Tal Hajus passes by the chariot containing the chained and sleeping Dejah, leering at her, and then at Sola. Carter glares at him warningly.

Carter watches him and the other council members disappear into the main chamber of the ruins. Carter hears clanking:

Tarkas is unlocking the chains for Dejah. She awakens - he leaves before she can thank him.

Sola smiles within her tent, and sets out a second set of sleeping silks for Dejah. Woola jumps in it, refusing Sola's commands to move aside. Dejah laughs.

DEJAH THORIS

No, it is all right! Leave him be.

Dejah enters Carter's tent.

JOHN CARTER

Dejah! Would you not rather be in the ladies' tent?

IN SOLA'S TENT

Sola presses her cupped antennae to the side of the tent.

DEJAH THORIS

(O.S.)

No. I am happy here.

Sola nods, curls up on her silks with Woola.

IN CARTER'S TENT

Dejah lies down - Carter awkwardly places the silks around her moonlit form. His hand remains on her shoulder, as she gazes at him.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

As my arm rested for an instant upon her naked shoulder, I felt a thrill pass through every fiber of my being such as contact with no other mortal had ever produced; I realized that I had loved her since the first moment that my eyes had met hers, in the plaza of a dead city, on a dying world.

DEJAH THORIS

I do not know why it is that I should always feel this way when you, a stranger, are with me: that I am safe, and that, with you, I shall soon return to my father's court, and feel his strong arms about me, and my mother's tears and kisses on my cheek.

JOHN CARTER

Do people kiss, then, upon Barsoom?

DEJAH THORIS

Parents, brothers, and sisters, yes. And... lovers.

JOHN CARTER

You, Dejah Thoris, have parents and brothers and sisters?

DEJAH THORIS

Yes.

JOHN CARTER

And a...lover?

Dejah turns over on her side, to face away from him.

DEJAH THORIS

The man of Barsoom does not ask personal questions of women, except his mother, and the woman he has fought for and won.

JOHN CARTER

But I have fought for you, my princess.

Dejah draws in breath sharply and sits upright. She regards him a moment, then shakes her head with a sound of disbelief, throwing aside the sleeping silks and rising.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

What have I done now?

DEJAH THORIS

(exiting tent)

What a child! A great warrior, and yet a stumbling little child.

OUTSIDE

Carter peers out of his tent, while Dejah goes into Sola's tent. There are some grumbles from Dejah, but nothing Carter can make out. Sola leaves the tent, looks at Carter.

JOHN CARTER

What is the matter with Dejah?

SOLA

All she will say is that she, the daughter of jedds and jeddaks and so on, has been humiliated by a creature who could not polish the teeth of her grandmother's sorak.

JOHN CARTER

...What might a sorak be, Sola?

SOLA

(gestures)

A little animal, kept by the Red Barsoomians to play with.

JOHN CARTER

A cat.

(shakes head, crestfallen)

I am not fit to polish the teeth of her grandmother's cat.

With a sigh, Carter closes the tent flaps.

INSIDE CARTER'S TENT

He tries to go to sleep on his silks. He tosses and turns, then gives up and sits cross-legged, frowning.

He watches the two moons pass the opening of the tent.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

I believe a man's way with women is in inverse ratio to his prowess among men. The weakling and the saphead have often great ability to charm the fair sex, while the fighting man sits hiding in the shadows like some frightened child.

EXT. THARK ENCAMPMENT - WASTES - DAWN

Frowning, baggy-eyed, messy-haired Carter exits the tent.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

So this was love! I escaped it all my years on Earth, only to fall for a creature from another world, hatched from an egg, whose span of life might cover a thousand years.

He sees Sola attending her thout. He looks questioningly at Dejah's tent. Sola shrugs. Carter hangs his head.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

Though I was suffering the greatest misery I had ever known, I would not have had it otherwise for all the riches of Barsoom.

Carter puts a new riding blanket on his thout, when he sees Zad approach the tent where Dejah is sleeping, sword drawn.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

Come away from there, that is not your tent.

Zad gives him an ugly sneer, and approaches him. He looks at Carter's thout...and cuts off its head with the sword.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

I did not need a manual of Green Martian etiquette to know what reply to make - I could scarcely refrain from drawing my pistol and putting him down for the beast he was, but he stood waiting with a sword, and my only choice was to meet him in fair fight with his choice of weapons.

Carter draws his longsword.

All the Tharks are alerted to the battle, and gather around. Dejah looks out of the tent, and joins Sola.

Zad lunges at Carter. Carter evades, gives him minor nicks.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

He first attempted to charge me as a bull might a wolf. I was too quick for that.

Zad does this a few more times, streaming blood from a half dozen minor flesh wounds on his back and arms.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

Yet I was unable to deliver an effective thrust myself.

Zad squares off with him, carefully circling.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

Then he changed his tactics, and tried to do by science what he failed to do by brute strength.

Their swords flash in the sunlight, ringing out upon the stillness as they crash together with each effective parry.

Carter concentrates hard as he fights the ogre-like Zad.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

I must admit he was a magnificent swordsman, and had it not been for the remarkable agility lent to me by the lesser gravitation of Mars, I might not have stood a chance.

Zad, huffing and sweating, stops dancing around. He rushes in with a series of quick and deadly attacks.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

He closed in to end the battle in a final blaze of glory; just as he rushed me, a flash of light struck full in my eyes.

CARTER'S POV

The blinding flash wipes out his vision of the oncoming Zad.

Carter squeezes his eyes shut, throws himself to one side.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

I leapt blindly to one side in an effort to escape the mighty blade which, it seemed, I could already feel in my vitals.

Carter rolls on the ground, his shoulder bleeding.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

I was only partially successful, as a sharp pain in my shoulder attested.

(off Dejah, Sola, Sarkoja)

As my fleeting glance swept over the watching women, a little tableau was presented which will stand graven in my memory.

CARTER'S POV

Time slows as Carter sees Dejah attack Sarkoja with one of her diamond hairpins, striking something from Sarkoja's hand:

A mirror, flashing light as it spins, shatters on the ground.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

Women may not kill men on Barsoom, but Sarkoja had found a way.

Sarkoja claws at Dejah, and draws wicked-looking DAGGERS.

Sola spings between them, pushing Dejah away and defending from three of Sarkoja's arms, but the last one descends downward toward her chest.

Time resumes its normal pace when Zad attacks Carter and forces him to defend himself. A thrust from Zad lands in Carter's chest.

Carter's vision blurs.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

Feeling the sharp point of his sword, I determined that I would not die alone.

Carter stretches his sword outward.

CARTER'S POV

He tries to aim the sword at Zad, but Zad's form moves along with his whirling, blurry vision.

Carter yells and throws himself forward with all his weight.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

I felt steel tear into my chest.

Carter's knees give way. There is blood, and Carter falls.

His eyes stare into nothing for many a tense moments.

Dejah approaches him, trembling. She sinks to her knees beside him, and screams. When Sola comes toward her, she runs away, and throws herself into the chariot.

But then, Carter blinks, springs to his feet. He finds Zad's sword through his chest, coming out beneath his shoulder.

He looks over at Zad, sword buried to the hilt in his chest. The watching Martians are clapping.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

Moments later consciousness returned: my adversary lay stone dead upon the ochre moss of the ancient sea bottom. A murmur of Martian applause greeted me, but I cared not for it.

Carter recovers his sword from the corpse. He sheathes it, and begins to pull at the sword buried in his chest. Sola cries out, waving her arms and shaking her head - she has bandages and vials of remedial agents in all her arms.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

Give a Martian woman a chance, and death must take a back seat.

As she leads him away, Carter notices her own bandaged chest.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

Sola was apparently little the worse for her encounter with Sarkoja, whose dagger had struck the edge of Sola's metal breast ornament and, thus deflected, inflicted only a a slight wound.

Sola leads him back to the tent - they pass Dejah, lying in the chariot sobbing.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(nods toward Dejah)

Is she injured?

SOLA

No, she thinks that you are dead.

JOHN CARTER

(smiles)

And thus no one to polish the teeth of grandma's cat?

SOLA

I think you wrong her, John Carter. I am sure she would never grieve like this over any who held but the highest claim upon her affections.

JOHN CARTER

Dejah!

Dejah pops up, wide-eyed and gaping to see him.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

I still live! When I have this sword removed, I will continue to fight for your honor, my princess.

She frowns, turns away arms folded, and sinks down inside the chariot once more.

SOLA

She must be very angry, if she will not admit your existence living, though she mourns you dead.

Sola leads Carter into the tent.

INSIDE CARTER'S TENT

Sola sits Carter down, pulls out the sword - Carter makes a sound of pain through gritted teeth. With all four arms, Sola immediately goes to work with the medicine salves to staunch the blood and clean it, and bandages him up very fast.

SOLA (CONT'D)

Tears are a strange sight upon Barsoom. I have seen but two other people weep in all my life: one was Sarkoja, when they dragged her from me today. The other was my mother, years ago before they killed her.

JOHN CARTER

Your mother! But Sola, child, you could not have known your mother.

SOLA

But I did. My father also. I wish I could be a proper Thark, but I have known love, and so I am lost.

EXT. THARK - FLASHBACK - YEARS PRIOR

GOZAVA, a petite Thark, admires a wildflower.

She sits on a hill, in the outskirts of Thark.

SOLA

(V.O.)

My mother was Gozava, of the retinue of Tal Hajus. Too small and soft-hearted to be chosen for maternity, she roamed the deserted avenues and hills, alone with her thoughts and hopes.

Thoats and zitidars pass: shepherding them is a young Tars Tarkas, struggling to control the brutes himself.

Tarkas sits beside Gozava, talking.

SOLA (CONT'D)

She met a young warrior, novice herder of animals. She confessed to him her repugnance for cruelty, expecting a storm of denunciation to break from his lips.

Tarkas takes her in his arms and kisses her.

SOLA (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

In the years of their secret love, my father aimed to wrest the metal from Tal Hajus and become ruler of Thark, so he could claim and protect us. His advance was rapid, until he was ordered to war against the natives of the ice-clad south, to despoil them of their furs.

EXT. TOWER - THARK - DAY - FLASHBACK - LATER

Gozava climbs a tall, ruined tower, with the egg in her arms.

SOLA

(V.O.)

My egg was hidden in the highest tower of ancient Thark.

INT. TOWER - THARK - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Gozava, with her little daughter Sola, laughing and playing.

SOLA

(V.O.)

When I hatched, my mother visited nightly, teaching me language and customs. One night, she told me the story of my birth, and whispered the name of my father in my ear.

Gozava whispers the name in her daughter's ear. Light flashes upon the darkness of the tower. They turn to see:

Sarkoja, standing in the doorway to the chamber, glaring.

SOLA (CONT'D)

Sarkoja, suspicious of my mother's nightly absences, found us.

Gozava rises to confront Sarkoja. Young Sola watches in terror as Sarkoja yells, and the shadows of her four arms strike out against Gozava.

SOLA (CONT'D)

She heard everything except the name of my father, which my mother insisted was known to her alone.

Sarkoja leaves the tower, the beaten Gozava trembling on the floor. Gozava rises, wraps Sola in sleeping silks and furs.

SOLA (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

Sarkoja hastened to report her discovery to Tal Hajus. Mother fled to find the man whose protection we might not claim, but on whose face she wished to look upon once more.

EXT. TOWER - THARK - NIGHT - FLASHBACK

Gozava climbs down the tower with Sola.

At the bottom of the tower, they run into the city, making their way toward the outskirts. There is the squealing and grumbling of approaching thoats and zitidars.

Gozava and Sola hide in the shadows of a building, watching to see who comes. As the head of the procession passes, the lesser moon swings clear of the overhanging roofs, shining brilliant light. Gozava shrinks further into the shadows.

SOLA

(V.O.)

My mother saw that the returning expedition was not that of my father, but the caravan bearing the newly-hatched Tharks.

With Sola in her arms, she slips onto a passing chariot. She embraces Sola tightly, and as they come to a stop in the plaza, she deposits Sola into a crowd of Thark children.

The children are herded together into a nearby room by the caretaking female Tharks, with Sola staring back at her mother until the last instant before she disappears inside.

Tears fall from Gozava's eyes, as Thark warriors arrest her.

SOLA (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

In the confusion of the plaza she mixed me with the other children. The next day, we were parceled out among the retinues.

INT. DUNGEON - NIGHT

Gozava, beaten and bloody, stares out with dead eyes upon a platform. Tal Hajus laughs with the council members.

SOLA

(V.O.)

My mother was imprisoned, and the most shameful torture was employed to wring from her lips the name of my father.

Sarkoja folds her arms, grinding her teeth with frustration.

SOLA (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

She told them she killed me and threw my body to the white apes to save me from a like fate at their hands. All believed except Sarkoja.

INT. AUDIENCE CHAMBER - THARKIAN PALACE

Tal Hajus gleefully describes Gozava's death struggles to Tars Tarkas. Sola, a little older than before, listens and watches sadly as everyone laughs.

Tars Tarkas does not move a muscle, betraying no emotion. But he does not laugh with the others.

SOLA

(V.O.)

I was present when my father learned my mother's fate from Tal Hajus. He does not know about me, but I am sure his love never died.

INT. CARTER'S TENT - PRESENT

Sola shivers from the memory, hugging herself.

Carter looks at her with sympathy.

JOHN CARTER

And I am sure he became more determined than ever to make a carcass out of Tal Hajus.

(beat)

After so many years of secrecy, why do you risk telling a stranger?

SOLA

John Carter, if ever a real man walked the cold, dead surface of Barsoom, you are one. I trust you, and I believe this knowledge may someday help us.

SOLA(CONT'D)

(whispers in his ear)

My father's name is Tars Tarkas.

Tears fall from Sola's eyes, and she sits next to Carter. Carter takes the corner of his sleeping silks, and dries her tears. She smiles gratefully.

INT. DEJAH'S TENT

Bursting in, Carter sees Dejah seated upon the contented Woola, who she pets idly, refusing to look at Carter.

DEJAH THORIS

What would a *Thark* desire of Dejah
Thoris, *his captive*?

JOHN CARTER

Dejah, I do not know how I have
angered you. My only desire has
been to serve you.

(she ignores him, he
strides further in)

Have none of me, as you wish. But
that you aid me in your escape is
not my request, but my command.

Dejah rises abruptly, eyes flashing. They face off.

DEJAH THORIS

Command, is it?!

JOHN CARTER

When you are safe once more at your
father's court, you may do with me
as you please.

DEJAH THORIS

I shall!

JOHN CARTER

Do we have an agreement, then?

Dejah seethes at him, eyes narrowed and shaking with rage.

DEJAH THORIS

I follow your directions, because I
understand the motives which prompt
them. But you I do not understand:
queer mixture of child and man,
brute and noble. I accept your
service no more willingly than I
bow to your authority.

JOHN CARTER
 Fine. Come with me.

Dejah begrudgingly follows him out.

EXT. THARK ENCAMPMENT - WASTES - NIGHT

Dejah and Sola saddle one thoot, packing all the gear and supplies they will need, but Carter is without one.

He arms his harness with a sword, two revolvers, and a rifle strapped to his back.

He leaves the encampment, and enters the ruins' main gate.

EXT. RUINS - NIGHT

Carter finds the thoot enclosure, and carefully sneaks in. The thoots surround him, and Carter thinks he's done for. But then, one thoot steps very close and nuzzles him, and he gives it a bit of food. He leads the thoot away.

EXT. WASTES - NIGHT

Carter leads the thoot to a little ruined veranda, finds Woola and the other saddled thoot, missing its riders.

JOHN CARTER
 (V.O.)
 I reached the rendezvous point, but there was no sign of the two women. I wondered what had delayed them, when the answer came.

Sarkoja leads a party of four mounted warriors nearby.

SARKOJA
 He would likely have arranged to meet them just without the city. It will require the combined strength of all to disarm him. Take him to the vaults beneath the jeddak's quarters, and chain him securely where he may be found when Tal Hajus wishes him.

THARK SOLDIER #1
 What of the girl?

SARKOJA

She is safe in the arms of Tal
Hajus, and may all her ancestors
have pity upon her, for he will
have none. My work is done: if you
fail to capture him, I commend your
carcasses to the cold bosom of Iss.

Carter reacts, rethinking quickly. He takes the throats, and Woola, back into the city.

He goes toward the light of the council's quarters, and peers inside one of the windows:

The council members are crowded around the edge of the room.

Carter looks up, sees an unlit window in the second floor. He leaps upward to it, and enters an untenanted room. He makes for the doorway, and looks down:

Sola and Dejah are standing before Tal Hajus.

Tars Tarkas stands in the shadow of a large column, glaring with hatred at Tal Hajus, hand on his sword hilt.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

I did not need telepathy to read the thoughts of Tars Tarkas: he remembered that other woman, who long years prior stood before this beast. Could he have received my thought at that moment, the reign of Tal Hajus would have been over.

TAL HAJUS

(gestures)

Leave us, all of you.

The council chamber empties, filing up the walkway to the very balcony where John Carter stands. He leaps down into the shadows, reaches for Tars Tarkas, but he leaves too.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

But he also strode from the room, not knowing that he left his own daughter at the mercy of the creature he most loathed.

TAL HAJUS

Your John Carter has doomed you. I told him what would happen should you try to escape.

DEJAH THORIS

You are a fool! You threaten me so that John Carter will murder for you - when you might wring a mighty ransom from my people, would you but return me to them unharmed!

TAL HAJUS

Yes, princess, I could do that. But a thousand times would I rather watch your face writhe in agony, knowing that for all the ages to come, your kin will shudder in the shadows of the night recalling the terrors of your death. Tomorrow the torture will commence: but tonight, you belong to Tal Hajus!

He tackles Dejah to the floor, grabbing her wrists with his upper hands and forcing her legs apart with his lower.

Carter leaps forward, slicing through two of Tal Hajus' arms.

Sola pulls Tal Hajus away by his other arms as Carter helps Dejah to her feet - they run out the door. Sola punches Tal Hajus with all four fists, and follows.

Tal Hajus roars, alerting Tarkas who descends the pathway.

TAL HAJUS (CONT'D)

(to Tars Tarkas)

Capture them!!

EXT. RUINED CITY - NIGHT

Carter finds the four Tharks surrounding his thoats and Woola. Woola is putting up a valiant fight.

Sola mounts one thoat, Dejah and Carter the other. Carter and Sola fight the soldiers back, and take off for the wastes.

Tars Tarkas runs out of the chamber, sees them speeding off.

He goes to the thoat enclosure. Mimicking Carter, he offers food to the thoat so that it is calm when he mounts.

Meanwhile, the other warriors try to mount the thoats, and are ripped apart as usual. The thoats escape the enclosure, rampaging toward the encampment.

MEANWHILE

Dejah rests her head on Carter's shoulder.

DEJAH THORIS

If we make it, my chieftain, the debt of Helium will be greater than she can ever repay.

Carter places a hand over hers, which cling to him. Carter closes his eyes, elated.

The sun rises on the little riding silhouettes. As the sun exchanges positions with the moons several times, the figures slow, and become more slumped over.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

We rode all night and the following days with only a few short rests for sleep, leaving all of us exhausted. When we sighted no distant trees, the mark of the great waterways throughout all Barsoom, the terrible truth flashed upon us - we were lost.

They stop, and dismount, stumbling and groaning.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

We hoped that from some ridge we might discern the missing waterway. But we were ready to drop from hunger, thirst and fatigue.

Carter can see the outline of low mountains in the distance, and points them out. But they all just take a rest in the shadow of the thoats, exhausted.

Night falls, and is replaced by the sun once more.

Carter slumbers - loud breath gently blows through his hair.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

I was awakened by a huge body pressing close to mine.

John Carter looks into the face of Woola, snuggling close.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

Opening my eyes I beheld my blessed
old Woola; the faithful brute had
followed us across the trackless
waste to share our fate, whatever
it might be.

Carter embraces Woola tightly, tears falling from his eyes.

Dejah awakens too, and smiles wistfully at this sight.

LATER

They are back to riding. The thout carrying Dejah and Carter
lurches, and pitches violently to the ground, throwing them
onto the moss.

Carter removes its trappings - the thout's too weak to rise.

The other thout, distressed, nudges the rifle strapped to
Carter, staring at him with pleading eyes, nodding its head.

Regretfully, Carter aims his rifle at the thout.

MEANWHILE

The gunshot echoes through the valley...and is heard by Tars
Tarkas, who rides toward the sound.

Tarkas finds them walking, leading the one remaining thout
carrying all their gear.

Dejah watches as Carter feeds Woola a piece of (not)cheese.

DEJAH THORIS

I wish that I might have your
heart, as he does.

JOHN CARTER

You do.

(they stop)

Look down at your feet, Dejah
Thoris; it lies there now, where it
will ever lie beating alone for you
until death stills it forever.

Dejah looks at him, vulnerable.

DEJAH THORIS

What do you mean, John Carter?

(steps closer)

What are you saying to me?

JOHN CARTER

I am saying, Dejah Thoris, that I am yours, body and soul, to serve you, to fight for you, and to die for you.

Dejah places her hands hesitantly on his chest.

A BLAST nearly hits them - Carter looks back to see Tars Tarkas, with his rifle. Tarkas stops his thocht and dismounts.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

Hold, Tars Tarkas! You released Dejah yourself-

TARS TARKAS

A mistake I would not make again.

JOHN CARTER

You knew we would escape!

Tars Tarkas huffs.

TARS TARKAS

Yes, and so did Sarkoja! She found your hastily-covered map, which clearly did not help you find your way. Had I but known you would blunder your way toward Warhoon!

Carter exchanges concerned looks with Dejah and Sola.

JOHN CARTER

Warhoon...

TARS TARKAS

I have spent days tracking you, to save you from yourselves. Now you will return with me to Thark. I have spoken.

JOHN CARTER

If we return, we will all experience fates worse than death.

TARS TARKAS

I can bring you back dead, if you prefer - but I cannot return without you, or my complicity in your escape will be confirmed.

(aims gun at Carter)

I am afraid I must insist.

JOHN CARTER
Come with us.

TARS TARKAS
Impossible. I have unfinished
business with Tal Hajus.

JOHN CARTER
Your daughter lives, my friend,
unless you deliver her to him.

Tars Tarkas blinks rapidly.

TARS TARKAS
What?

John Carter moves aside, urging Sola forward.

SOLA
My mother...was Gozava.

The moment is interrupted by ominous HORNS, thumps, clanking armor and weapons. They see:

Green Martians ride nearby.

Scarred, missing limbs, ears, eyes, tusks, which are adorned with barbed wire. They wear necklaces of severed hands and breastplates of skulls. They have no guns - all arms wield massive, bloodstained clubs of zitidar bone.

TARS TARKAS
The Warhoons!

Carter unholsters the two revolvers for Dejah and Sola.

JOHN CARTER
We may meet in Helium yet - I have
escaped worse plights than this.

Carter tries to smile reassuringly. Dejah is horrified.

DEJAH
Are you not coming with us?

JOHN CARTER
Someone must hold the fellows off.

Dejah embraces him tightly. She turns to Sola.

DEJAH THORIS
Fly, Sola - Dejah Thoris remains to
die with the man she loves.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

Those words are engraved upon my heart. I would gladly give my life could I only hear them once again.

Sola and Tarkas exchange looks.

SOLA

We are Tharks. We do not fly.

Sola, Tarkas, Carter and Dejah urge the thoats down, and lie prone on their stomachs, guns ready and aimed.

The Warhoons seem to be passing by, but then grizzled, mace-wielding jed DAK KOVA stops and brings out a spyglass.

Dak Kova scans the area.

THROUGH THE SPYGLASS

He sees nothing but red rock, then he sees strange shadows. He takes a double-take, returning to that spot, and realizes that they are Carter & co., aiming at his horde with guns.

Dak Kova puts his spyglass away, and charges toward them.

A shot from Carter finds its mark, and knocks Dak Kova backward from his mount.

The other Warhoons ride toward the oncoming gunfire of our heroes. They pick off the Warhoons coming toward him, and for a few moments, it seems they have gotten all of them.

But then, a whole horde appears past the mountain ridge.

They toss the guns, unsheathe their swords - Dejah takes the great diamond pins from her hair, wielding them as daggers.

The Warhoons are upon them, roaring and slashing with their weapons. The two thoats of the heroes squeal at the Warhoon thoats, who stop abruptly, eyeing Carter in a new light. They buck off their riders.

The dismounted Warhoons race head-first like bulls, their middle arms used on the ground like legs, swinging their wicked tusks, using upper arms to clobber with their clubs.

Dejah and Sola fight like beautiful but deadly dancers, Tarkas is a powerful swordsman, and Carter soars about, descending with his sword like an eagle.

Dak Kova, recovered from his injury, enters the fray with his gigantic iron maces. He is by far the most skilled and dangerous fighter - he goes after Sola, knocking aside and breaking her swords, and grabbing her by the waist with one massive hand.

Woola leaps and tackles him, forcing him to drop Sola. Dejah drags Sola out of the way of Dak Kova's swinging maces, but Dak Kova swats her with his empty hand and sends her flying.

Carter leaps in and catches Dejah in his arms. He calls out telepathically to the thoot:

CARTER

Run.

The thoot nods, and races far away from the battle.

Carter bounds toward the thoot, stopping it, and throws Dejah over the saddle.

DEJAH

NO!

Carter whistles at Woola, who stops fighting Dak Kova to meet Carter. Woola jumps on the backseat with Dejah, pinning her to the thoot, and the thoot takes off with blinding speed into the Martain wastes.

Carter returns to the battle - Dak Kova is engaged in battle with Tars Tarkas, who is fighting back-to-back with his daughter. Dak Kova spots Carter, and goes after him.

They face off, but three giant maces are too much for Carter to contend with. One of them catches him and sends him flying into a projecting rock of quartz. He sprawls onto the moss.

The Warhoons press in, he tries to raise his sword to defend himself as they savagely beat him with their bone clubs.

JOHN CARTER

I reeled beneath their blows which
fell upon me in perfect torrents;
my head swam; I went down beneath
them, to oblivion, and all went
black before me.

BLACKOUT.

EXT. WARHOON

Carter awakens on a pile of silks and furs to see an ugly old female WARHOON MEDIC attending to him, none too gently. Dak Kova is behind her, watching.

WARHOON MEDIC
He will live, my Jed.

JOHN CARTER
(V.O.)
When I awoke, I found I had but
jumped from purgatory into gehenna.

There are torches everywhere, in yet another city ruins - but every wall here is splattered and smeared with blood. The Warhoons fight each other around a massive bonfire, creating a hellish scene.

Jeddak of Warhoon, BAR COMAS, presides in a gruesome throne with Sola on his lap, pinned to him by two of his arms.

Bound by WARHOON GUARDS before Bar Comas is Tarkas and MORS KAJAK, a middle-aged Red Martian man with a breastplate of silver and turquoise, and modesty-covering tasset of turquoise feathers, studies Carter curiously as Dak Kova shoves Carter before the throne.

BAR COMAS
Where is the Princess of Helium?

DAK KOVA
(wiping his nose on a
severed hand)
Gone. The reds took her.

Carter lets out his breath with relief - he looks over at Mors Kajak, surprised that he is doing the same thing.

DAK KOVA (CONT'D)
Tal Hajus lost his prize to
Zodanga.

Carter notices Mors Kajak looks alarmed at this news.

DAK KOVA (CONT'D)
(shakes head, disgusted)
Trying to mate with a red female...
that is *barbaric*.

SOLA
John Carter! Father! You live!

Bar Comas uses one hand to cover her mouth.

BAR COMAS
No matter - I have mine.

TARS TARKAS
Let her go!

Dak Kova hits him in the gut to silence him, lifts up Carter.

DAK KOVA
I have brought a strange creature
wearing the metal of a Thark, whom
it is my pleasure to have die in
the great games.

BAR COMAS
If he dies, it will be as your
jeddak sees fit.

DAK KOVA
By the dead hands at my throat he
shall die! Oh, would that Warhoon
were ruled by a *real* jeddak rather
than a water-hearted weakling!

Bar Comas screams, dropping Sola and lunging at Dak Kova.

Without drawing weapons, they viciously tear at each other's ears and eyes, goring and slashing with their tusks.

Sola runs to Carter, grasping one arm, while Mors grasps the other, huddled together in shared terror. Tarkas, alone unaffected, sighs and holds all three in his massive arms.

The younger Bar Comas seems to have an advantage over the older Dak Kova, but then Bar Comas trips over a bone.

Dak Kova gores him in the groin, and rips his tusk upward.

Bar Comas hangs limply by his jaw on Dak Kova's tusk, like a wet towel on a hook. Dak Kova removes him and throws him on the ground, placing his foot on his dead foe's neck and his hands in the air, like a victorious boxer.

The Warhoon women go to sever Bar Comas head and hands.

Sola buries her head against Tarkas' chest, unable to watch.

The Warhoon women throw the headless, handless body into the bonfire, shrieking with laughter.

Other Warhoons strap Carter onto the back of a rabid, scarred thout.

They whip the thout's rump, causing it to race off, jostling Carter roughly as it enters the cavernous WARHOON PRISON.

INT. WARHOON PRISON

OVER BLACK:

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

I was cast into a dungeon. I do not know whether I lay there days, weeks, or months.

The sound of a door creaking open. The WARHOON JAILER, keys jangling, brings a dim torch into the darkness, illuminating Carter, heavily chained to the floor and wall. The jailer places a plate of soggy cheese on the floor before Carter.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

No sound reached me from the world above, and although I at first bombarded him with questions, no word escaped my jailer when he brought me food.

The jailer disappears, taking the light with him.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

It is a wonder that my mind did not give way to the terrors of that utter, inky darkness.

Carter blindly reaches for the plate of food, but it is already being eaten by cold, sinuous creepy-crawlies who pass over Carter's flesh and make him recoil.

CUT TO:

The Warhoon Jailer returns with another plate of food.

John Carter looks more deranged this time, eyes wide and bloodshot in his sickly pale face. He crouches like a beast in the corner of the cell, gathering a slack of the chain.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

Finally all the hatred and maniacal loathing for these awful creatures who had placed me in this horrible place was centered by my tottering reason upon this single emissary, who represented to me the entire horde of Warhoons.

The Jailer stoops before him to place the plate down, and Carter cracks the chain down upon his skull. The Jailer sinks to the floor.

John Carter laughs wildly, mutters to himself as he gropes the Jailer's face, assuring the Jailer is unconscious.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

Laughing and gibbering like the mad idiot I was fast becoming, I fell upon his prostrate form, my fingers feeling for the means of my escape.

His fingers find the chain of keys around the Jailer's neck.

Gleaming, fiery-red eyes light up in the darkness, at the same height as Carter's. They approach, bobbing slowly, with a soft, wet sound as their bodies slide along the floor.

Carter shuffles back into a corner, crouches and holding his hands palm-outward to shield himself.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

I glanced up into the darkness to see six pairs of gleaming eyes fixed, unblinking, upon me. I shrank back, and stealthily on came the awful eyes.

The body drags away from Carter, the eyes retreating until they disappear into the darkness and the grating of the body against the floor ceases.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

They dragged my prize away to some distant recess of the dungeon, where they had been waiting to drag my dead carcass. For two days no food was brought to me. Then, both food and companionship arrived.

A new Jailer comes in, with Mors Kajak - he gives Mors two plates of food, and chains him to the wall before leaving.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(O.S.)

Greetings.

MORS KAJAK

Who speaks out of the darkness?

Carter edges closer, so that he can see him a bit.

JOHN CARTER

John Carter, a friend of the red men of Helium.

MORS KAJAK

I am of Helium, but I do not recall your name.

JOHN CARTER

Nor would you. I hail from the Blue Planet.

MORS KAJAK

The Blue Planet?! Goodness, man! Tell me everything! What are the contraptions earth-men wear upon their heads, and what are they for?

JOHN CARTER

I would be happy to discuss hats. But first I must know about the princess I serve: Dejah Thoris.

Mors Kajak cannot contain his excitement.

MORS KAJAK

A friend indeed! For I am her father, Mors Kajak, Jed of Helium. How was she when you last saw her?

JOHN CARTER

(V.O., as Carter talks with Mors)

I told him everything that had occurred up to that point, and he then explained what had brought him to the dungeons of Warhoons.

MORS KAJAK

I was flying with the Helium navy to rescue my daughter Dejah, when the Zodangan fleet attacked.

JOHN CARTER

Zodanga is an enemy, then?

MORS KAJAK

They are now, and my daughter is their captive. The Zodangan prince, Sab Than, is madly in love with her. His father Than Kosis has made her marriage to his son the price of peace between the cities, which have been at the edge of civil war.

BURROUGHS

(V.O.)

Stop, I must interrupt a moment: how do these hereditary names work?

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

How do you mean?

BURROUGHS

(V.O.)

This 'Sab Than' took his father's first name as his last, while 'Mors Kajak' took as his father's last name as his first...?

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

Ah, yes. Than Kosis means 'Than, son of Kosis', while 'Tardos Mors' means 'Tardos, father of Mors', illustrating the difference between the twin cities: Heliumites value their children's futures over their own, abdicating positions to them when appropriate. Zodangans are miserly, their wealth and power passing on only when they do...most Zodangan heirs ensure this happens early.

MORS KAJAK

Our answer: we would rather see the princess dead than wed to any other than her choice, and would prefer being engulfed in the ashes of a lost and burning Helium to selling her to the house of Than Kosis.

(sighs)

Zodanga took us up on the offer, and began by obliterating our fleet. I barely escaped with my life, and was captured by Warhoons.

JOHN CARTER

If I can come within sword's reach of Sab Than, I can solve the difficulty.

MORS KAJAK

You love her! Does she know it?

JOHN CARTER

(smiles)

She knows it, Mors Kajak.

Mors springs to his feet, letting out a sound of joy. He grasps Carter by the shoulder.

MORS KAJAK

Had the choice been left to me I could not have chosen a more fitting mate for the princess of Barsoom. I give you my word, John Carter: Sab Than shall go out at the point of my sword for Helium, Dejah Thoris, and for you.

JOHN CARTER

That is kind of you, but first we must make it out of Warhoon.

MORS KAJAK

Yes. This is but a brief respite from the arena.

The jailer comes back, with more guards this time. They carefully unlock the chains, and lead the two of them out.

JOHN CARTER

Brief indeed...

EXT. ARENA - WARHOON - DAY

Dak Kova, with his jeds and chieftains, sit at the center of one side of the ancient, dilapidated arena upon a large raised platform.

Carter and Mors Kajak enter one of the cages on the edge of the arena, each filled with a dozen contestants: among them green women, calots and thoats. Two cages are empty.

MORS KAJAK

The last surviving victor will be set free, whether animal or man.

SOLA

(O.S.)

Or woman.

Carter notices Sola in the nearby cage, with Green women.

SOLA (CONT'D)

But what benefit is it to win, if everyone else must die?

She watches the arena as:

Tars Tarkas fights against a mad zitidar, the last of a dozen which litter the arena along with a dozen green men.

Tarkas fells it, and is led tired and injured back to his empty cage.

The thoat cage is opened - the thoats descend on the bodies and engorge themselves on them, leaving only the bones.

Carter's cage is opened. He is prodded out into the arena with sharpened bones.

Once in the arena, the rabid, foaming thoats charge. Carter picks up the giant bones of the zitidars, and clubs the thoats as they attack. They fall easily, and Carter is led back to his cage - but he slumps, heartbroken.

JOHN CARTER

They want us to be like them...

The cage of the wild calots is opened, setting them loose to eat the thoats, and gnaw the bones to pieces.

Tarkas holds Sola's hand through the cage bars, when daggers are tossed into her cage. The other women are larger than Sola, and fight over the daggers - some of them have multiple daggers, while Sola is left with none.

Their cage is opened and the women are forced into the arena. The green women fight the calots masterfully - Sola evades. Mors Kajak notices Carter's concern for Sola.

MORS KAJAK

You truly are the son of the love goddess, for you to have such empathy for your Green captors.

JOHN CARTER

Sola and Tars Tarkas are not my captors - they are my friends.

MORS KAJAK

I see.
(lowers his eyes)
That will make it much harder.

The calots are taken down to three by the women, but the calots have killed all of the women except Sola. They surround her, snarling and foaming at the mouth.

JOHN CARTER

Sola, fight! They are not Woola!

Sola hears him, swallows tears. She grabs a dagger from a fallen woman just as the first calot attacks, stabbing it.

She turns and slashes the second with a cry.

The third runs behind her and leaps upon her back - she throws it over her shoulder delivers the finishing blow.

The crowd roars with laughter and applause, as Sola lets fall her weapons, sinks to knees, bowing her head as tears fall.

The cage to Mors, Carter and Tarkas are opened. They are given swords.

Tarkas helps up Sola, who buries her face in his chest. Carter, Mors and Tarkas exchange uncertain looks.

DAK KOVA

What is this?! Fight!

Mors raises his sword, as does Tarkas. Sola screams, and Carter pulls her away from the fight.

Carter picks Sola up and leaps into the crowd of Warhoons. Setting down Sola to fight back the Warhoons, Carter leaps up, grabs Dak Kova and flings him, unarmed, into the arena.

Tarkas and Mors halt. In accordance with custom, they sheathe their swords. Tarkas steps forward and exchanges fisticuff blows with Dak Kova. It does not take long for Dak Kova to fall lifeless.

The crowd of Warhoons still.

TARS TARKAS

I, Tars Tarkas, Jeddak of Warhoon,
declare these games ended!

The Warhoons exchange looks.

JOHN CARTER

Leave or you shall be next to die!

The Warhoons scramble, scattering out of the arena. John Carter jumps back down into the arena.

TARS TARKAS

I could make you a Jed.

JOHN CARTER

I do not want any association with these people. I submit to you that we leave, before they give you any real duties of state.

Tars Tarkas grins, laughing heartily as he places a heavy hand on Carter's shoulder.

EXT. WASTES - DAY

Tarkas, Sola, Carter and Mors ride across desert in a beat-up flier, barely hovering over the ground. Mors teaches Carter to fly.

JOHN CARTER

We found and repaired the flier of Mors Kajak as best we could - it limped along, carrying four occupants, two of which were Tharks, when it was designed for a single human. But it was better than walking the blistering-hot sands, and I learned from Mors the operation of flying.

They pass a Green Martian incubator, the eggs blasted apart. Sola looks saddened, exchanged looks with Tars Tarkas.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

Along the way, we passed evidence of Zodanga's violent attitude toward the Green Men, who they regarded as an infestation.

CUT TO:

Mors fashions a little spigot, hammering it into a fantastical (not)cactus.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

We sustained solely on vegetable milk from the plants which give so bounteously of this fluid.

Mors and Carter drink from it - suddenly a big, hulking form kicks up dust as he races to join them: Woola.

Mors raises his sword in alarm, but Carter stops him, petting Woola and allowing him to take a drink. The vegetable milk runs out - Tarkas slices the (not)cactus up with his sword, so that he and Sola can eat it.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

My pleasure at finding Woola was tempered by anxiety as to the reason of his leaving Dejah Thoris. I commanded him to lead us to the nearest waterway he had spotted on his path to meet us.

EXT. ATMOSPHERE FACTORY - DAY

Woola stops near a water-filled canal pipe lined with trees. The pipe lets out just enough drops to water the ground around the trees.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

The water which supplies Mars is collected from the melting ice caps in immense underground reservoirs. Instead of flooding the surface of the fields and wasting the precious water to evaporation, it is pumped through long conduits to the various populated centers.

Mors and Carter run to drink from it, filling their canteens and washing off the dust.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)
Now if we could only find food!

Downstream, they see:

A LARGE, IMPOSING BUILDING

Covering four square miles, towering two hundred feet high with no windows. Clouds exit the top of huge pipes, and collect in a mass over the building.

MORS KAJAK
The atmosphere factory - there should be food there.

JOHN CARTER
Would they let us in?

MORS KAJAK
The equator factory supplies the air for most of the planet - there are only two others, in the northern and southern poles. I think they will feel secure in aiding us, so long as we do not present ourselves as madmen.

Woola races toward the building. The others follow.

Veering from the canal just short of a waterwheel mechanism, they approach the only entrance they can see for miles: a human-sized door, of the same stone as the building.

Examining it, Carter finds that there is a tiny hole next to the door. He peers into it.

Static, and then the voice of an old man comes from the hole.

MATAI SHANG
(O.S., voice)
State your name, country of origin and business.

JOHN CARTER
John Carter. From... never mind that. I am a friend of the red men of Barsoom and I am starving. In the name of humanity, open to us.

Something clicks aside loudly within the wall, allowing a spyglass to exit the hole, attached to a mechanical arm. A strange speaker pops up. The steampunk camera swivels, and looks them up and down.

The camera peers at Carter, lens aperture narrowing.

MATAI SHANG

(voice)

In the name of the ninth ray, what are you?

MORS KAJAK

I am the Jed of Helium, Mors Kajak.

(camera turns to him)

We have escaped the Warhoons and require assistance - I can vouch for each of these creatures, strange though they might be.

The spyglass folds, disappears into the hole. The stone door recedes into the wall, and slides to one side. They enter.

INT. LOBBY - ATMOSPHERE FACTORY - DAY

Leaving the dark hallway to enter the first chamber, the thick stone door resets behind them - steel bars descend into apertures in the floor with a loud, ominous sound.

In the center of the table is a huge stone table laden with food and drink. In the center of the stone table, another little camera like the first appears.

MATAI SHANG

(voice)

Satisfy your hunger, travelers.

They hesitantly sit around the table, drinking and eating.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

I tasted the first meat since I arrived on Mars: juicy chops from well-fed farm animals, along with luscious fruits and vegetables, so refined by ages of wise cultivation that anything similar on Earth dwindled into pale, grey nothingness by comparison.

MATAI SHANG

(voice)

You wear the metal of, and are accompanied by, green warriors, as well as a calot. Yet in color you are not green...

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

Meanwhile, our invisible host put me through a severe cross-examination, during which I again explained my advent upon Mars.

MATAI SHANG

(voice)

Your statements are remarkable. But you speak the truth, and your physiology supports your claim: the conformation of your brain, the size of your heart-

Carter chokes on the drink.

JOHN CARTER

Can you see through me?

MATAI SHANG

(voice)

I can see all but your thoughts.

The camera disappears, and a door at the other end of the chamber opens - a pale old man in a hooded black robe enters, wearing a gold medallion set with a huge jewel that gives off rainbow-colored light, glowing white at its core.

He lets down his hood, revealing his face and golden hair.

MATAI SHANG (CONT'D)

And were you a Barsoomian, I could read those as well.

MORS KAJAK

A Holy Thern!

Matai Shang smiles, and sits at the table.

MATAI SHANG

I am Matai Shang, Father of Therns, servant of the Living Goddess.

Carter stares at Matai Shang, searchingly.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

I did not apprise him of my ability to sense his thoughts - had he suspected he would have closed them off, as Martians have precise control of their mental machinery.

Carter looks toward the door.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

One curious fact I discovered was that the outer doors were manipulated by telepathic means: the locks released by a certain combination of thought waves.

Carter swallows his food, arches an eyebrow.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

How did you unlock the doors from the inner chamber?

Matai Shang looks nervous, as NINE MUSICAL NOTES PLAY.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

As quick as a flash there leaped to his mind nine Martian sounds.

MATAI SHANG

That is a secret I must not divulge. You understand, I am sure.

Carter nods, smiling mischievously.

MORS KAJAK

This is an important meeting, your Holiness - people suspect John Carter is escaped from the Valley Dor, his colors the product of a union with a Thern and another Barsoomian race.

MATAI SHANG

The Therns do not breed with those we welcome into the Valley Dor - we only serve humans, giving them rest as a reward for a life well fought. I expect your father, Tardos Mors, will join us very soon?

MORS KAJAK

Yes, he is approaching his
thousandth year.

Carter reads the mind of Matai Shang, and an image flashes:

*Tardos Mors sails down the River Iss, into a lovely jungle of
scarlet vegetation.*

The trees shake, and a roar echoes. Tardos Mors eyes widen.

Carter shakes his head to clear the image.

MORS KAJAK (CONT'D)

John Carter, are you all right?

JOHN CARTER

Yes. I am fine.

TARS TARKAS

I am looking forward to traveling
down the River Iss, should I live
long enough to conclude my affairs.

MATAI SHANG

Anything is possible through Issus.
Greens are welcome in the Valley
Dor, as are Earth-men.

Carter looks with suspicion at the smiling Shang.

MORS KAJAK

I expect you feel some kinship with
the Greens, since their origin is
so similar to the Therns.
(MORE)

Matai Shang bristles.

JOHN CARTER

What do you mean?

MORS KAJAK

Black was the firstborn, second
came the Okarians. Red evolved from
the now-extinct Malagors, and the
Therns evolved from white apes-

MATAI SHANG

(stands)

Issus created all, except Greens.
(to Carter)

MATAI SHANG (CONT'D)

Reds played at being gods: they mixed the blood of the white ape with that of the insect Sith.

JOHN CARTER

(to Mors)

Your kind created the Green Martians?

Tarkas and Sola stop eating, pained by the history.

MORS KAJAK

(lowers eyes; quietly)

When Zodanga and Helium were united, they endeavored to build an empire - to work the arid fields, the Green Men were brought forth. But they proved equal to us, so my father freed them. This set him at odds with Than Kosis, who split the twin cities and proclaimed himself Jeddak of Zodanga.

TARS TARKAS

Now they draft criminals and debtors to work the fields, while Than Kosis orders us exterminated.

Uncomfortable silence. Shang smiles.

MATAI SHANG

This is unfit talk for the dinner-table. I am sorry, but it is for the good of all that we retire for a long sleep.

ANOTHER MENTAL FLASH:

Matai Shang stands over sleeping Mors Kajak with a dagger.

MATAI SHANG (CONT'D)

I am sorry, but it is for the good of Barsoom...

Carter blinks, full of dread. He rises from the table.

JOHN CARTER

We will not sleep here.

MATAI SHANG

Oh?

Carter looks to the entrance door, and the musical notes play in his head.

The doors open - when Carter looks back at Shang, the Thern's eyes are wide with horror. He runs into the inner chamber, and the doors close behind him.

Carter opens those doors, and they enter the--

INT. MACHINE ROOM - ATMOSPHERE FACTORY

Where all the steampunk mechanisms operate: the water of the canal powers the pumps and is collected for steam, sunlight is collected from a ceiling aperture by a machine, connected to a tank of glowing powder on the other side of the factory.

In the center is a giant scarlet-plumed bird in a cage: a MALAGOR. Matai Shang opens the cage.

Woola runs and barks at the Malagor, and jumps on Shang, grabbing his golden hair in his jaws - it comes off Shang's head, revealing it to be a wig as Woola tumbles off with it.

Shang mounts the Malagor, soaring out the ceiling aperture.

MORS KAJAK

Seems the Malagors are not extinct after all. What was that about?

JOHN CARTER

I do not know. But I believe he has returned to the Valley Dor.

Mors Kajak takes a look around the factory.

MORS KAJAK

That is a problem: someone must look after the pumps, and that radium-powder battery.

JOHN CARTER

Do you know of anyone who can handle such a task?

Mors Kajak puffs up, indignant.

MORS KAJAK

Of course. Me.

JOHN CARTER

We cannot leave a Jed to work in a radium-fueled factory!

MORS KAJAK

You can and you must. I know I promised my sword to aide the rescue of my daughter, but if this factory fails, all of us will die.

John Carter puts a hand on Mors Kajak's shoulder.

JOHN CARTER

You will see your daughter soon.

MORS KAJAK

(smiles)

I know.

EXT. ZODANGA - DAY

The guarded gates of Zodonga loom, in a towering wall of iridescent carborundum blocks - 70 ft high and 50 ft thick, banners flying with the insignia of golden flowers and scarlet feathers.

JOHN CARTER

Tars Tarkas and Sola stayed behind at the atmosphere factory, refusing to venture further into Zodanga.

In its shadow is Woola, cocking his head at:

Carter, in disguise: he is wearing an extra set of Matai Shangs' white robes and gold wig.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

To ease our passage into Zodanga, I borrowed the accoutrements Matai Shang left behind at the Atmosphere Factory to use as a disguise.

With signs of respect, the guards let them through. They pass a complex of soldier barracks and flier hangars, entering:

THE PLAZA OF ZODANGA

Before them is a statue of Than Kosis, with his cape and headress of Malagor feathers.

Fliers are constant overhead, docking at the tall, ornate gold towers. The largest is the ZODANGAN PALACE, surrounded by a 20-ft high wall of thick red glass.

In front of every golden tower is a lawn of scarlet grass. The passing Zodangans are bedecked in gold jewelry. Their hair is cut square in the back, straight bangs in the front.

They see the newcomers, and press in curiously - Carter tenses, uncertain, but realizes they are looking at Woola.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

The moment we entered Zodanga, Woola drew a great amount of attention, as he belonged to a species never domesticated by red men - it was like strolling down Broadway with a Numidian lion.

A ZODANGAN COUPLE look questioningly at Carter- he nods to indicate that they can pet Woola, who enjoys the attention.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

It provided an opportunity to speak with the Zodangans, who were not of the same mind as their Jeddak.

ZODANGAN MAN

That our ruler should have attacked the Helium fleet as it searched for the beautiful princess-

(look from the wife, he
clears throat)

...was but another awful blunder of Than Kosis.

ZODANGAN WOMAN

Zodanga must soon elevate a wiser man to his place.

ZODANGAN MAN

Not his son - Sab Than's temper burns hotter than his father's.

ZODANGAN WOMAN

(to Carter)

Once Helium's fleet was disabled, our forces reduced the city to a sorry plight - it is said she will fall within the next passage of the further moon. Holy Thern, can you remind the Jeddak and his son we are all the children of Issus?

John Carter looks saddened.

JOHN CARTER
 ...I will see what I can do.

Suddenly, above them, a flier trailing smoke appears. Its wing and engines are damaged by gunfire, and it is veering straight for the city.

Carter jumps up high in the air, climbing onto the flier - slumped over the controls is a wounded, unconscious young Zodangan with a Malagor-feather cape: SAB THAN.

As Carter pilots the flier away from the city, he can see there is a battle going on miles away, a sea of swarming green and scarlet.

He grasps Sab Than, and leaps back down to Zodanga below as the flier crashes into a fiery explosion upon the moss.

As Carter lands before an astonished crowd, Sab Than opens his eyes, disoriented.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)
 (V.O.)
 By acting with my customary lack of forethought, I prevented a potentially deadly accident...

Sab Than gets to his feet, pulling away from Carter's arms to compose himself with dignity before the crowd. He sees the smoke plume from the wreckage outside the city walls.

ZODANGAN MAN
 The Holy Thern saved the prince!

Off John Carter's shock.

JOHN CARTER
 ...and saved the life of the man I had come to kill.

SAB THAN
 Praise Issus you arrived when you did, Holy Thern.
 (scratches his head)
 What exactly did you do...?

EXT. THE PALACE OF THAN KOSIS

Sab Than leads Carter into the luxurious audience chamber of the palace, the walls covered with tapestries, lit by rays dancing between the roof and a ground-glass ceiling.

JOHN CARTER

Leaving Woola to the care of the
Zodangan couple, Sab Than escorted
me into the palace to receive the
king's gratitude.

SAB THAN

(to Carter)

Wait here while I make
introductions to my father.

Sab Than approaches Than Kosis, seated in his gold-and-ruby
throne. but then someone enters past tapestries: Dejah
Thoris. Sab Than goes to her.

Carter is dumbfounded.

THAN KOSIS

To what do I owe this visit from
the Princess of Helium, who with
rare consideration for my pride,
insisted to me that she would
prefer a green Thark to my son?

Dejah smiles, gives an odd forced laugh.

DEJAH THORIS

It has ever been the prerogative of
a woman to change her mind - that
you will forgive, Than Kosis. The
Princess of Helium shall wed Sab
Than, Prince of Zodanga.

Sab Than takes her hand, but she slips his grasp.

DEJAH THORIS (CONT'D)

But only once the war with Helium
is ended.

SAB THAN

Do it, Father! Proclaim hostilities
ended, and hasten my happiness!

Than Kosis sighs.

THAN KOSIS

I may offer peace, but Tardos Mors
and his son were very...*forceful* in
their opposition.

DEJAH THORIS

They desire for me to wed the man
of my choice. I have chosen.

THAN KOSIS

(smiles, patronizing)

A woman may change her own mind at will, but to change the minds of others is not so simple.

DEJAH THORIS

We shall see.

Dejah turns abruptly, and exits.

Carter is devastated, barely hearing or noticing as Sab Than brings him in front of Than Kosis, describing the rescue.

JOHN CARTER

Thus were my happy dreams dashed:
the woman I loved more than life
had forgotten my existence and,
with a *smile*, had given herself to
her people's most hated enemies.

Than Kosis rises, saluting Carter.

THAN KOSIS

It is a miracle you arrived to save
my son from the Green Men's wrath.

JOHN CARTER

(snaps back to attention)

Did you say *Green* men?

THAN KOSIS

Yes. It was Tharks who shot down my
son's flier.

JOHN CARTER

(MORE)

A man and a young female?

THAN KOSIS

No, an army: Tal Hajus wishes to
reclaim the Heliumite princess, who
is to be my son's bride. You may
reside here, until the wedding of
my son, which I would be honored if
you were to officiate.

Carter enters the same hallway Dejah was led into. He sees the door of her quarters, guarded by a ZODANGAN GUARD.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

I could not believe it.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

She would have to repeat it to my face, alone, before I would be convinced.

His expression turns from heartbroken to frowning determination. He marches toward her quarters, until the guard steps in to block him.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

I am from Than Kosis, and wish to speak privately with the Princess of Helium.

ZODANGAN GUARD

And your order?

Carter throws aside his robe, taps the sword hanging there.

JOHN CARTER

The only order I require to enter where I will hang at my side. Will you let me pass in peace or no?

The Guard draws his sword. Carter parries it aside, and throws him to the ground, unconscious.

Dejah hears the noise and peers out of the room.

DEJAH THORIS

You are no Thern. Are you an assassin?

JOHN CARTER

I am a once-cherished friend.

DEJAH THORIS

That voice. I have heard it before. But...it cannot be, for he is dead.

Carter takes off the gold wig, throws it aside.

JOHN CARTER

I still live.

DEJAH THORIS

My chieftain!!

Dejah's face lights up with joy, and she embraces him - but then she recoils, shuddering.

DEJAH THORIS (CONT'D)

No...I can no longer call you that. Had you but returned an hour before... but now it is too late...

JOHN CARTER

You would not have promised your heart to the Zodangan prince, had you known that I lived?

DEJAH THORIS

I thought my *heart* lay buried with your ashes in the pits of Warhoon! I promise my *body* to another, to save my people from the curse of a victorious Zodangan army!

JOHN CARTER

If you meant the last words you spoke to me that day as the hordes of Warhoon charged down upon us...

DEJAH THORIS

(quietly)

I meant them, John Carter. But I cannot repeat them now. The ceremonies to follow are meaningless formalities - I am as good as married.

JOHN CARTER

I have come to claim you, and all Zodanga cannot prevent it - no other man shall claim the princess I love as his bride!

Dejah looks up at his last word, but then shakes her head.

DEJAH THORIS

If you had spoken those words earlier, I would already be yours.

JOHN CARTER

What do you mean?

DEJAH THORIS

On Barsoom there are two kinds of women: one men fight for, to win their hand in marriage; the other, so that he may claim her... but not as his wife. You called me yours without having asked my hand...

(falters)

Even then I did not repulse you, as I should have done, until you made it worse by boasting that you had won me through combat.

JOHN CARTER

Why did you not tell me? You *know* I am ignorant of your Barsoomian ways!

DEJAH THORIS

Because I was *not* ignorant of your Earthly ones! I could not bear it if you saw me as your...

JOHN CARTER

(eyes widen, realizing)
 ...Slave.
 (takes her hand, goes down on one knee)
 What I failed to do, believing it would be unwelcome, I do now.

DEJAH THORIS

(pulls hand away)
 No, it is useless! I may never be yours while Sab Than lives!

JOHN CARTER

Then you have sealed his death warrant: Sab Than dies.

DEJAH THORIS

I may not wed my husband's slayer! It is *custom*!

JOHN CARTER

(rises)
 Custom - the favored weapon of tyrants! Custom be *darned*!

(MORE)

DEJAH THORIS

We are *ruled* by custom upon Barsoom. If you would call me 'tyrant' for placing honor above desire, then you are ignorant of far more than customs.

Dejah turns away. Carter's anger melts, regretful - he wraps his arms around her.

JOHN CARTER

You are not who I was speaking of.

DEJAH THORIS

I know.
 (pause, grasps his hand)

DEJAH THORIS (CONT'D)

As we share the memory of our days
among the Tharks, so too must we
bear this.

The soldier outside the room groans, awakening.

Carter goes out to help him up, but the guard attacks Carter.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

The Zodangan guard awoke, ruder
than before.

Carter lunges and pierces the guard through the chest - the
man cries out, bringing three others to join in the fight.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

My reply was a quick thrust which
left me but three antagonists, and
I can assure you that they were
worthy of my metal.

Carter fights all three, until he is backed against the wall.
He works his way into a corner, forcing them to come at him
one at a time.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

We fought upward of twenty minutes;
the clanging of steel producing a
veritable bedlam.

Each one is defeated, falling in a bloody heap.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

They were brave men and noble
fighters, and it grieved me that I
had been forced to kill them.

Footsteps. Carter hides behind one of the tapestries.

In comes Than Kosis, Sab Than and ZODANGAN BODYGUARDS, who
check the bodies.

ZODANGAN BODYGUARD #1

It is the Heliumite princess! She
has turned on us!

Sab Than grabs the bodyguard and stabs him in the throat.

SAB THAN

Hold your tongue.

MATAI SHANG

(O.S.)

Was that necessary?

Than Kosis startles and draws his sword, turning to see Matai Shang in the hallway behind him.

MATAI SHANG (CONT'D)

Forgive me if I disturb you,
Jeddak.

THAN KOSIS

No, it is good you have come. My son was simply defending the princess' honor from a fool: it is clear that a force of Heliumite soldiers have infiltrated the palace.

SAB THAN

(to Dejah Thoris)

I shall give you a chance to speak for yourself: tell us what you saw.

DEJAH THORIS

I saw a single man best four Zodangans in a fight. I did not recognize the man.

Sab Than's expression twists, insulted and frustrated.

Matai Shang steps forward, scrutinizing Dejah.

MATAI SHANG

Her mind is a blank - she has perfect control.

He kneels beside the dead guardsmen, placing a hand on their heads, tilting his head as though listening.

MATAI SHANG (CONT'D)

But she speaks the truth: their antagonist wore the vestments of a Thern, and his fighting ability was superhuman. I know the man: I met him at the atmosphere factory, which he overtook with the help of the Heliumite Jed and two Tharks.

Dejah looks alarmed.

THAN KOSIS

Mors Kajak has taken the atmosphere
factory?!

MATAI SHANG

Fear not: he knows its importance,
and how to operate the machinery.

SAB THAN

That is not the point! We must
reclaim the factory at once!

THAN KOSIS

Set the patrols to find this false
Thern - I want him captured before
the morrow.

(to Dejah)

You and Sab Than will wed at dawn.

DEJAH THORIS

That was not our arrangement!

THAN KOSIS

Men change their minds as well,
princess: Tardos Mors will have no
choice but to accept our terms, if
his son is our hostage.

DEJAH THORIS

(grabs his arm)

No! Leave my father alone!

Than Kosis throws her off and sweeps from the room, taking
everyone but Dejah with him.

Carter slips out from behind the tapestries. He removes the
Thern robes.

JOHN CARTER

Do not fear for your father, my
princess.

Carter leaps out from the balcony.

Dejah watches as he leaps atop the glass wall, leaning
against the rail. A tear falls down her cheek, glistening in
the sunset.

DEJAH THORIS

Good-bye, my chieftain-that-was.

MEANWHILE

Carter looking out over the city. In the distance is Helium, with its turquoise-blue tower and walls of clear glass - miles in another direction is the atmosphere factory, with its whirling plume of cloud.

Carter looks to the nearby towers, and sees a docked flier. He leaps onto the ornate ledges, and climbs.

Reaching the top, he finds the muzzle of a rifle in his face.

The rifle belongs to a sentry. Carter grabs the sentry's wrist, pulls him over and deposits him on a ledge below. As the sentry shouts, Carter pulls himself up onto the roof of the tower and climbs aboard the flier, and speeds off.

He passes a searchlight tower, where a sentry calls out, commanding him to halt. He ignores it. The sentry opens fire.

A dozen fliers of the ZODANGAN AIR SQUADRON chase after him in a swarm. He evades, weaving sharply around the tall towers.

His path is blocked by a ZODANGAN CRUISER, a crew of 100 barraging him with rapid fire.

Just before colliding with it, Carter evades down and underneath the hull.

On the other side, the guns keep firing, and a well-aimed shot blasts the prow of Carter's flier. The flier plummets, hurtling, and almost lands in a herd of thoats before Carter regains control, flying straight up into the clouds.

The fliers hover above the city, searching in the spot where Carter fell. As they disappear behind him, Carter turns on the light on his flier, realizing that the compass/speedometer panel is damaged.

Leaving Zodanga behind and racing toward the atmosphere plume, Carter sees the battlefield coming into view.

Down below, the bodies of Zodangan warriors lay scattered about with Tharks...and Warhoons.

The Tharks which stand fight against Warhoons, led by their Jeddak Tars Tarkas and Sola. The Warhoons are being defeated by the Tharks, and fairly soon they are overtaken.

Tal Hajus watches from the safety of his tent, his two lost arms replaced with metal ones, while Sarkoja fights Sola.

When the last of the Warhoons falls, Tarkas is tied to a stake. Sola is defeated by Sarkoja.

Carter flies in, drawing his sword, and cuts Tarkas free.

TAL HAJUS

How kind of you to join us, John Carter! We shall see who it is dares strike the mighty Tal Hajus!

(to the Tharks)

Strap him to that pillar! Heat the irons! With my own hands I shall burn the eyes from his head!

JOHN CARTER

Chieftains of Thark! You claim to be a just people—

TAL HAJUS

Silence! Gag the creature and bind him as I command!

JOHN CARTER

Justice, Tal Hajus! I am a chief among you, and so is Tars Tarkas. Who are you to set aside the customs of ages among the Tharks?

The chieftains echo cries of 'justice'!

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

You are a brave people, but where was your mighty jeddak during the battle today? How recently has he fought for Thark, since falling to a midget's blade and a woman's fists? Now that he and I have an equal number of arms, with my bare hands I could kill him.

Tal Hajus froths and fumes.

Carter puts a hand on Tarkas' arm.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

There stands beside me a great Thark, a mighty warrior, and a noble man: how sounds Tars Tarkas, Jeddak of Thark?

A deep-toned roar from all, with applause.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)
 Were he a brave man he would invite
 Tars Tarkas to combat, but Tal
 Hajus is afraid; Tal Hajus, your
 jeddak, is a coward.

A tense, long silence - all eyes are riveted to Tal Hajus.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)
 Chieftains, it but remains for this
 council to command: shall the
 jeddak, Tal Hajus, prove his
 fitness to rule over Tars Tarkas?

Twenty swords flash high in assent - only Sarkoja's stays
 sheathed, hissing with hatred,

Tal Hajus draws his long-sword, advances to meet Tars Tarkas.

Tarkas looks at Carter... and grins.

Tarkas roars and slices at Tal Hajus - the lack of two of his
 arms throws him off, and he is out of practice. Tal Hajus,
 cut to ribbons, falls in a heap, and Tars Tarkas crushes his
 neck with his foot until he struggles no more.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)
 (V.O.)
 With his foot upon the neck of the
 dead monster, Tars Tarkas became
 jeddak among the Tharks.

TARS TARKAS
 Sarkoja!

Sarkoja steps forward, shaking with fear.

TARS TARKAS (CONT'D)
 Years ago you orchestrated the
 torture and death of a woman named
 Gozava. The warrior who loved her
 may not kill you, it is not our
 custom: but there is nothing to
 prevent him from tying a strap
 between your neck and a wild thout,
 to test your fitness. I thought it
 only right to warn you.

Sarkoja shrieks, storming past a smiling Sola. Sarkoja mounts
 a chariot and takes off across the wastes.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

Sarkoja was gone, nor was she ever seen after, having taken her pilgrimage on the River Iss.

Sola embraces her father.

TARS TARKAS

Come, John Carter.

(Carter steps forward)

I believe there *is* such a thing as friendship. If you would ask anything of your Jeddak, name it.

JOHN CARTER

Dejah Thoris. She is now held by Than Kosis, whose son she must wed to save her country from Zodanga. I ask that you help me rescue her and return her to Helium.

Tars Tarkas nods, turns to the chieftains.

TARS TARKAS

The loot of Zodanga would be magnificent, and by an alliance with Helium, we could increase the size and frequency of our hatchings to become supreme among the green men of Barsoom. What say you?

Roars of approval, flashes of swords raised high in the air.

EXT. ZODANGA - NIGHT

They ride upon Zodanga at full speed, reaching the towering city wall. The guards before the gate fight the Tharks back, but are quickly overwhelmed.

The huge gates, however, are closed. Carter consults with Tarkas, and orders the tallest of the Tharks to the wall. They climb upon each other's shoulders, creating a ladder of bodies - Carter scampers up.

Carter makes the final leap to the top of the wall, and fights the sentries there. He jumps down to the mechanism controlling the gate, and releases it.

The massive doors swing open. Tars Tarkas leads the soldiers in, on his massive thoats.

The people of Zodanga are awoken, peering outside their homes to see the Green invaders enter. The soldiers of the barracks swarm out to defend their city - Carter punches one off his flier, and takes it up over the glass wall of the palace.

EXT. ZODANGAN PALACE - DAWN

There, Carter sees through the great windows into the first floor of the audience chamber, filled with noble Zodangans:

Thank Kosis, on his throne. Matai Shang stands beside him, bearing a huge cushioned salver upon which lies a great golden chain with a collar and padlock at either end.

A procession moves toward them: two figures, robed in scarlet silk, are led by uniformed FEMALE ZODANGAN OFFICERS. As they near the throne, the officers remove the scarlet shrouds, revealing Sab Than and Dejah Thoris, who is now garbed in gold jewelry and Malagor feathers.

Than Kosis takes the chain from Matai Shang's cushion, locks the first collar around the neck of his son. He takes the second collar, and clasps it around Dejah's neck.

With a cry, Carter smashes through the great window with his sword, and jumps down into the audience chamber and cuts through the golden chain.

DEJAH THORIS

John Carter!! You still live!!

The nobles and officers assembled draw their swords. Sab Than draws a jeweled dagger and attacks Carter, who grabs his wrist, keeping it from entering his heart.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

With a dagger drawn from his nuptial ornaments, Sab sprang upon me. I could have killed him as easily as I might a fly, but the custom of Barsoom stayed my hand.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

Zodanga has fallen! Look!

Carter points with his long-sword out the great windows, where Tharkian gunfire create growing webs of cracks in the glass wall. In moments, the entire wall shatters, and through the hail of broken glass ride the Green warriors.

Carter throws the shocked Sab Than off of him, and engages Than Kosis in battle. Than Kosis is strong, vicious.

Sab Than climbs the steps toward Carter - Carter turns to guard against him, but Sab Than attacks Than Kosis instead, running him through the back with his sword.

Than Kosis falls dead. Carter looks with horror at Sab Than.

SAB THAN

You will not steal my inheritance
from me! I am Jeddak now!

Sab Than charges Carter with a flurry of attacks, which Carter can only parry and guard, back to the golden throne.

Sab Than raises his sword to impale Carter to the throne, but is pulled violently backward: Dejah Thoris has grabbed the end of the broken chain, and is pulling him down the steps.

SAB THAN (CONT'D)

The woman! It is her plot! Strike
her down! Kill her! KILL HER!!!

Dejah draws the hairpin daggers and stabs Sab Than, turning to defend herself from the Zodangan officers.

Carter rushes to her side. Matai Shang opens a passageway behind the throne and disappears into it - Carter and Dejah fight their way toward it, but the Zodangans block their way.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

Nothing short of a miracle could
save Dejah Thoris and myself, when
I saw Tars Tarkas surging through
the crowd that swarmed about him.

Tars Tarkas jumps his thout through the great windows, leading the Tharks into the audience hall.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

With one swing of his mighty
longsword he laid a dozen corpses
at his feet, and so he hewed a
pathway before him until in another
moment he stood upon the platform
beside me, dealing death and
destruction right and left.

Tars Tarkas does as described, fighting with Carter as Sola fights with Dejah Thoris.

Soon, the audience chamber is empty.

Dejah, catching her breath, sinks into the golden throne. Carter leans upon the arm of it.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

Well, this is certainly not customary.

DEJAH THORIS

Sab Than broke with custom first when he ordered me killed. Now his throne is mine by combat.

JOHN CARTER

(shakes head, amazed)

A princess of Helium and Jeddara of Zodanga - was there ever such a woman as you?

DEJAH THORIS

Was there ever such a *man*! Barsoom has never before seen your like. Are all Earth men like you? Alone, a stranger, hunted and threatened, you have done what no man has ever done: joined together the wild hordes of the sea bottoms, and brought them to fight as allies of a red Martian people.

JOHN CARTER

It was not I who did it: it was a power that would work greater miracles than this.

Dejah smiles, taking his hands.

DEJAH THORIS

You may say it now, John Carter: I am free.

JOHN CARTER

Never had I dreamed that in all the universe dwelt such a woman as you. That you are a princess does not abash me, but that you are...*you* is enough to make me doubt my sanity as I ask you, my princess, to be my wife.

DEJAH THORIS

(rises, smiling)

You do not need to be abashed: you
so well knew the answer to your
plea before it was made!

They embrace in a passionate kiss.

JOHN CARTER

Thus, with death and destruction
reaping their terrible harvest
around her, did Dejah Thoris, true
daughter of Mars the God of War,
promise herself in marriage to John
Carter, Gentleman of Virginia.

Carter and Dejah leave the chamber arm in arm, in a
procession of their own, out into the city.

Meanwhile, behind them, Sab Than's eyes open. He sits up,
tugs at the diamond pin lodged in his chest, cries out and
decides to leave it. He makes for the passageway, and climbs
the steps up to a tower - where he finds a flier.

Mounting it, he looks toward:

The atmosphere factory, sending its whirling plume of cloud
into the air. Beyond it are the blue sails and banners of the
Helium navy.

Face twisted in insane rage, he takes off into the sky.

INT. DEJAH'S QUARTERS - ZODANGAN PALACE - DAY

Through the balcony window the atmosphere factory plume can
also be seen - almost overtaken by the terrific battle
between the Helium navy and the Zodangan fleet. All of it is
backdrop as Carter removes Dejah's Malagor-feather cape.

JOHN CARTER

I see what you mean about clothes.
Completely unnecessary.

Dejah smiles - she uses her remaining diamond hairpin to
sever the straps of his harness.

He begins to remove the gold jewelry, casting it aside,
kissing Dejah all the way down as he goes.

EXT. ATMOSPHERE FACTORY - DAY

Sab Than turns his flier downward, into the plume of cloud.

INT. ATMOSPHERE FACTORY

Mors Kajak, working the pumps of the atmosphere factory. He hears whirring, getting louder and louder, looking up through the exhaust pipe and sees:

Sab Than's flier, diving in a death-spiral through the mist.

INT. DEJAH'S QUARTERS - ZODANGAN PALACE - DAY

Dejah takes in a gasp of breath as Carter enters her, lying against the bedding silks and furs.

INT. ATMOSPHERE FACTORY

The flier crashes though, exploding into the pipe and engulfing the factory with fire.

INT. DEJAH'S QUARTERS - DAY

Dejah and Carter finish, breathing heavily as they hold one another. Outside, however, a plume of fire replaces cloud.

They catch their breath, bolting upright.

They exchange looks of startled horror, clutching each other.

EXT. ZODANGA - DAY

Everyone stands still, even those who were engaged in battle not moments before.

The fliers cease fire, drifting, as the crew on both sides contemplate the disaster that has occurred.

Dejah and Carter, dressed once more, reach a tower of the palace, joining Tars Tarkas, Sola and Woola, who goes up to Carter sadly, whining. Carter pets him, comforting him.

The royal flagship docks at the roof. Out of the ramparts, guardsmen in silver armor disembark, followed by:

TARDOS MORS, a silver-haired, regal Red Martian with a long cape and robe of turquoise feathers, face is full of sorrow.

Dejah approaches him, tearfully, with Carter.

Tardos Mors opens his arms and Dejah runs to embrace him.

DEJAH THORIS
Grandfather!!

TARDOS MORS

It brings me joy to see you again,
princess.

DEJAH THORIS

I only wish...father...

TARDOS MORS

I know.

JOHN CARTER

I failed to save your son, Mors
Kajak... he was a brave man.

DEJAH THORIS

Nonsense! You saved us all!

(to Tardos Mors)

This is the man to whom Helium owes
the safety of her princess as well
as her victory today: his name is
John Carter.

JOHN CARTER

You owe your thanks more to another
man than me: this here is Tars
Tarkas, Jeddak of Thark.

TARDOS MORS

Thank you, Tars Tarkas, Jeddak of
Thark, for your valor - Helium owes
you a debt that we now have no time
to repay. That Tardos Mors may meet
the greatest living warrior of
Barsoom is a priceless honor.

TARS TARKAS

(MORE)

The honor was mine, Jeddak of
Helium.

TARDOS MORS

I have long wished to see an
alliance formed between our people -
but tomorrow's sun shall look upon
a dead world, which must travel the
heavens for all eternity, peopled
not even by memories.

TARS TARKAS

(nods)

The days of Barsoom are over. It is
the end.

(glances at Carter)

TARS TARKAS (CONT'D)

It is a man from another world who taught the hordes of Thark to understand friendship, and to him I owe my ability to appreciate and reciprocate the sentiments so graciously expressed.

(to Tardos Mors)

Let us bid each other farewell, as friends.

Tardos Mors extends a formal salute to Tars Tarkas, who responds in kind.

Dejah weaves, eyes fluttering - Carter spring to her side and holds her up in his arms.

JOHN CARTER

Dejah!

DEJAH THORIS

I am fine.

TARDOS MORS

The air is getting too thin at this altitude.

The standards of the soldiers droop, as their breathing becomes labored. All around, the fliers that were in the air drift slowly to a landing.

Dejah buries her face into Carter's chest.

DEJAH

It is cruel that we must be torn apart, who were just starting upon a life of love and happiness.

JOHN CARTER

Hush now! You still live - I still live!

TARDOS MORS

And while we live, I would prefer to draw breath from the skies of Helium. Come.

Tardos Mors leads them all into the great carrier-flier.

EXT. HELIUM FLIER - DAY

Leaning over the deck railing to keep themselves upright, Carter, Dejah, Tarkas, Sola, and Tardos Mors gaze at the outlying city of Zodanga, watching as the people on the ground pass out.

JOHN CARTER
 Within an hour the people of
 Barsoom were sinking by thousands
 into the unconsciousness which
 precedes death by asphyxiation.

As they pass the wall and drift from the city, they lower
 their altitude, passing over the dead atmosphere factory.

Dejah slumps against the railing, head drooping to her chest.

DEJAH THORIS
 (looks into his eyes)
 Kiss me, John Carter...

JOHN CARTER
 You are not getting enough air as
 it is.

DEJAH THORIS
 Do as I bid, my chieftain - your
 princess commands it.

JOHN CARTER
 We really are married.

John Carter kisses her.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)
 (V.O.)
 As I pressed her dear lips to mine,
 the feeling of power and authority
 rose in me, and my fighting-blood
 sprang to life in my veins.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)
 I love you. I love you! It shall
 not be, my princess - there must be
 some way to live, and I, who have
 fought my way through a strange
 world for you, will find it.

Tardos Mors, slumped against the ship wall, breathes
 raggedly.

TARDOS MORS
 There is not...the walls of the
 atmosphere factory are
 impregnable... locked with a key
 known only to the Therns of Dor...

Carter's eyes go wide: sounds play in his mind.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

With those words, a series of nine forgotten sounds flashed upon my conscious mind like lightning in the darkness – the key to the doors of the atmosphere plant!

Carter turns suddenly to Tardos Mors, still clutching Dejah.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

A flier, Jeddak! Quick! Take me to your swiftest flier - I can save Barsoom yet!

Dejah's eyes light up. Tardos Mors gathers the strength to lead Carter to the hanger of the carrier, where he points out a flier, fancier than the rest.

TARDOS MORS

Take mine: the fastest air-scout machine the skill of Barsoom has ever produced.

Carter removes all his ornaments, weapons, everything.

DEJAH THORIS

What do you plan to do?

The atmosphere factory is getting further behind them. Carter jumps aboard the flier.

JOHN CARTER

If I open the atmosphere factory, can you repair the pumps?

DEJAH THORIS

No...but I could release the reserve cache...buy enough time for the engineers to replace it...but, how do you propose to...?

JOHN CARTER

(taps temple of his head)

The key - courtesy of Matai Shang!

Hope renewed in her eyes, Dejah mounts behind him, clinging to his torso.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

Stay with me, and hang on tight!

He speeds off, rapidly dropping altitude.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

I had to fly low to get sufficient
air to breathe.

He stops a few feet above the ground, lies flat on his belly, one hand on the steering, the other throwing the speed lever to the max setting. They hover fast over the moss, evading the jutting rocks and (not)cacti.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

My errand was a race against time
and death, so I traveled with awful
velocity, splitting the thin air of
dying Mars with the speed of a
meteor.

The flier skids sharply into the ground before the looming
walls of the factory, in front of the door.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

With a sickening thud, I plunged to
the ground before the small door
which was withholding the spark of
life from the inhabitants of an
entire planet.

Carter stumbles toward the door, gasping, his vision
blurring.

Dejah follows, doing the same, crawling against the door.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

I was becoming very weak, and it
was with difficulty that I
controlled my mind at all.

Carter sinks to his knees before the gates, concentrating and
playing the nine sounds in his mind.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

But, with a final effort, I hurled
the nine thought waves at that
awful thing before me. Our eyes
were fixed on the single panel
before us we waited in the silence
of death.

The door recedes.

Carter lies down, gasping.

CARTER'S POV, TILTED SIDEWAYS

With a final look at Carter, Dejah enters, hugging the wall, then resorting to crawling.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

From where I lay I opened the second door, and as I saw Dejah Thoris, the hope of Barsoom, crawling weakly on hands and knees through the last doorway, I lost consciousness.

FADE TO BLACK.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O., over black)

It was dark when I opened my eyes again.

INT. ARIZONA CAVE - NIGHT

Carter awakens with a huge gasp of air.

He bolts upright to a sitting posture.

JOHN CARTER

Dejah?!!

Carter feels his clothes, his hat, his boots.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

(V.O.)

Strange, stiff garments were upon my body: I ~~was~~ clothed, though when I fell unconscious at the little doorway I had been naked. (MORE)

Carter looks out the cave mouth, at the moon and starry sky.

CARTER'S POV

He looks specifically at Mars.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

Above me shone the red eye of Mars holding her awful secret, forty-eight million miles away. Did she reach the pump room? Did the vitalizing air reach the people of Mars in time to save them?

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

Was my Dejah Thoris alive? For ten years I have waited and prayed to be taken back to the world of my lost love, so that I may know the answer.

INT. INCUBATOR - NIGHT

Dejah Thoris, next to a little egg, hatching.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

But something tells me they are there waiting for me - Dejah, Tarkas...and, perhaps, a hatchling.

Dejah reaches into the incubator, and pulls out a little baby girl: THORIS LLANA.

EXT. PALACE GARDEN - HELIUM - NIGHT

Dejah takes the child (now the age of Tala from the beginning) outside, pointing out the planet earth in the sky, as Woola makes whimpering noise to indicate he sees it too.

JOHN CARTER

And I can imagine, across that awful abyss of space, a beautiful woman in the palace garden, and at her side is our little hatching, as she points into the sky toward the planet Earth, while at their feet is a huge and hideous creature with a heart of gold.

INT. UTICA PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL - NIGHT

We now look at Carter's face, deep in reverie.

Burroughs sits at his bedside, tears in his eyes.

BURROUGHS

...They died, Uncle.

Carter returns to the present.

JOHN CARTER

What makes you so certain?

BURROUGHS

Dyani, the Apache woman. You had a daughter by her: Tala.

Their faces flash through his mind, alternating with their Martian counterparts.

JOHN CARTER

I do not know those names.

BURROUGHS

Yes, you do.

JOHN CARTER

Her name was Dejah, and my daughter, if we had one, would have taken the name Thoris Llana. That is the custom upon Mars.

BURROUGHS

Uncle, please. I understand that you do not want to remember, but... you *must*.

JOHN CARTER

What are you saying?!

BURROUGHS

It was a brutal attack by the soldiers, who came to finish what they started. You tried to defend them...

Carter is pained, the images coming unbidden to his mind:

The looks of terror on the faces of Dyani and Tala, as the soldiers chase after them, laughing.

John Carter gets up from the bed, pacing, agitated.

JOHN CARTER

(MORE)
I know what you are doing. You refuse to believe my tale, and now you are trying to convince me it was, what, a dream? A lie?

BURROUGHS

No. Everything you told me was real, just distorted - your memory is like a photograph, too faded to make out the details clearly.

JOHN CARTER

(shakes head, smiling)
I know that the average human mind will not believe what it cannot grasp.

JOHN CARTER (CONT'D)

I tell but simple truths, which
some day science will
substantiate...

BURROUGHS

Please, come to your senses! Marry
Ms. Doren, and take Sally as your
maid! If you remain here, Sally
will be Hal's plaything, and
Sebastian will squander your money.

JOHN CARTER

Money?

BURROUGHS

Your father has passed on and left
you an inheritance. The gold mine
you found in Arizona has made you
fabulously wealthy.

Carter looks at him incredulously, through tears of agony.

JOHN CARTER

If there is any fortune to be had,
you may have it, son. What care I
for *wealth*?!

BURROUGHS

Because *you still live*. Your
fiancee, Faye Doren, remember her?
She still lives. Toby's daughter,
Sally - she still lives, the poor
child. Now that Toby is gone-

JOHN CARTER

He is not gone: he is the Jeddak of
Thark.

BURROUGHS

I said Toby. Not Tarkas.

*The image of Toby, as Carter frees him from the stake,
already dead - it alternates into the image of Carter freeing
the living Tarkas from his stake.*

BURROUGHS (CONT'D)

So you do remember. And you must
also remember what their master,
that horrible old lecher Hal
Powell, did to Gracie!

Carter puts his hands over his ears, as:

The image of Gozava, dead, as Sarkoja and Tal Hajus watch, becomes another image:

GRACIE POWELL, a beautiful black slave woman, dead on the floor, her dress torn open - Hal Powell is doing up his pants.

Sandra Powell watches from the shadow of the doorway, staring at Gracie bitterly.

Sally appears behind Sandra, carrying a platter of food: seeing her mother, the platter falls from her hands. Sandra seizes her and drags her into the darkness of the mansion.

BACK IN THE PRESENT

Burroughs grabs Carter's hands and forces him to look at him.

BURROUGHS (CONT'D)

She was a slave - no one can avenge her death, nor protect her defenseless daughter, except you!

BURROUGHS (CONT'D)

I am sorry. Toby, Tala, and Dyani...are gone.

JOHN CARTER

We shall know soon enough - I would rather lie dead beside her on the face of Mars, than live all these terrible miles away here on Earth!

Carter rushes out of the room. Burroughs follows him.

IN THE HALLWAY

Carter runs at break-neck speed, shoving doctors and nurses out of the way - he knows where he is going.

EXT. UTICA PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL - NIGHT

Carter runs out of the building, through the snow and toward the cliff. Burroughs exits the building, trying to catch up.

Carter reaches the cliff edge. He stares up at:

CARTER'S POV

Mars, in the sky.

Carter closes his eyes, and jumps. We follow him all the way down, into the frozen lake.

BLACKOUT.

JOHN CARTER

(V.O.)

There was the same instant of
unthinkable cold, and utter
darkness.

EXT. MARS - VALLEY DOR - DAY

Carter awakens, naked, on the bank of a river, surrounded by strange scarlet foliage. In the darkness, strange creatures and birds move, and we hear a roar.

Carter is uncertain at first, but then looks up, and smiles:

He sees the two moons of Mars in the sky.

FADE TO BLACK:

THE END