

A PRINCESS OF MARS

by

Abraham Bard Sherman

Based on the novel

A Princess of Mars

by

Edgar Rice Burroughs

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FADE IN:

EXT. CLIFF-TOP BY HUDSON RIVER - DAY (1885)

A cottage overlooks the river.

INT. JOHN'S COTTAGE - DAY

Leather furniture, Persian rugs, hunting trophies, books of science, language, theology, philosophy and ancient lit. A Confederate cavalry captain's dress uniform on a mannequin. A telescope sits pointing out a window.

A man, JOHN CARTER, thirty, handsome, writes furiously at a desk overlooking the river, his eyes intensely focused on his task. His writing parallels the voice-over.

JOHN (V.O.)

To my nephew Edgar. Perhaps you have found your Uncle Jack to be somewhat of a mystery. Gone for years at a time. Never looking a day older since I bounced you on my knee. By the time you read this, it'll do no harm for you to know the truth. First, understand that I'm neither part god nor in possession of a fountain of youth, though myth might suggest such things. Nor am I insane. With that you will likely disagree. I have lived on earth far longer than I care to remember, always a man of thirty years old. The war between the states was one of many in which I fought over the centuries, finding both victories and defeats. I'm sorry that I was unable to protect your family as well as I hoped. I'd known no welcome warmer than theirs, no love more giving. This manuscript is a record of my brief journey to another world which felt more real, more like my true home than earth ever has. I pray I return to it before my final death.

EXT. ARIZONA FOOTHILLS - CAMPSITE - DAY (1866)

A tent and scattered tools are next to a mine shaft, two horses and a mule tied nearby. John, 6'1", built, scruffy beard, ragged Confederate uniform, prepares venison and coffee.

JAMES POWELL, late twenties, wearing similar uniform, scurries out of the mine.

JOHN
 Finally find something, mister
 expert?

POWELL
 No joke. Look.

Powell holds out a rock sparkling with quartz and gold.

POWELL
 Vein keeps, three months we'll
 have enough for land.

They yell and dance.

EXT. ARIZONA FOOTHILLS - FOREST - DAY

John follows a deer through the woods, raises his rifle, takes aim. DISTANT GUNSHOTS ECHO through the foothills.

John sprints through the forest toward the sounds.

EXT. ARIZONA FOOTHILLS - CAMPSITE - DAY

Five outlaws yell and circle around Powell's body in the middle of camp. One leads the horses and mule away.

John runs in, SHOOTING TWO REVOLVERS. He kills two outlaws with shots to the chest, spooking off the animals. The three surviving outlaws FIRE back with REVOLVERS, one hitting John in the side. They scatter into the forest.

John checks Powell for signs of life, sinks to the ground and cries. FOOTSTEPS approach. John reloads his revolvers, enters the mine.

INT. MINE - DAY

John stumbles and falls, barely conscious. A pool of blood gathers under his gunshot wound.

EXT. ARIZONA FOOTHILLS - CAMPSITE - DAY

The outlaws creep across the campsite. A brilliant, supernatural, scarlet light appears from inside the mine and sends them running in terror.

INT. MINE - NIGHT

The light emanates from John's body lying on the floor.

A new, naked, unwounded John stands up, staring at his former, clothed body. He steps back suddenly, HITS his HEAD. He grimaces in pain, wiping blood and sweat off his forehead.

His eyes open wide and he gasps for breath as anxiety sets in. He touches his glowing body on the floor, pulls away in astonishment. He shivers, takes the pants from his old body, dons them and reaches for his coat. The light intensifies. He leaves the coat, stumbles backwards out of the mine.

EXT. ARIZONA FOOTHILLS - CAMPSITE - NIGHT

He runs, a red glow gathering around him, emanating from his heart. He stops, frantically paws at his chest. His attention is magnetically drawn to a bright red object in the night sky. Against his conscious will, his arms extend toward the object. He transforms into a beam of light and shoots into space.

EXT. ALIEN PLANET OF BARSOOM - PLAIN - DAY

He opens his eyes on an alien world with a salmon-colored sky, two moons, and one sun. He lies on his back, his gray pants and white skin in sharp contrast to the plain of bronze-colored moss that stretches to the horizon.

He stands, springing three feet into the air. The gravity is weaker than Earth's. He looks around in amazement, sees hills two miles away. He takes a step, bounces, lands on his face, spits out a mouthful of moss.

He gets up and walks, stumbles, crawls toward the hills. Moments later, he sees a football-field sized crater off to his right. Inside the crater is a chest-high, circular, stone-walled enclosure covered by a glass dome. He crawls and reaches the low wall.

He gains his balance, stands, leans close to the enclosure and looks over the wall. Inside are three hundred basketball-sized, white eggs.

Nine giant, green-skinned creatures silently approach John from behind. They are fifteen feet tall, with four arms, two legs and hairless skin. Their heads have lizard-like eyes on the sides, nose slits in the center of the face and small cup-shaped ear/antennae on top. They have human-like mouths with sharp teeth and two walrus tusks that curve upward from the lower jaw. These creatures are called Tharks.

Each Thark is armed with a rifle, two revolvers, a broadsword, a short sword, a dagger and a forty-foot spear. They wear battle harnesses to support their weapons and their patchwork of ancient armor. The armor was originally designed for humans, and has been adapted by the Tharks to serve multiple purposes.

They ride on the backs of large, saddled animals with no bit or bridle. The mounts are ten feet tall, have four legs on either side, a beaver-like tail, a mouth from ear to ear and hairless hide. They are called thoats.

The leading Thark's EQUIPMENT RATTLES. John turns to see a forty-foot spear hurtling toward his chest. He leaps backward as the SPEAR LODGES in the wall. He lands beyond the far side of the giant incubator.

The lead Thark, named TARS TARKAS, dismounts and pulls his spear free. The other Tharks dismount and look over the eggs. When walking, the Tharks use their lower arms as front legs. In this most frequent bodily posture, the Thark stand eight feet tall and look like centaurs with upward-pointing walrus tusks.

They talk in their own language and gesture over the incubator, impressed by John's acrobatics. John watches them in awe while backing away.

Tars Tarkas orders his companions to mount and ride away. They ride up to the edge of the crater, leaving Tars Tarkas behind. The towering, ferocious-looking, heavily-scarred Tars Tarkas lays down his weapons and walks slowly around the incubator toward John.

John jumps far in the opposite direction. A RIFLE BULLET EXPLODES in front of him, stopping him in his tracks.

Tars Tarkas orders his men to hold fire. He unclasps a decorative bracelet and holds it out to John, speaking softly in his language. John responds in English.

JOHN

I'm flattered by the offer, but
I'd prefer not to be your next
meal.

Tars Tarkas pricks up his ears. He points at himself.

TARS TARKAS

Tars Tarkas.

He gestures at himself and the others on the plain.

TARS TARKAS

Thanks.

John backs away.

Tars Tarkas points at an emblem on his harness.

TARS TARKAS

Tars Tarkas. Tars Tarkas.

JOHN

Tars Tarkas. John Carter. I hope
you'll pardon me if I don't stay
to get better acquainted.

TARS TARKAS

Jonkatar?

JOHN
John Carter. Two words.

TARS TARKAS
Jonkatar. Tars Tarkas.

Tars Tarkas walks toward John. John glances at the other Tharks. One of them raises his rifle and takes aim.

John locks eyes with Tars Tarkas and slowly walks over to him. He clasps on Tars Tarkas' bracelet. Tars Tarkas takes his arm and leads him back to the incubator.

The other Tharks return from the edge of the crater. Tars Tarkas ties John's hands and feet securely with a leather belt taken from his own battle harness.

JOHN
Restraints. Always the first sign
of welcome.

Tars Tarkas speaks with his men while reattaching his weapons. He mounts his thout, reaches down three arms and pulls John across his saddle. They ride up and out of the crater.

A Thark scout gallops from the direction of the hills, stops in front of Tars Tarkas and reports. Tars Tarkas glances down at the incubator, shouts and leads his men at a gallop toward the hills.

An AIRCRAFT the size of a Blackhawk helicopter ZOOMS over the hills and dives, flying low over the plain in a direction away from the Tharks. Its small propellers are for steering and propulsion only, not lift. A crew of five bronze-colored humans are armed with rifles. One looks through a scope and locates the Tharks.

The airship turns and flies toward the Tharks.

Five Tharks change direction and gallop toward the oncoming airship. Tars Tarkas stops and yells after them. One of the five yells back to Tars Tarkas. Tars Tarkas, angered, starts off after them. One of the four Tharks still with Tars Tarkas grabs his shoulder and shouts to him, reasoning with him. Tars Tarkas reluctantly turns away from the airship and gallops toward the hills, followed by the four others.

The five Tharks facing the airship stop, take aim and FIRE their RIFLES in unison. Their EXPLODING BULLETS HIT the ship, glancing off it, causing minimal damage.

The airship's crew FIRES EXPLODING BULLETS back at them, BLASTING three Tharks out of their saddles. The surviving two Tharks FIRE continuously. The airship swoops past them and circles around. The two Tharks are BLASTED out of their saddles by EXPLODING BULLETS. The riderless thouts bolt into the plain.

The ship turns to follow Tars Tarkas and his four companions. The four stop and FIRE at the ship, killing two of the red crewmen. Tars Tarkas continues galloping toward the hills. The remaining three red crewmen BLAST the four Tharks out of their saddles. Their thots bolt into the plain.

The ship takes another turn and zooms toward Tars Tarkas, the only remaining Thark. Tars Tarkas stops his thot, raises his RIFLE and FIRES repeatedly.

Tars Tarkas' FIRE melts away the front of the airship and disables it. A SHOT from a crewman HITS Tars Tarkas' thot in the chest, wounding it. Tars Tarkas DROPS his RIFLE, grabs John and jumps clear of his THRASHING THOT.

The AIRSHIP CRASHES into the plain and EXPLODES.

Tars Tarkas picks up his RIFLE and reluctantly SHOOTS his dying thot.

EXT. CITY OF ZODANGA - NIGHT

The city of Zodanga covers two hundred square miles. Buildings stand hundreds of stories tall. The palace is the highest at four thousand feet tall. Towers, airship hangar buildings and elevated docks fill the city's skies. Armor plating and gun emplacements have replaced many windows and elevated gardens.

The buildings are surrounded by swarms of all shapes and sizes of civilian airships. They range from helicopter-sized one-man ships to giant cargo ships a quarter mile long. A fleet of military airships of various sizes hovers over the center of the city.

All Zodangans are bronze-colored and human in shape.

INT. ZODANGAN PALACE - THAN KOSIS' THRONE ROOM - DAY

Stuffed Thark trophies line the sides of the room.

JEDDAK (KING) THAN KOSIS sits atop a fifteen foot tall dais accessible only by a narrow staircase at the front. Kosis is disfigured and covered with scars from head to toe. His gaze is merciless and hateful, his mouth set in a bitter, conceited smirk.

JED (PRINCE) SAB THAN stands at his side, his loyal, drained countenance focused unwaveringly on Kosis.

SAB THAN

Father, the Helimites are massing at Hastor, preparing for our "imminent" attack.

THAN KOSIS

Leaving Ptarth poorly defended.

SAB THAN

Will the loss of their last ally
break their spirit?

THAN KOSIS

No, the Helimites will never
surrender like the others. They
are the keepers of this world, in
their own eyes. They will serve
our purposes better as corpses
than as slaves.

(a new subject)

What's the condition of our Thark
laborers?

SAB THAN

Our ships struck three of their
minor cities since the last
deployment. There was
considerable resistance. Their
roving bands continue to thin the
ranks of our scouts.

THAN KOSIS

Have the ships from the battle of
Korad been recovered?

SAB THAN

They've disappeared, like the
others. Not a single burnt wreck.

THAN KOSIS

Recent casualties?

SAB THAN

Twelve hundred Tharks to four
hundred of ours. And two thousand
new slaves.

THAN KOSIS

Four hundred of ours?! The Tharks
are savages, fighting from the
backs of thots! How long will
the torturers go unpunished, and
my commanders bring me ratios?!
Who led our attacks?

SAB THAN

Odwar Nath. The Tharks are
adapting the rifles they take-

THAN KOSIS

Dispose of Nath. Give Odwar Sabor
the opportunity, or any of my
other pitiful officers. Choose
one who can survive more than a
Thark's breath.

SAB THAN

Yes, Father.

EXT. RAVINE - DAY

Tars Tarkas hikes in centaur posture, now devoid of armor. John is draped over his back, sunburned, with chapped lips. They leave the ravine, entering a valley.

EXT. VALLEY - DAY

At the end of the valley is an ancient city of fifty square miles, bordered by hills. High, jeweled towers glisten in the sunlight. The buildings are made of ornately carved wood, large stones, and cement. The city appears deserted and crumbling. BIRDS fly between the buildings, their SQUAWKS ECHO across the valley.

John looks up at the city, then sinks down exhausted. Tars Tarkas follows a worn path toward the city.

EXT. THARK CITY - MAIN AVENUE - DAY

Tars Tarkas carries John toward the middle of the city.

EXT. THARK CITY - PLAZA - DAY

A square mile of open space. Hundreds of Tharks converge, walking in centaur posture. Many are fully armed and wear patchwork armor. The females are shorter, with lighter green skin and finger nails, unlike the males. No apparent signs of old age among the Tharks.

The excited crowd tries to pull John off of Tars Tarkas' back. He quiets them with a word of command and crosses the plaza to a magnificent building of gleaming white marble decorated with gold and gems.

He hesitates on the steps, lowers John, unties his legs and takes his arm, leading him inside. John stumbles, struggling with the weak gravity.

INT. THARK PALACE - HAGOJA'S THRONE ROOM - DAY

Pillars reach from the first floor to the domed roof twenty floors above. Forty highly-decorated Thark chieftains sit awkwardly at human-sized wooden desks.

On a dais reclines JEDDARA (QUEEN) HAGOJA, the fattest and ugliest Thark of them all, surrounded by five personal guards who always accompany her.

John stands beside Tars Tarkas, who reports the fate of his expedition, pointing to John and gesturing to imitate a giant leap. He shows John's tied hands.

TARS TARKAS

Jonkatar.

Three Tharks, in centaur posture, surround John, feeling his muscles and skin.

Hagoja walks in centaur posture to the exit, motioning John to follow. She motions Tars Tarkas back. John tries to walk, stumbles, HITS his HEAD on a desk. Hagoja laughs, the chieftains laughing with her, except Tars Tarkas and eight others. John crawls toward the exit.

A chieftain named DOTAR roughly pulls John to his feet. JOHN indignantly jumps and head-butts Dotar, knocking him unconscious. John puts his back to a desk, ready to defend himself. The Tharks are speechless, then applaud.

A chieftain checks Dotar's vitals, removes his harness, carries his body away. The harness is respectfully placed at John's feet. He stumbles backwards in confusion. Tars Tarkas picks up the harness, takes John's arm. They exit, followed by the others.

EXT. THARK CITY - PLAZA - DAY

HAGOJA

Sak Jonkatar.

Hagoja makes a small jump.

HAGOJA

Sak.

JOHN

I could kill myself.

HAGOJA

Sak!

John jumps out a hundred feet and lands, rolling to the ground. He crawls back, exhausted. Fifty Tharks saw the jump and laugh. Many shout "Sak!"

TARS TARKAS

Sola!

A young Thark woman named SOLA emerges from the crowd. Tars Tarkas motions for John to follow her. Sola grasps John's bound arms and gently leads him toward a building. LORQUAS PTOMEL, a chieftain standing next to Tars Tarkas, watches Sola depart.

INT. SOLA'S BUILDING - MAIN CHAMBER - DAY

Sola and John enter through a large front door. The walls are decorated with beautiful, ancient murals and mosaics of flowering landscapes. Sola directs John to sit on one of the six beds covered with silks and furs.

She hisses and an animal named WOOLA waddles in on ten short legs and squats in front of her like a dog.

Woola is the size of a Shetland pony, and has green skin and a frog-like head with a mouth full of three rows of long, shark-like teeth. Woola is a calot.

Sola unties John's hands. He backs away from Woola. Sola looks into Woola's eyes, then exits. Woola lies across the front doorway, stares at John, PURRS softly.

Sola returns with a block of cheese-like substance and a jar of milk-like fluid, puts them near John, sits and watches him. John crawls over to it.

WOOLA SNIFFS at the food. Sola swats him away. He circles John and lunges at the cheese. Sola slaps him and he crawls away in defeat.

JOHN
Wonderful. Dog food.

John tastes the cheese, then devours it and drinks the milk. Exhausted, he lies on a bed and falls asleep.

INT. SOLA'S BUILDING - MAIN CHAMBER - NIGHT

John wakes up, shivering. A fur blanket partially covers him. Sola reaches out from her seat nearby, adjusts his blanket, adds another. He falls back to sleep.

INT. SOLA'S BUILDING - MAIN CHAMBER - MORNING

John sits up in bed. Five female Tharks sleep in beds nearby. Sola sleeps on the floor next to his bed. Woola lies across the doorway, watching him.

John picks up a discarded cheese rind, throws it into another room. Woola goes after it. John shuffles over, barely maintaining his balance, and LOCKS Woola in.

EXT. THARK CITY - SIDE AVENUE - MORNING

John shuffles down an avenue. BIRDS SCREECH high above.

INT. SOLA'S BUILDING - MAIN CHAMBER - MORNING

WOOLA CRASHES through the doorway into the main room, SNIFFS the floor, runs out. Sola wakes up, sees that John is gone, runs out.

EXT. THARK CITY - SIDE AVENUE - DAY

WOOLA runs down an avenue, SNIFFING the ground.

John reaches the edge of the city. WOOLA jumps in front of him, SNARLING and showing his teeth.

EXT. VALLEY - DAY

John jumps over Woola, away from the city. Woola chases, nearly catching him. John leaps back toward the city.

EXT. THARK CITY - SIDE AVENUE - DAY

John jumps to a window thirty feet up, looks at Woola. A huge, hairy hand drags him backwards into the building.

INT. APE ROOM - DAY

An enormous ape-like creature SLAMS John onto his back and pins him to the floor with its foot. It is eight feet tall, with four arms, white and hairless except for clumps of white hair on its head and hands. It JABBERS and motions to a second ape behind John.

The other ape raises a large stone club above John, is distracted, glances aside. Woola leaps from a doorway onto the chest of the ape, knocking away its club. The first APE SCREAMS, releases John, leaps out the window.

EXT. THARK CITY - SIDE AVENUE - DAY

The APE LANDS and runs along the side of the building.

INT. APE ROOM - DAY

Woola and the ape roll back and forth, TEARING with their CLAWS, GROWLING and SNORTING. John stands against the wall, stunned.

EXT. THARK CITY - SIDE AVENUE - DAY

Tars Tarkas and Sola, in centaur posture, follow two CALOTS SNIFFING the ground. Up ahead, an ape appears, enters a ramp leading up into a building. The calots go crazy, tug on their leashes. The Tharks follow the ape.

INT. APE ROOM - DAY

Woola and the ape are weakening. John comes to his senses, grabs the dropped CLUB, SMASHES the ape's skull. The other APE runs in, ROARING and frothing at the mouth.

John turns toward the window, hesitates, glances at Woola. WOOLA PURRS pitifully, weakly stands. John turns and faces the charging ape.

He throes the CLUB, HITTING the ape in the knees. It stumbles forward. JOHN sidesteps and PUNCHES it in the stomach. Woola leaps, knocking the ape off its feet. The APE falls, GASPING for breath. John leaps, grabs the CLUB, SMASHES the ape's head, killing it. John sinks to the floor, breathing laboriously.

Tars Tarkas and Sola enter with their calots. Sola runs to John and checks him over. She takes his arm and leads him toward the door.

Tars Tarkas looks over Woola's wounds, draws his pistol.

JOHN

No!

John leaps, pushes Tars Tarkas' arm up. A BULLET hits the wall, EXPLODING through wood and stone. John helps Woola to his feet, motions for him to follow.

Tars Tarkas watches John intently, holstering his pistol.

EXT. THARK CITY - PLAZA - DAYS LATER

The Tharks practice with their weapons. John and Sola aim rifles at targets fifty feet away against a wall. At Sola's command, John shoots THREE EXPLOSIVE BULLETS.

Sola raises a sword, demonstrates jabs and blocks. She and John make slow SWORD CUTS AND PARRIES. WOOLA sits nearby, swathed in bandages, GROWLING at Sola as she appears to threaten John.

A female calot named CHEWA walks by. WOOLA is distracted and PURRS at her. CHEWA GROWLS back. WOOLA GROANS.

INT. SOLA'S BUILDING - SLEEPING CHAMBER - DAY

John listens as Sola speaks. She points to her weapons, saying a different word for each, and also identifies the cheese and milk. He repeats the words.

Sola mimes hunger and says a phrase, then pretends to eat, speaking another phrase.

She speaks, then writes a word on a cloth. John repeats the word and writes it phonetically in English, including a phrase of definition. Woola leans his head against John, who pets him. Sola draws two designs, points to replicas on her harness.

SOLA

Sola. Thark.

EXT. CITY OF GREATER HELIUM - DAY - MONTHS LATER

Greater Helium covers one hundred and fifty square miles. A beautiful, decorative, impenetrable fortress-city. Magnificent buildings stand hundreds of stories high. Windows and gardens abound. Towers, hangars and docks fill the city's skies, gun emplacements discreetly placed. Thousands of airships fly throughout the city.

The gleaming, scarlet palace rises above the center of the city to the height of one mile. It's sides are decorated with windows, lush gardens and sleek landing areas. On its top is a giant dome surrounded by gardens and landing areas.

Fifty miles away, on the horizon, is the city of Lesser Helium. It covers one hundred square miles, with a mile-high, central palace of gleaming yellow.

All Heliumites are bronze-colored and human in shape.

INT. HELIUMITE PALACE - TARDOS MORS' THRONE ROOM - DAY

The room is a quarter mile long, with walls of gleaming white marble and inlaid gems. Giant pillars stand a mile tall, reaching up to the dome atop the palace. At one end are two scarlet thrones atop a dais.

JEDDAK (KING) TARDOS MORS sits on one of the thrones, JED (PRINCE) MORS KAJAK standing next to him, surrounded by twenty advisers. They wear bejeweled leather harnesses, each with a broadsword, dagger and pistol.

Maps of Barsoom are set up around the platform, many regions stained red. Dotted lines mark the shores of ancient, dried oceans.

PRINCESS DEJAH THORIS enters, black hair, regal, confident posture, wearing a bejeweled leather harness. She is half the age of the men around the throne.

JEDWAR (GENERAL) KANTOS KAN, leader of the advisers, gestures at the maps.

KANTOS KAN
(to Tardos Mors)
My Jeddak, just weeks after the
loss of Ptarth, can we afford to
let Than Kosis-

Kantos Kan stops in mid-sentence. The council turns to Dejah Thoris and bows as she enters.

DEJAH THORIS
Continue, Jedwar Kantos Kan.
Speak, before your words cut your
tongue.

KANTOS KAN
(condescending)
Your presence honors us, Princess
Dejah Thoris. I hope our
discussion doesn't bore you.

DEJAH THORIS
My grandfather has said I am
always welcome at his council.

KANTOS KAN
(to Tardos Mors)
Are we not making it too easy,
perhaps, for Than Kosis and the
Zodangan fleet to take Hastor?

TARDOS MORS
We're not able to hold these
borders and retake Ptarth.

DEJAH THORIS
There is one more variable.

KANTOS KAN
With all due respect, Princess
Dejah Thoris, do we really have
time to discuss them again?

DEJAH THORIS
They've never attacked us.
They've only fought Zodanga and
the others who provoke them.

KANTOS KAN
Are we to trust a scientist in
matters of war?

TARDOS MORS
Even if they were to volunteer, I
couldn't send their mounted armies
to be slaughtered by the Zodangan
fleet.

DEJAH THORIS
Their marksmanship would be useful
in our fleet.

KANTOS KAN
(sarcastic)
Yes, this war is too easy, let's
invite the Tharks into our midst.

MORS KAJAK
(clearing his throat)
Father, can I have a moment with
my daughter?

TARDOS MORS
Of course.

Tardos Mors leads Kantos Kan and the council out.

DEJAH THORIS
I've been trying to imagine what
it would be like if we didn't have
to quarrel over strips of land.
If there were enough for all of
us, if that could change even Than
Kosis.

MORS KAJAK
A restored atmosphere would lessen
wars, but it might be too much to
hope that it would end them. Some
can never eat their fill of power.

DEJAH THORIS
I have to go out again.

MORS KAJAK
You can't go, not now.

DEJAH THORIS
If I don't, we'll have maybe another twenty years to watch the world die around us. If we don't starve sooner.

MORS KAJAK
I know. I wouldn't be able to look after you as I would like. Our realm is being eroded by Than Kosis.

Dejah Thoris slumps into the other throne.

DEJAH THORIS
I have to finish what I began. The atmosphere system can be regenerated, but I need to conduct tests and inspect the factory.

MORS KAJAK
Into Than Kosis' swarm of scouts.

DEJAH THORIS
If we wait, it will only become more dangerous.

MORS KAJAK
The sea bottoms are their hive, with thousands of caves and ancient wrecks to hide in. It would be a suicide mission.

DEJAH THORIS
I'll test over deserted Thark territories.

MORS KAJAK
Only if Kantos Kan guides you.

DEJAH THORIS
Hi m?

MORS KAJAK
Have I made the only safe bet at keeping you here?

DEJAH THORIS
You would send him to escort scientists on an expedition?

MORS KAJAK

There is no other way. Remember, for this mission, you are only a scientist. Don't be reckless.

DEJAH THORIS

I'll be careful, daddy.

MORS KAJAK

You are our world's future, Dejah.

INT. SOLA'S BUILDING - SLEEPING CHAMBER - MORNING

John's hair is shoulder-length. Woola carries in two sets of milk and cheese, places them near John and Sola.

SOLA

Is there anything else that you would like to learn about the Tharks, Jonkatar? I've never taught a young one who was as quick as you.

JOHN

Are there any second languages spoken among you?

SOLA

Yours is the only other I've heard.

(hopeful)

Would you teach it to me?

JOHN

I don't think any I know would help you, Sola.

SOLA

Your ancient Thern tongue has been forgotten among us.

JOHN

Thern tongue? You've seen others like me?

SOLA

In the murals. And stories from the older chieftains.

JOHN

Do you think I'm a Thern?

SOLA

They're secretive, even deceptive. According to legend. You haven't told me much about yourself.

JOHN
I'm not even from this world.
There isn't much I could tell that
would mean anything to you.

SOLA
(Laughs)
An insane Thern. Or still trying
to hide. You should know that
Jeddara Hagoja and the chieftains
may not find your denials amusing.

EXT. THARK CITY - PLAZA - DAY

Nine hundred fully armed and armored Tharks help harness eight-legged mastodonian animals called zitidars to two hundred and fifty large, beautifully decorated chariots, one per chariot. On each zitidar sits a Thark guide. In each chariot sits a decorated female Thark.

The chariots march single file out through the city, each followed by a calot on a leash. Sola leads John into a chariot. Woola trots after them.

SOLA
Will anyone be waiting for you to
return to your home?

JOHN
Perhaps one, but I wouldn't blame
him if he never wanted his Uncle
Jack to return.

SOLA
Why do you say that?

JOHN
I promised to protect his father
and brothers in battle, but I
failed. I was their officer.

SOLA
There are many unwanted losses in
war. Your confidence to do good
shouldn't be one of them.

JOHN
I'm a captive on another world.
What use do I have for confidence?

SOLA
Even here, if you look, you'll
find something to fight for.

John glances down at Woola running alongside the chariot, happy as a clam, his tongue flopping out of his mouth.

JOHN
Should you be encouraging me to fight?

SOLA
You're one of us, Jonkatar, until you prove otherwise. You earned this respect by your prowess on your first day with us.

JOHN
The one I struck down?

Sola nods.

EXT. SKY OVER PLAIN - DAY

An airship two hundred yards long and a hundred wide, steered by WHIRRING PROPELLERS, sails slowly toward hills on the horizon. It's forward and upper decks are open to the air, crowded with busy crewmen and scientists.

EXT. DEJAH THORIS' AIRSHIP - FRONT DECK - DAY

Kantos Kan and Dejah Thoris stand on the front deck, looking out at the surrounding terrain.

DEJAH THORIS
Don't the Tharks travel through here this time of year?

KANTOS KAN
Next year. Every five years they go in force to the incubators.

EXT. HILLS - DAY

Tars Tarkas views the airship thru a scope on his rifle.

EXT. PLAIN - DAY

The Thark caravan marches across the plain, heading toward the opposite side of the hills. At the head rides a hundred and fifty warriors in ranks of ten, the same number bringing up the rear. Fifty outriders flank on either side. All heavily armed, two rifles per warrior.

Tars Tarkas gallops from the hills and approaches Hagoja.

TARS TARKAS
Jeddara Hagoja, a ship on the far side of the hills. Twenty haads, closing slowly.

HAGOJA
What nation? What colors?

TARS TARKAS
Heliumite lines with the banner of
a peaceful vessel.

HAGOJA
Or of a disguised Zodangan ship.
Order our chariots into the hills.
Form a line along the ridge.

TARS TARKAS
My Jeddara, what if it's a
Heliumite ambassador? This could
be our chance to start speaking
with them.

HAGOJA
An unnecessary risk.

TARS TARKAS
Will you never talk to them? We
can't continue alone against
Zodanga.

HAGOJA
Form the line, Tars Tarkas.

Chieftains scatter and send troops back down the caravan.
Tars Tarkas gallops past Sola's chariot.

TARS TARKAS
To the ravines. A ship approaches.

Lorquas Ptomel rides up to Sola's chariot and silently
escorts it. Sola pretends that she doesn't notice him.
Sola's guide goads their ziti dar into a gallop.

EXT. HILLS - DAY

The Thark caravan disperses into the hills and canyons.
John unties Woola, climbs to the ridge-top, lies flat.

Thark warriors line up for a quarter mile in either
direction, stretching along the ridge-top.

EXT. SKY OVER PLAIN - DAY

Dejah Thoris' airship floats slowly toward the hills.

EXT. HILLS - DAY

The Tharks FIRE a RIFLE volley at the ship.

EXT. DEJAH THORIS' AIRSHIP - FRONT DECK - DAY

A crewman standing next to Dejah Thoris is SHOT by an
EXPLODING BULLET and flies backwards from the impact.
Crewmen and scientists across the front deck are shot by
the Tharks. All remaining crewmen return FIRE.

A one-man messenger ship lifts off the deck and is blasted out of the air by Thark RIFLE FIRE.

Kantos Kan grabs Dejah Thori s and pulls her behind a metal column. A BULLET EXPLODES next to Kantos Kan, shrapnel hitting him in the arm. He and Dejah Thori s run across the chaotic deck and slip through a hatch into the enclosed cabin area of the ship.

EXT. PLAIN - DAY

The ship swings back toward the plain, its decks dissolving in flame under THARK FIRE.

EXT. HILLS - DAY

The Tharks stand, continue FIRING. John watches in awe and disgust.

INT. DEJAH THORIS' AIRSHIP - DEJAH THORIS' CABIN - DAY

Ten guards fortify the doorway with furniture. Dejah Thori s bandages Kantos Kan' s bleeding arm.

KANTOS KAN
The ship won' t take much more.
I' m sorry, Princess.

DEJAH THORIS
They' re not supposed to be here.

Kantos Kan looks out a window at rapidly rising terrain.

KANTOS KAN
The bridge has been hit.

EXT. SKY OVER PLAIN - DAY

The ship circles erratically, swerves into a hill.

EXT. HILLS - DAY

The Tharks swarm the ship and tie it in place with ropes attached to giant pegs. John, followed by Woola, walks along the ridge to a point uphill from the tethered ship.

INT. DEJAH THORIS' AIRSHIP - DEJAH THORIS' CABIN - DAY

Kantos Kan hands a pistol to Dejah Thori s.

KANTOS KAN
When they find us, it would be
better if you weren' t...

Dejah Thori s nods.

EXT. DEJAH THORIS' AIRSHIP - FRONT DECK - DAY

Tars Tarkas leads the Tharks onto the deck, sees the dead body of a red man.

TARS TARKAS
Take prisoners. They're
Heliumites.

The Tharks enter the cabins of the airship.

INT. DEJAH THORIS' AIRSHIP - CABIN AREA - DAY

The Tharks engage the few remaining Heliumites, FIGHTING with BROADSWORDS. A Thark chieftain named ZAD disarms his opponent, is about to kill him. Tars Tarkas grabs his sword arm.

TARS TARKAS
He'll get a chance in the arena.

Zad sheathes his sword, ties the hands of the Heliumite, leads him off the airship.

INT. DEJAH THORIS' AIRSHIP - DEJAH THORIS' CABIN - DAY

YELLS, GRUNTS, CLASHING SWORDS are heard through the cabin door. A CRASHING IMPACT demolishes the door and the fortifications inside. Six of Dejah Thoris' guards run forward and are cut down by the Tharks.

KANTOS KAN
Now!

Dejah Thoris puts her pistol to her head, her hand shaky, then still. She puts the pistol down. Kantos Kan grabs it, aims it at her head. Tars Tarkas runs in, knocks it out of Kantos Kan's hand. More Tharks enter the cabin and capture the Heliumites.

EXT. HILLS - DAY

The Tharks drag Dejah Thoris, Kantos Kan and the remaining four of the Princess' guards off the ship. They're taken to separate chariots and chained to metal rings in the floorboards. The Tharks carry their casualties off the ship. The wounded Heliumites are left on board, gathered together, under guard.

Tars Tarkas approaches Hagoja, who directs the search of the airship.

TARS TARKAS
Two high-ranking Heliumites are
among the prisoners. They're in
my custody.

HAGOJA
Can it be repaired? Will it fly?

TARS TARKAS
It's a wreck.

HAGOJA
Scrap it. Leave their wounded
aboard.

Tars Tarkas turn away, sickened. The warriors loot the ship, carrying off lab equipment, engine machinery and casks of water. The loot is loaded onto a small caravan.

EXT. PLAIN - NIGHT

The ship has been stripped bare. The Tharks stand on the hills around the ship. CRIES of WOUNDED HELIUMITES emanate from the decks of the ship. Hagoja throws a FIRE BOMB onto the main deck. The securing ropes are released. The ship soars straight up, its decks consumed in ROARING FLAMES.

The loot caravan sets off into the night.

JOHN
Jeddara Hagoja's loot is marching
unprotected across the open plain.

SOLA
Tars Tarkas says they will travel
without lights and return by dawn.

JOHN
With three days back to the city
and no settlements in a six-hour
march?

SOLA
It'll be hidden, deep underground.

EXT. HILLS - NEXT DAY

John and Sol a see Dejah Thori s from a distance. She sees John, signals with her hand, he hesitates, not sure how to respond. She turns away, sad and angry.

A Thark chieftain presents weapons, ornaments and a downsized harness to John.

JOHN
What's this?

SOLA
They were Dotar's. The chieftain
you struck down.

(MORE)

SOLA (cont'd)
 The victor in fair combat earns everything that belonged to his enemy, including his rank. You now have a place on the council.

JOHN
 Why now?

SOLA
 Another sword for the march. I assured Tars Tarkas that you were ready.

EXT. HILLS - NIGHT

Lookouts stand atop the hills, watching by moonlight.

John, Sola, Zad, and two Thark women meet in camp.

SOLA
 Zad, has the fate of the prisoners been decided?

ZAD
 I've heard Jeddara Hagoja will throw the woman to the wild throats at the games.

SOLA
 She will waste this prisoner?

ZAD
 Sola, why don't you go tell the Jeddara she's being wasteful?

Zad and the two Thark women laugh.

SOLA
 The woman is from the only country that isn't attacking us.

ZAD
 They attacked us yesterday.

SOLA
 We fired first. We have to make peace with Helium if we're going to survive against the Zodangans.

Zad snarls and slinks off toward his nearby chariot.

ZAD
 Jeddara Hagoja will never pledge her sword to the red calots.

EXT. HILLS - DAY

John and Sola pass Dejah Thoris, chained in a chariot. Dejah Thoris turns away from John, blushing, indignant.

Tars Tarkas, assisted by Zad, directs the loading of supplies and equipment into Dejah Thori's chariot. Zad wears a key hanging from a necklace.

JOHN
Sola, who holds the key to the woman's chains?

SOLA
Zad has it.

JOHN
Would she be safer if Tars Tarkas took it?

SOLA
There may be a way.

Sola approaches Tars Tarkas. Zad, out of earshot, watches Sola.

TARS TARKAS
What is it, Sola?

SOLA
Kaor, Chieftain Tars Tarkas. My pupil Chieftain Jonkatar wonders why you've let Zad humiliate you by taking charge of your prisoner.

TARS TARKAS
Jonkatar needs only to look after himself. I'll be organizing our defense for the rest of the march. Zad will care for her.

SOLA
Should such a unique prisoner be entrusted to him?

TARS TARKAS
Why are you so concerned about this red woman?

Zad throws a piece of equipment into the chariot. Dejah Thori's narrowly dodges it. Zad laughs.

SOLA
Zad has told me of his hatred for the red people. He's looking forward to her time in the arena.

Tars Tarkas rides over to Zad, whispers to him. Zad throws down the necklace with the key, spits on it, storms off. Tars Tarkas takes the necklace. Zad glares at Sola and John as he passes by.

Hagoja, Tars Tarkas, John and the Thark council lead the caravan out into the plain.

EXT. PLAIN - DAY

The caravan arrives at the incubator, parks around it. It's full of squirming baby Tharks. Tars Tarkas and three others open it.

The chieftains arrange duels between the women, who fight til first blood. Winners get two children. John returns to Sola's chariot, where Dejah Thoris is now chained.

JOHN

Is this the cost of survival? The allotment of children?

SOLA

The Tharks haven't always been this way.

John puts two gauntlets on Woola's front legs, unties him and leads him away from the chariot. He swings his sword slowly at Woola, teaching Woola to use the GAUNTLETS to DEFLECT the SWORD. He swings faster as Woola catches on.

DEJAH THORIS

(to Sola)

What chance will I have when Jeddara Hagoja summons me?

Sola is amazed to hear her speak, points at her harness.

SOLA

(softly)

I'm afraid your position may only make things more difficult for you. Some members of the council are not as blind. Tars Tarkas and others may try to reason with her. Appeal to them.

EXT. PLAIN - NIGHT

The Tharks make camp, pitching tents by moonlight. Woola is leashed to Sola's chariot. His favorite girl calot, Chewa, walks by. He PURRS. She ignores him.

John ties up his two thoats and approaches Dejah Thoris.

JOHN

Sola places her hopes in Helium. They say that you are of high position. What's your name?

She turns away.

JOHN

Is this how you greet everyone who would be your friend? I've met Tharks that were more civil.

DEJAH THORIS
A friendly Thern?

John rolls his eyes, glances over his shoulder. Zad approaches John's two throats.

JOHN
(to Dejah Thoris)
Well, you seem to have everything
under control. Please excuse me.

Zad raises his sword, aiming at one of John's throats. John draws his SWORD and DEFLECTS his blade. They fight, their WEAPONS CLANGING, sparks flying. Woola tugs at his leash, nearly strangling himself. A crowd gathers. Kantos Kan, shackled, watches from a nearby chariot.

John jumps sideways, is cut slightly by Zad. Zad thrusts at John, stabbing him through the underarm. John lunges forward and passes out. Consciousness returns. John's sword is buried in Zad where he lies dead on the moss. John removes Zad's sword from his underarm and reclaims his own sword from Zad's body.

John walks, bleeding and disgusted, to Sola's chariot. The crowd applauds him. Woola licks John's wounds.

Two chieftains strip the equipment and ornaments from Zad's body and deliver them to John. Sola dresses John's wounds, applying ointment and bandages. Dejah Thoris feels suddenly ashamed and cries, turning away.

Sola sees her tears. Pain flashes across Sola's face. John gets up and takes a step toward Dejah Thoris. Sola stops him, pulls him aside.

SOLA
Jonkatar, you'll only embarrass
her. She'll speak to you when
she's ready.

JOHN
I suppose you're right, Sola.
Please don't take this personally,
but it's not often that you can
get sound emotional advice from a
Thark.

SOLA
I've seen tears once before. It
was enough to learn that it shows
a wounded heart.

JOHN
Are tears that rare among you?

SOLA
We've been hiding them for a
hundred generations.

JOHN
Then who did you see cry?

SOLA
Someone it's not wise to speak of.

JOHN
Would he be embarrassed if you told someone?

SOLA
(hitting a nerve)
She is no longer alive.

JOHN
Would it help you to speak of it?
If you can't tell any of your own people, perhaps you can tell me.

SOLA
You couldn't tell anyone about it.
It's my closest secret.

JOHN
I would be honored to keep it.

SOLA
It was my true mother, years ago.

JOHN
You knew her?

SOLA
Not all Tharks have led the heartless life you saw today.

A rapid series of camera shots accompanies Sol a's descriptions.

SOLA (V.O.)
My mother, Gozava, was sensitive, more sensitive than the other women. She spent time by herself, sitting on the hills among the flowers, letting her thoughts go free. She met a young warrior who guarded grazing thoats and zitidars. At first they spoke only of community concerns, but as they met more often, they began to talk about themselves, their likes, and their hopes. She told him how she hated that the Tharks were forced to lead lives without love, as if the strength to survive had to come from a cold heart. She waited for the storm to break from him;

(MORE)

SOLA (V. 0.) (cont' d)
but instead he took her in his arms and kissed her. Knowing that love was forbidden, the egg which contained me was hidden in an incubator atop a tower of Thark City. My father took the medals of three chieftains and soon stood high in the Thark council. He dreamed of taking the medals of Tal Hajus, Jeddak at the time. He hoped that the highest position would allow him to protect his family, and encourage all the Tharks to embrace their hearts again after ignoring them for thousands of years. Then Tal Hajus began a war to steal Zodangan supplies and my father was captured in battle. He was the slave and gladiator of their Jeddak Than Kosis for three years. During that time, the egg hatched. My mother kept me in the tower and visited me daily, hoping to mix me with children whose teachers had been killed in battle. Children who waited to be re-distributed. She taught me the language and told me of my lost father, but warned me not to share my knowledge of my parents or show my affection for her when with others. That night, the moment after she told me of my father, a lamp flashed open and there stood Hagoja. One of many competitors for the throne. Even then it was her goal to keep the "weakness" of love from re-emerging among the Tharks. Her gleaming eyes were fixed in hatred on my mother. She had heard the story but had not caught the whispered name of my father. She demanded that my mother reveal it. My mother lied and said she alone knew his name and would never reveal it to her child. Hagoja planned to take us to Tal Hajus upon his return from an incubator. She couldn't wait to tell him of this violation of Thark customs. We escaped and fled to the outskirts of the city. Near the southern border we encountered the Jeddak's caravan returning from the incubator. My mother hid us out of sight and let most of them pass before pushing me toward a group of unassigned children.

(MORE)

SOLA (V.O.) (cont'd)
 Her eyes filled with tears as she let me go, and then she disappeared into the shadows. I never saw her again. Soon after, the news spread that Tal Hajus had tortured her to death. Hagoja gained popularity and took the throne soon after. A year later my father escaped the Zodangans, crossed the wastelands on foot, and arrived at Thark City barely alive. My mother must have kept our identities secret. He's alive and organizing the defense for this march.

JOHN
 Tars Tarkas?

SOLA
 He doesn't know I'm his daughter. He knows that Hagoja was responsible for the death of my mother, Gozava, and he has lived for revenge, ascending the ranks faster than any before him. He's now Jedwar, second only to Hagoja.

JOHN
 You've never told him who you are?

SOLA
 I don't know which would be worse, to continue carrying the secret on my own, or to lay on him an old burden. If he were unable to protect me, or if the truth of our past were found out by his competitors for the throne, then in my death he would lose her, again. Jonkatar, it's easier for Tars Tarkas to think that I was killed and he has no child.

EXT. THARK CITY - MAIN AVENUE - DAY

The caravan returns to the city.

INT. JOHN'S BUILDING - MAIN ROOM - DAY

John enters a building along a main avenue. Frescoes depict white-skinned humans with short blonde hair, only a few with weapons and shining armor, followed by playing calots. WOOLA PURRS calmly at the frescoes.

INT. JOHN'S BUILDING - SLEEPING CHAMBER - DAY

John enters a second-floor room overlooking a courtyard.

EXT. JOHN'S BUILDING - COURTYARD - DAY

The courtyard is ornate and wildly overgrown.

It transforms as John sees what it once looked like, with beautiful vegetation and flowers. Graceful Orovar women and handsome men like those in the murals walk the paths of the courtyard. Guards in gleaming armor stand on either side of a doorway. Children play with calots in the fountains and climb on the statues.

The courtyard resumes its overgrown form.

EXT. CITY OF GREATER HELIUM - PALACE - NIGHT

The Heliumite palace is brightly lit and towers over the rest of the city in the night sky.

INT. HELIUMITE PALACE - TARDOS MORS' THRONE ROOM - NIGHT

Tardos Mors sits on his throne. Mors Kajak stands next to him. A councilor whispers into Mors Kajak's ear.

COUNCILOR

Our scouts have found no sign of the Princess' ship.

MORS KAJAK

She's missing?!

COUNCILOR

It's too early to assume the worst. She may have changed the order of her experiments.

MORS KAJAK

She would've sent her messenger. Something has befallen them.

TARDOS MORS

She could've traveled a thousand haads since the last report. Organize the fleet for a search.

COUNCILOR

But the Zolangans are advancing.

TARDOS MORS

They'll be busy at Hastor. Our attack on Ptarth will have to wait until she's found. We'll lead the search together.

COUNCILOR

There will be no one to command from the throne in your absence.

TARDOS MORS

For two hundred years I've left
this throne to lead my forces into
enemy territory. I'll not now
leave my granddaughter in danger
and shrink before Than Kosis the
coward, who never leaves his city.

COUNCILOR

Yes, my Jeddak.

Tardos Mors rises and leads the councilor out of the throne room. Mors Kajak stares at the empty Jeddara's throne where Dejah Thoris once sat.

EXT. THARK CITY - PLAZA - DAY

John approaches Hagoja's building, chains Woola to a pillar, enters the building. WOOLA GROANS in protest, pulling on his chain.

Lorquas Ptomel arrives followed by his calot Chewa, chains her to Woola's pillar, enters the building. Woola runs around the side of his pillar to see Chewa. He PURRS at her, snuggles against her. She welcomes it for a second, then pushes him away and GROWLS at him.

INT. THARK PALACE - HAGOJA'S THRONE ROOM - DAY

John sits by Tars Tarkas, Sola nearby. Six of the forty chieftains glare at Tars Tarkas in disgust. One of them, SOJAT, glances at the other five, nodding to each.

Dejah Thoris stands in front of Jeddara Hagoja.

HAGOJA

So, red woman, who are you?

DEJAH THORIS

Princess Dejah Thoris, daughter of
Mors Kajak, Jed of Lesser Helium.

A whisper spreads through the council. Tars Tarkas sits up with concern.

HAGOJA

Why were you crossing our
territory without a royal escort?

DEJAH THORIS

I was testing the atmosphere
gasses. I've wanted to ask for
your help with my research. If
you would assist my people, we
could improve the atmosphere
system and regenerate the rest of
our world.

HAGOJA

You chose a unique flight path to study the system.

DEJAH THORIS

We were forced to take that route because of the Zodangan encroachment. I wouldn't have flown so close if I'd known it was a hatching year.

HAGOJA

We've had to increase the frequency of our hatchings because of your people.

DEJAH THORIS

Can you blame all the red people for Than Kosis' attacks?

HAGOJA

Aside from attacks, you've taken all the farm lands. My people would rather kill than starve.

DEJAH THORIS

Zodanga and its allies have taken them. Helium will soon starve.

HAGOJA

Should I be concerned if red people die?

(licks her lips)

At least then we would have something to eat.

DEJAH THORIS

My hope is that the Tharks and the red people will live in peace. After the ambush of my ship, all nations of the red people may soon be your enemies.

(to the council)

Is that what the Tharks want?

Tars Tarkas rises to speak.

Sojat leaps in front of Dejah Thoris, STRIKES her across the face, knocking her down. He places his foot on her back and laughs at Tars Tarkas. Hagoja and the five glaring chieftains laugh with him. Lorquas Ptomel stands in support of Tars Tarkas.

John jumps toward Sojat with an angry shout. Dejah Thoris crawls away, her nose bleeding.

JOHN PUNCHES Sojat. Sojat draws his short sword. John draws his, deflects Sojat's blade, jumps onto Sojat's chest and stabs him.

Sojat tries to shake John loose, is overcome, sinks dead to the floor. Tars Tarkas, Lorquas Ptomel and ten chieftains applaud.

Sola and Lorquas Ptomel make prolonged eye contact. Lorquas Ptomel smiles gently. Sola smiles in return. She turns away, embarrassed, still smiling.

John carries Dejah Thoris to a bench, puts cloth up to her nose.

DEJAH THORIS
Why are you fighting for me?

JOHN
(with a smile)
How long can a "Thern" and a woman of Helium live among the Tharks? It's not a question I plan to let them answer for us. John Carter.

John puts out his hand. She awkwardly takes it. He shakes her hand.

DEJAH THORIS
Jonkatar, Princess Dejah Thoris.

JOHN
John Carter. Two words.

DEJAH THORIS
Jonkatar, my people greet each other like this.

She puts her right hand on his left shoulder.

Hagoja calls Tars Tarkas to her side, exchanges whispers. Two chieftains strip Sojat's body and carry it away. Hagoja delivers Sojat's gear to John.

HAGOJA
Tars Tarkas tells me you speak well, considering the short time you've been with us. Soon you will begin to transcribe the ancient writings for us.

JOHN
I'm afraid I'll be a disappointing linguist, as I'm not a Thern.

HAGOJA
Ages ago my people eliminated every member of the white Orovar race. So you must be a Thern, returned from your hidden city.

JOHN
I wish that I were able to serve my Jeddara in that way.

HAGOJA

Do you know what your boldness
would've cost if you had failed to
kill Dotar or Sojat, the
chieftains you attacked?

JOHN

In service to all Tharks, I would
kill again to defend a chieftain's
right to speak.

Hagoja glances at Tars Tarkas, then Dejah Thoris, who
steps behind John.

HAGOJA

(sarcastic)

Oh, that's why you attacked Sojat.

Five chieftains laugh.

HAGOJA

Chieftains rarely kill an enemy
quickly. The slower means of
death can be so imaginative.
Jonkatar, some insist you deserve
praise for being the first
outsider to become one of us.
They will be held responsible for
your actions.

JOHN

Then they should know that I'm
taking custody of Princess Dejah
Thoris until a ransom is arranged.

HAGOJA

Take her. She won't be a very
helpful slave.

John leads Dejah Thoris toward the exit. Sola follows.

HAGOJA

I hope you'll join us for
tomorrow's festivities. You'll
find them especially entertaining,
Princess Dejah Thoris.

EXT. THARK CITY - PLAZA - DAY

John begins to unchain Woola.

SOLA

The Great Games begin tomorrow.

Tars Tarkas hurries up to John, pulls him aside, pushes
him against a pillar. Woola tugs on his chain.

TARS TARKAS

If you're going to kill someone, don't say you're doing it for my sake. I don't need help from a puny thing like you, whatever you are.

JOHN

There will be others like Zad and Sojat. You can't always watch Dejah Thoris, Sola can.

Tars Tarkas releases John. John calms Woola. Tars Tarkas removes his key necklace, leans close to Sola.

TARS TARKAS

Do you understand her importance?

SOLA

Yes, Chieftain Tars Tarkas.

TARS TARKAS

Don't abuse my trust.

Sola takes the key necklace.

INT. JOHN'S BUILDING - SECOND FLOOR CHAMBER - NIGHT

John, Sola, and Dejah Thoris enter a large room on the second floor. Frescoes depict peaceful people and playing calots. Sola places food on the table, chains Dejah Thoris' ankle to a metal ring in the floor.

SOLA

I'll get the rest of our supplies.

Sola exits, LOCKING the DOOR.

INT. JOHN'S BUILDING - HALLWAY - NIGHT

Sola disappears down the hallway. An unfamiliar THARK CHIEFTAIN appears from the opposite direction, listens outside John's door.

INT. JOHN'S BUILDING - SECOND FLOOR CHAMBER - NIGHT

Woola looks toward the door.

JOHN

I can't be a chieftain of the Tharks any longer. There is another nation in greater need of my allegiance.

DEJAH THORIS

What are you saying?

JOHN
Tonight we'll make for Helium.

DEJAH THORIS
We have to take the men who were captured with me.

JOHN
They're heavily guarded. They'll have to wait until we contact your scouts.

DEJAH THORIS
They're to be taken to the arena tomorrow.

WOOLA GROWLS at the door.

JOHN
What is it Woola?

John opens the door, revealing an empty hallway.

INT. JOHN'S BUILDING - SECOND FLOOR CHAMBER - NIGHT - ONE HOUR LATER

John and Dejah Thoris sit and eat a hurried meal. Sola enters.

SOLA
Jeddara Hagoja's spies never rest. She knows of your plan. I won't allow her to take you.

Sola pulls off the necklace and key. John's hand moves to the hilt of his broadsword.

JOHN
You gave your word to Tars Tarkas.

SOLA
And I'll stay and be punished by him if I must. Perhaps Hagoja will be merciful to him if the blame falls on me.

JOHN
You have to come with us, Sola.

DEJAH THORIS
Helium will protect you.

SOLA
And I leave my father to be tortured by Hagoja?

JOHN
 Nothing you could do would appease her. We can leave signs of a struggle, leading them to believe you were taken with us by force.

SOLA
 There's someone else I want to stay for as well.

JOHN
 Stay, and you'll die. Come, and you can return when Hagoja is gone.

DEJAH THORIS
 (surprised)
 You know your father?

SOLA
 Sometimes I think it would be easier not to know.

Sola UNLOCKS Dejah Thoris' CHAIN.

JOHN
 Gather the last of our supplies and ransack the room. Meet me at the courtyard gate. I'll be waiting with thoats.

John gestures to Woola to stay, exits out the back door.

EXT. JOHN'S BUILDING - COURTYARD - NIGHT

John waits in the shadows with his two thoats. Woola runs up, a shallow wound on his back, pushes John toward his building. John leaves his thoats, follows Woola.

EXT. JOHN'S BUILDING - BALCONY - NIGHT

John jumps to a second story balcony.

INT. JOHN'S BUILDING - SIDE ROOM - NIGHT

John sees moving shadows under the back door of the main chamber, hears the GRATING of a SWORD being drawn.

THARK WARRIOR (O.S.)
 (whispering)
 He'll run when they don't meet him.

THARK COMMANDER (O.S.)
 (whispering)
 No, he has a weakness for the red woman. When he comes, we'll take him to the Jeddara.

John slips out, jumps from the balcony.

EXT. THARK CITY - SIDE AVENUE - NIGHT

John leads Woola and his thots, staying in the shadows.

EXT. THARK PALACE - COURTYARD - NIGHT

John ties his thots to a statue. He jumps to an unlighted third floor window, pulls himself inside, lowers a rope. Woola climbs up into the room.

INT. THARK PALACE - SIDE ROOM - NIGHT

He crosses to the door, hears BREATHING from the hallway. He unlatches the door, lets it drift open, hides behind it. Two guards enter to investigate. John stabs one while Woola silently kills the other in a dark corner.

John and Woola enter the empty hallway, crack open a door at the back of a balcony above Hagoja's throne.

INT. THARK PALACE - HAGOJA'S THRONE ROOM - NIGHT

Dejah Thoris and Sola stand unarmed in front of Hagoja. Her guards and the council exit. Tars Tarkas stands behind a pillar, toys with the handle of his broadsword, relaxes and exits.

HAGOJA

Sola, you and Jonkatar will die in the arena for your treachery. I could gain a ransom from your people, Princess Dejah Thoris, but a thousand times more would I enjoy watching you grovel and scream in the agony of torture. Word of this will go out to Tardos Mors and Mors Kajak, mighty rulers of Helium. I only wish I could see their faces when they hear.

John and Woola jump and land in front of Hagoja. She draws her broadsword. John draws his. Sola and Dejah Thoris back away. John motions for Woola to follow them.

JOHN

The courtyard! Here!

He tosses a sword to Sola, PARRIES a thrust by Hagoja.

HAGOJA

Guards!

Sola, Dejah Thoris, Woola slip out through a back door.

Hagoja's guards come running through the main entrance. John punches Hagoja, knocking her flat. He and Woola slip out to the courtyard.

EXT. THARK PALACE - COURTYARD - NIGHT

John wedges his long sword in the latch, jamming it. Sola takes a thoot, Dejah Thoris and John ride the other.

EXT. THARK CITY - SIDE AVENUE - NIGHT

Woola follows them out of the city along an empty avenue.

INT. THARK PALACE - HAGOJA'S THRONE ROOM - NIGHT

Hagoja's guards awaken her. Tars Tarkas stands nearby.

HAGOJA
Remove your hands from me,
maggots!

Hagoja crawls to her throne and pulls herself onto it.

HAGOJA
Tars Tarkas, bring them back,
unharm ed. Sola and Jonkatar will
help quench the arena's thirst.
The Princess must be untouched, in
perfect condition.

EXT. HILLS NEAR THARK CITY - NIGHT

John et al ride away from the city. A roving band of five mounted THARKS see them and start FIRING. John returns FIRE, shooting two out of their saddles. JOHN FIRES twice more. The Tharks duck for cover.

EXT. PLAIN - NIGHT

John's group gallops across the plain. Woola easily matches their pace. They are two miles out from Thark City. A SHOT EXPLODES on the ground next to Woola. John turns and raises his rifle. JOHN SHOOTS five times, killing two more of the Thark warriors. The last Thark gallops back toward the city.

Dejah Thoris clings to John. He puts his hand over hers.

EXT. SKY OVER ZODANGA - NIGHT

Hundreds of civilian airships fly throughout the city.

INT. ZODANGAN PALACE - THAN KOSIS' THRONE ROOM - NIGHT

Sab Than enters.

SAB THAN

Circumstances favor us, father. Our spies report their Princess is missing. Two hundred of their battleships leave tomorrow to search for her.

THAN KOSIS

Redirect our fleet to Helium.

SAB THAN

Their outposts, father? Many of our forces have been deployed.

THAN KOSIS

They can join the others at Helium after they're done with the outposts. We have the chance to tear the heart out of their realm.

SAB THAN

Will we force a surrender?

THAN KOSIS

No. There is so much more fun we can have with them.

CONTINUED IN THE
FEATURE-LENGTH
SCREENPLAY...