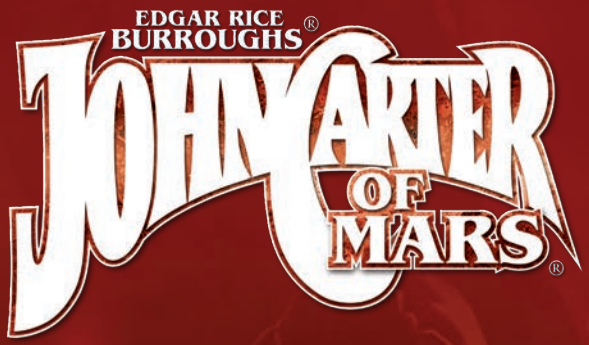

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Appendix: Narrator's Secrets: Zodanga

Appendix: Narrator's Secrets: Palace



Labyrinthine passages connect these caves with the luxurious palaces of the Holy Therns, and through them pass upon their many duties the lesser therns, and hordes of slaves, and prisoners, and fierce beasts; the grim inhabitants of this sunless world.

There be within this vast network of winding passages and countless chambers men, women, and beasts who, born within its dim and gruesome underworld, have never seen the light of day — nor ever shall.

They are kept to do the bidding of the race of therns; to furnish at once their sport and their sustenance.

Now and again some hapless pilgrim, drifting out upon the silent sea from the cold Iss, escapes the plant men and the great white apes that guard the Temple of Issus and falls into the remorseless clutches of the therns; or, as was my misfortune, is coveted by the Holy Thern who chances to be upon watch in the balcony above the river where it issues from the bowels of the mountains through the cliffs of gold to empty into the Lost Sea of Korus.

All who reach the Valley Dor are, by custom, the rightful prey of the plant men and the apes, while their arms and ornaments become the portion of the therns; but if one escapes the terrible denizens of the valley for even a few hours the therns may claim such a one as their own. And again the Holy Thern on watch, should he see a victim he covets, often tramples upon the rights of the unreasoning brutes of the valley and takes his prize by foul means if he cannot gain it by fair.

It is said that occasionally some deluded victim of Barsoomian superstition will so far escape the clutches of the countless enemies that beset his path from the moment that he emerges from the subterranean passage through which the Iss flows for a thousand miles before it enters the Valley Dor as to reach the very walls of the Temple of Issus; but what fate awaits one there not even the Holy Therns may guess, for who has passed within those gilded walls never has returned to unfold the mysteries they have held since the beginning of time.

The Temple of Issus is to the therns what the Valley Dor is imagined by the peoples of the outer world to be to them; it is the ultimate haven of peace, refuge, and happiness to which they pass after this life and wherein an eternity of eternities is spent amidst the delights of the flesh which appeal most strongly to this race of mental giants and moral pygmies.

—Thuvia, *The Gods of Mars*

We have the right to escape if we can. Our own moral senses will not be offended if we succeed, for we know that the fabled life of love and peace in the blessed Valley of Dor is a rank and wicked deception. We know that the valley is not sacred; we know that the Holy Therns are not holy; that they are a race of cruel and heartless mortals, knowing no more of the real life to come than we do.

—John Carter, *The Gods of Mars*

AN ERA OF CHANGE

Each carTardos Mors would believe me. Of that I was positive. And that he would have the courage of his convictions my knowledge of his character assured me. Dejah Thoris would believe me. Not a doubt as to that entered my head. Then there were a thousand of my red and green warrior friends whom I knew would face eternal damnation gladly for my sake. Like Tars Tarkas, where I led they would follow.

– John Carter, *The Gods of Mars*

Welcome to the second of three era supplements for ***John Carter of Mars***. This book examines the Prince of Helium era, the two decades between John Carter's involvement in the fall of Zodanga and his eventual crowning as Jeddak of Jeddaks. During this time, Helium has risen to undisputed primacy among the red Martians, and their green counterparts the Tharks are more successful and powerful than they have ever been. That's not to say this is a peaceful era: violence and bloodshed are ever the way on Barsoom, even with established hegemonies. Carter spends the first ten years of this era at the center of that storm, and most of the second half marooned on another world. The final two years he spends either in captivity or rescuing his wife from the same. In the process, he unveils dark secrets impacting the entire world, unseats ancient forces, and fundamentally alters the structure of power across the entire planet.

It's a time of sweeping progress and high adventure. We're glad you've chosen to become a part of it.

The Second Era

While hardly the first period of conflict and adventure on the world of Barsoom, this is the second era of play covered by ***John Carter of Mars***. It is the time when Carter himself is the least famous and impactful, making it a great period for other characters to carve out their own legends and accomplishments. However, as Carter eventually saves the planet from suffocation and death, this time period also carries the challenge of being somewhat overshadowed by the canonical action presumably taking place concurrent to whatever adventures you may set here.

The information in this book is designed to help you take advantage of the strengths of this chaotic and vibrant period in Barsoom's history, and to provide advice for mitigating some of its potential weaknesses. Even in this briefest and most constrained period on Barsoom, there is plenty of room for derring-do, bold decisions, and deep love and loyalty to create high adventure on the grandest of scales.

Themes in this Book

The purpose of this book is to offer new rules and character options for players, and new ideas, advice, and information for narrators who wish to play in this era. This new material is focused on the core themes of Prince of Helium: sinister secrets; friendship and loyalty; and the triumph of rational thought and optimism on a grand scale.

New species and culture options introduce new nations that John Carter uncovered during the action in *The Gods of Mars* and *The Warlord of Mars*. Other era books do likewise for the character types most appropriate for those times. Similarly, this book provides information on the wondrous mysteries to be discovered among the people and locations that take "center stage" in those novels.

Overall, this is a darker time on Barsoom. Carter's discoveries challenge assumptions and ways of being that have existed for millennia, and they do so by exposing terrible lies about dearly-held faiths and secrets. Against the backdrop of this awful drama, the fear and pain of slavery and other perils paint every moment of the lives of individuals like John Carter, Dejah Thoris, Xodar, and Thuvia of Ptarth. Despite this grim setting, it is again friendship, rationality, and unbreakable optimism that ultimately win the day and bring a unified, open peace to the entire planet.

Finally, it is during this time that the grand battles of John Carter's saga are fought. These are not duels between two petty rivals, but epic sword battles between exalted masters of the art. Nor are there border skirmishes between two nations, but rather world-changing conflicts involving millions of troops and tens of thousands of ships. New rules presented here offer advice on how to handle larger parties than a handful of player characters, and how to "zoom in" to give single combat the dramatic weight it deserves.

New Rules and the Existing Game

Although all rules in a tabletop roleplaying game are optional, the rules and ideas presented here are extra-optional. They're not presented as superseding those set down in the ***John Carter of Mars*** core rulebook, but rather to expand upon concepts

shown in less detail in that book.

These rules aren't intended as being better than the original rules, or vital for enjoyable play. Instead, they are meant to provide more options, deeper color, and further explorations of aspects of play important during this era of Mars' history.

Where rules here interact with or are based on rules presented elsewhere, they are presented as operating independently from those systems. This is so you can pick and choose which systems to include in your game. The dueling rules here, for example, can work with or replace the original combat rules to handle a fight for honor between two individuals. You do not have to use both. As another great warrior, Bruce Lee, famously said: "Take what is useful. Discard the rest. Add what is uniquely your own."

What is in this Book

CHAPTER 1: TALES OF THE ERA

This chapter gives a general rundown of the history of this era, and positions it within the history of Barsoom. It ends with summaries and game-specific analysis of the two Barsoom novels encompassing this period: *The Gods of Mars* and *The Warlord of Mars*.

CHAPTER 2: PEOPLES OF THE ERA

Written with players in mind, this chapter looks at the races revealed to exist during this era: Therns, First Born, and Okar. It gives rules for building such characters and guidelines for playing them, as well as a variety of new accolades, talents, and flaws particularly suited for characters of this type. Finally, it provides new talents that mesh well with the themes of this era.

CHAPTER 3: CHAMPIONS OF THE ERA

A deep dive into the characters portrayed in the books about this part of Barsoom's history. It includes listings for new narrator characters from the era, as well as updates or changes to characters from the core book to make them better suited for play during the era.

CHAPTER 4: MYSTERIES OF BARSOOM

This chapter gives an array of locations, technologies, and powers that are either shown in both novels or inspired by those that appear in those books.

CHAPTER 5: NARRATING THE ERA

Expanding on the ideas and advice in the core book, this chapter provides suggestions for running episodes, serials, and campaigns set during this era. It also provides a sample framework for creating a campaign based on the major events of this time, and tables for random events.

CHAPTER 6: SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

This chapter adds rules for supporting cast: narrator characters who play a role on the heroes' side. These can be contacts, supporters, allies, or even people for players to work with when the party is split, so nobody spends time doing nothing.

CHAPTER 7: DUELS OF MARS

Providing both in-world and game mechanics details for single combat on Barsoom, this chapter details the history, rules, etiquette, skills, and consequences of what is almost certainly the planet's favorite sport.

APPENDIX: NARRATOR MAPS AND SECRETS

Maps of Helium, Zodanga and a ruined palace for players and narrators. The secrets included for each map can be used to inspire adventures, plot seeds and mysteries in your campaigns.

What this Book Is and Is Not

This book is the second in a three-book series, each detailing one era of ***John Carter*** play, as first described in the ***John Carter of Mars*** core rules book. It is not a comprehensive listing of rules, ideas, and options for game play on Barsoom. Instead, it focuses on the themes, ideas, options, and concepts most appropriate for the years of this era. You do not need the Dotar Sojat or Jeddak of Jeddaks books to use and enjoy the information written here. Likewise, you can apply many of the ideas in those books to play during this era.

Also in this Book

Dueling is an important part of every era on Barsoom, as evidenced from John Carter's first moments among the Tharks and his meteoric rise in large part due to his prowess in single combat. This book ontains a detailed description of the rules of dueling as they exist throughout the history of the planet.

These rules apply to every era of ***John Carter*** play, and are included here because this is the first era where all the details are made plain. Earlier coverage would have missed the inclusion of factors like Okarian fencing and the dastardly cheating methods of the Holy Therns.



TALES OF THE ERA

"In that little party there was not one who would desert another; yet we were of different countries, different colors, different races, different religions — and one of us was of a different world."
– John Carter, *The Gods of Mars*

Prince of Helium Era Events

The Prince of Helium era begins at the end of *A Princess of Mars* after John Carter opens the great fortress doors to the atmosphere plant. Before Carter has a chance to learn if the mission to start the pumps of the atmosphere plant is successful, he passes out and wakes up on Earth. Ten years will go by before Carter returns to Barsoom. This time period at the end of the first novel is the very beginning of the Prince of Helium era, as are the books *The Gods of Mars* and *The Warlord of Mars*.

We know at the beginning of *The Gods of Mars* that Barsoom was saved by the heroic efforts of John Carter. However, what has happened in the ten years since then is a mystery. This chapter summarizes the important events of *The Gods of Mars* and *The Warlord of Mars* to help inspire campaigns set in the Prince of Helium era. The Missing Years section speculates on the events on Barsoom that span the period John Carter was on Earth.

The Cultural Changes of the Thark Horde

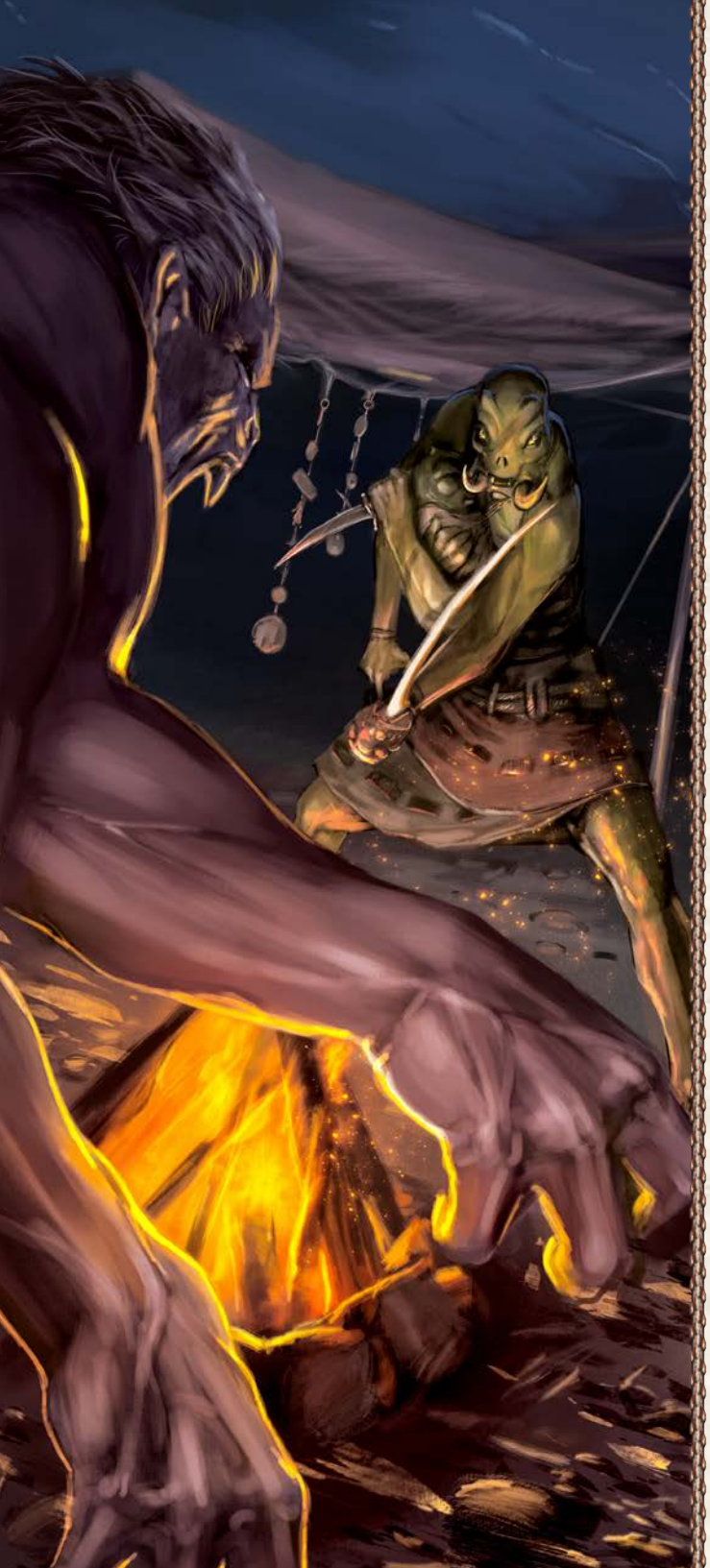
The Thark horde is unified under Tars Tarkas and allied with Helium. Slow change is taking root among the green Martians of Thark to embrace affection, love, and empathy. The Warhoon horde, traditional rivals of Thark, are not faring as well and continue the brutal ways of the past. The other hordes continue to war against each other and the rest of Barsoom as they have since the seas dried up and unleashed them on the world.

In both *The Gods of Mars* and *The Warlord of Mars*, Tars Tarkas plays a significant role as an ally of John Carter and leader of the green Martians in the conquest of the therns, the First Born, and the Okar. By the end of the era, when John Carter is declared Jeddak of Jeddaks, Tars Tarkas holds a high position in that alliance.

The other green Martian of significance — Sola, daughter of Tars Tarkas — follows Dejah Thoris on the pilgrimage to the Valley Dor. They become prisoners of the First Born on the journey there. Sola is left for dead by the First Born but is able to survive and make her way back to Helium. She tells her story of woe and motivates John Carter to raise an invasion force that will forever change the political and cultural landscape of Barsoom. The loyalty of Sola to Dejah Thoris and John Carter demonstrates the changes coming about, where loyalty is spreading beyond just the traditional Martian race lines.

For narrators wishing to explore the perspective of the green Martians, the focus should be on the changes occurring within their society. The themes of acceptance, compassion, love, friendship, and empathy — or their struggles accepting those — are the major ones. Secondary to this is the opening of the borders and the curtailing of xenophobia. Many will reject the new ways and continue to champion the old; this introduces interesting social conflicts, perhaps even ones between players.





Gods of Mars

The Fall of Issus

The Valley Dor is the reward for puritan Martians looking to leave a life of constant warfare and struggle. It is the promise of heaven for fighting or serving honorably. Such a place has more meaning to Martians as their long lifespan makes them almost immortal; once they reach adulthood, they do not age much and can live almost indefinitely outside of death by accident, foul play, or ritual duel. In such a society the appeal of an end to thousands of years of constant warfare can be alluring.

It's not entirely known how the white Martians of the Valley Dor came to be the high priests — or therns, as they are called — or when exactly the deception of Issus first started, but in the living memory of all Martians the pilgrimage to the River Iss and then the Valley Dor is sacred.

This pilgrimage has led many millions over the generations to their death by the hands of either the menagerie of creatures that live in the Valley Dor or the Holy Therns. Those not killed can find themselves enslaved. Either way the wealth and lives of the pilgrims feed the Holy Therns, in some cases literally. Such is the base of the economy of the Thern nation. They have a vested interest in keeping and perpetuating the myth.

John Carter finds himself returning to Barsoom in *The Gods of Mars*, appearing in the Valley Dor. Serendipity also places Tars Tarkas in the Valley Dor and both of them eventually fight and win their freedom from the therns. The irony is that Carter then finds himself in the hands of the First Born, who are running the same deception on the therns, of a final heavenly resting place in the Temple of Issus.

Issus is eventually exposed as nothing more than an incredibly old, cannibalistic tyrant. Carter is not afraid to call out her sham of divinity. In the end, after her deception is revealed, Issus is tossed from her throne into the arena and torn to pieces by her slaves for years of abuse. Thus comes to an end the greatest deception on Barsoom, though it will still take many years before some will accept it as such.

Religion Destroyed

The double deception is a damning comment on the Martian religion, and by allegory belief elsewhere. For players and narrators this can be a launching point for a quest on spirituality and questions of the afterlife. The philosophy of such things is unwritten on Barsoom and could make for a very interesting narrative.

If your campaign begins after the fall of Issus, then the idea of double deceptions can lead to players questioning the machinations of any powerful doctrine, force or leader. It's a great way to deepen plots that involve intrigue. A tangled web of lies and deceit, where one or more of the important players are using each other as pawns in their own games, gives players a chance to question who is the greatest threat and who they might ally with, all while trying to avoid getting tangled in the web themselves.

The Truth of the First Born

The home of the First Born is revealed as the Omean Sea, not the nearby moon of Thuria as some believed. For thousands of years they have raided the therns and occasionally other nations to continue their lives of piracy. They take pride in not doing any labor other than fighting and collecting their spoils. The First Born have one of the finest air fleets and crew in Barsoom; their ships could rival those of Helium. They could conquer and subjugate, but prefer the pirate life.

Xodar, a fallen dator who starts as an enemy of John Carter, is eventually persuaded to abandon Issus and join the Prince of Helium. Xodar is a key figure in overhauling the Helium fleet to operate in the Omean Sea and principal in the invasion of the First Born. After the First Born are conquered, Xodar is appointed jeddak and enters into the Helium alliance.

In *The Warlord of Mars*, Xodar and the First Born are part of the coalition that defeats the Okar.

The Power Vacuum of Helium

At the end of *A Princess of Mars* we find Helium as the pre-eminent power among the red nations. They have defeated and annexed Zodanga, their main rival. With the alliance cemented with the Thark Horde none can challenge them on Barsoom militarily or politically, especially as John Carter continues to lead the charge for Helium as it continues to expand its influence.

The notable figures of the house of Helium, Jeddak Mors Kajak and Jed Tardos Mors, are missing after going out on expeditions to find John Carter after the events at the end of *A Princess of Mars*. In their absence, Zodanga, under the leadership of Zat Arras, attempts to assert dominance over the Helium Hegemony. In the end Zat Arras is unsuccessful and loses his life as a consequence.

Dejah Thoris continues to be coveted not only for her beauty, but as a pawn for political intrigue. She is forced on the pilgrimage to the Dor Valley by the machinations of Zat Arras, and then she falls into the hands of Issus to be used as leverage against John Carter. Dejah Thoris is then imprisoned in the Temple of the Sun for a year, only to fall into the hands of the Holy Hekkador Matai Shang and the Firstborn Thurid. The villains deliver Dejah to the Jeddak of the Okar, Salensus Oll, in another attempt to wed her for her beauty and political importance. By the end of *The Warlord of Mars*, after all the covetous villains are dead, she is reunited with her family and loved ones.



Exploring Helium

Players and narrators have ample room to explore Helium with the absence of many the major characters for the majority of the Prince of Helium era. Of particular interest might be the rise of Zat Arras as a power within Helium in the absence of its true rulers, and the danger that such a quick rise to power can bring to the traditional cultural and political norms of the red Martians and the vassal cities of Helium.

Another great avenue for exploration is the military culture of Helium, in particular the great airship navy. Players can enlist within its ranks and take part in the conquest and annexation of Zodanga. We know that by a very slim margin a civil war was avoided in *The Gods of Mars* and a military coup saved the navy from turning on itself. The lead up to this is fertile ground to examine the schism in Heliumite society. Narrators and players might also consider exploring how the newfound Thark alliance resonates within Helium's military structure. The very armies and navies that fought against the green horde are now allied with them; this is undoubtedly a source of tension that can be interesting to explore.



Warlord of Mars

Kaol and Ptarth

After the fall of Issus and the Holy Therns in *Gods of Mars*, John Carter purses Matai Shang to Kaol. The Jeddak of Ptarth, Thuvan Dihn, is visiting his good friend and ally Kulan Tith, Jeddak of Kaol, when John Carter is called out in front of them on charges of blasphemy as he speaks out against the false goddess Issus. Once again Carter shows the hypocrisy of the false goddess and the truth of Matai Shang's deception. Both jeddaks are swayed by Carter's argument and both join the Prince of Helium's alliance.

Thuvan Dihn in particular is impressed with the character of John Carter. He is won over by the aegis Carter has extended to his daughter Thuvia. Thuvan Dihn joins Carter on the hunt for Matai Shang.

It is here we are presented with the shadowy forces pitting Martian against Martian for the gain of the tyrannical few. Some may remark that the brutal martial culture of Barsoom can only lead to the rise of tyrants who take what they want by strength. It is by a very narrow degree Kulan Tith is able to control his rage to allow reason to rule his judgment. It is in these small victories that thousands of years of bitter struggle is giving way to a more tolerant and benevolent Barsoom.

Red Martian Culture

Ptarth and Kaol provide approach for delving into red Martian culture They provide an open tapestry for adventures outside of the politics of Helium.

Kaol is known for its lack of an air navy and the thick forest that surrounds the nation. Plant life on Barsoom is rare, so having the players experience such a change can lead to interesting circumstances. How do the players adapt to the kinds of strange beasts found in the Kaolian forest? What kinds of new plants can be found here that might be significant to studies like those of Martian medicine?

The Great Rebellion of the North

The cities of the Okar are located in the freezing lands of the north. They are protected from the harsh environment of the arctic by huge domes built to trap the heat. The isolation and the cold keep the Okar society insulated from the rest of Barsoom. The weapon called the Guardian of the North further ensures no air ships intrude on this isolation. The cities are largely self-sufficient, but the wealth of Kadabra is further enhanced by preying on passing air fleets. Caught in this web are Mors Kajak and Tardos Mors, revealed to be slaves of the tyrant of Okar, Salensus Oll.

In open rebellion against the tyrant is his nephew, Prince Talu, and his city of Marentina. After Matai Shang's deception is revealed to Thuvan Dihn and Kulan Tith, he arrives seeking protection from the court of Salensus Oll at the beginning of *The Warlord of Mars*. John Carter and Thuvan Dihn arrive not long after, searching for the Holy Hekkador.

Salensus Oll, allied now with Thurid and Matai Shang, discovers that Carter has infiltrated the court and orders him thrown into a chamber known as the Pit of Plenty. Carter only escapes thanks to the help of Talu, who sends a spy within the court to aid Carter's escape.

A civil war erupts between Kadabra and Marentina, to which is joined a slave rebellion. Furthermore, the Helium alliance then invades Okar. Salensus Oll is killed; Talu is named Jeddak of Okar and joins the Helium alliance.

The Fall of Salensus

Narrators who wish to have campaigns focus on the players bringing about change might set the player heroes in the period after Salensus Oll's demise, sending the players on adventures to help overthrow the pockets of tyranny that still threaten to disrupt the new order in the frozen north.

The Missing Years

At the end of *A Princess of Mars* John Carter is returned to Earth, and a decade will pass before he returns to his beloved Barsoom. What happens while he is sitting at his study overlooking the Hudson River, staring out at Mars shining in the night sky?

That is a question your campaign can delve into. The novels *A Princess of Mars* and *The Gods of Mars* bookend a contained setting where the political and cultural trappings are known. We know the tableau as it stands at the end of the Prince of Helium era. In this section we will examine some of the places and people that might be of interest during Carter's missing years. These range from places where Carter's absence brings heavy consequences, such as Helium, and those that are still unchanged by Carter, such as the home of the First Born in the Omean Sea. As always, players and narrators can make use of what works for their story and use the rest as inspiration.

Carter's Absence

Part of the charm of the missing years is that John Carter is absent, as is the shadow he tends to cast on the major events of Barsoom. This gives the narrator and the players ample room to explore Barsoom in a canon setting without having to account for the larger-than-life hero. A decade with his absence gives a lot of room to tell your story. Of course, if your game's setting takes place far from Helium then Carter's absence is less impactful. It's only after his return to Barsoom that the legend of the future Jeddak of Jeddaks is built.

The disappearance of such an important character leaves a large hole in the political and personal spectrum of Helium and its allies. Characters need to understand the relationship they had with John Carter, if they had one, and the influence he cast on their prospects regardless of his personal interaction with them. If your story intersects with Helium and its allies, then the absence of Carter is significant.

The only cautionary point is that going too far off script during the missing years can result in a narrative that will be difficult to return to during the second half of the Prince of Helium era. As John Carter would agree, the more interesting path is the best one for the journey of the hero, so the missing years can be a great departure point for an alternative exploration of Barsoom.

The Atmosphere Plant

The major event at the start of the Prince of Helium era is the failure of the pumps in the atmosphere plant. With the keeper of the plant not responding (and presumed dead) and the assistant keeper found dead by assassination, the pumps have stopped working. It would take months with even the combined military might of all nations to breach the wall of the fortress housing the plant. Barsoom has three days to live. In the dying moments, John Carter is able to gain entry and someone is able to start the pumps.

Many perished before the air supply was revitalized. The aftermath of this event was likely political chaos. How had this come to pass? Who was responsible for the death of the keepers? How could this be prevented from happening again?

The stage is set for a great political adventure or a few serials to answer specific questions that would inevitably follow this event. The narrator can craft a campaign around how these questions are answered. Here are some points to consider.

- Who controls the atmosphere plant? Certainly whoever does will have quite the bargaining chip over other nations.
- How will new keepers be trained and chosen? Do the keepers come from one nation or will this be a collective project? Is having only two keepers enough for such an important task? The last person to know the telepathic codes for the locks was John Carter and he has disappeared. Are there ancient texts that can be consulted?
- Who was the assassin that killed the second keeper? A lone mad Holy Thern perhaps trying to deliver all Martians to the bosom of Issus? An agent of another nation trying to eliminate any future threat to them?

By the time of *The Gods of Mars* the issue of the atmosphere plant will be resolved. Likely led by Helium as they are the dominant military and political power, new keepers are appointed in some cooperative coalition. This reflects the changes of new alliances and friendships blossoming as one of the major themes of the Prince of Helium Era.

The narrator can direct the campaign with the players taking on roles to converge with the official history at the return of John Carter and proceed forward on the path of the novels. However, events may take place that lead to an alternative timeline on Barsoom and move into uncharted territory.

Helium

Just before the missing years, Helium finally ends the war Zodanga. At the cusp of victory Zodanga is crushed by the alliance of the Thark horde and Helium military. In the following decade the city is annexed and made part of Helium's ever-growing number of vassal cities. However, with the disappearance of John Carter and his undue influence on events, new opportunities are possible.

There are those who have not forgotten Zodanga as an independent power and have a desire to see it return to supremacy. In the missing years Zat Arras will rise to power and, in the absence of the Jeddak Mors Kajak and Jed Tardos Mors, be appointed Jeddak of the combined territories of Helium and Zodanga.

A campaign could be narrated from the perspective of the loyalist Zodangans arranging for Zat Arras to rise in power. Part of the narrative will be to explain the departure of Mors Kajak and Tardos Mors. Plot seeds could be planted that place Zat Arras behind them leaving. Eventually Carthoris will follow in the footsteps of the elder nobles and leave a power vacuum in Helium which Zat Arras is happy to exploit. Dejah Thoris left isolated will leave Helium rather than fall to the machinations of Zat Arras. This last departure will bring to a close the missing years era. This gives a good decade for narrators to present stories involving the political intrigue between Helium and Zodanga.

During the missing years the fortunes of the House of Helium are in jeopardy, unless the players want to intervene to continue the fight on John Carter's behalf. Narrators who wish to move away from the canon of the novels may allow their players to take advantage of the power vacuum and play out their own characters' rise to predominance.

Trade and Diplomacy's Rise

One of the characteristics of the missing years is the opening up of Barsoom. Diplomatic envoys are engaged in continuing the dialogue established after the atmosphere plant event to foster a new era of cooperation and less open warfare. Trade is on the rise and even the green Hordes are participating. During the missing years, this opens up a possible campaign of establishing a trading house based out of any of the red nations, exploring the challenge of creating trade networks with other cities or even the wastelands.

Story opportunities can be the political negotiations of the contracts, with opportunities for bribery and assassination; creation of the airships or land assets to haul the goods; and hiring of staff and guards to fight the pirates and raiders (because old Barsoomian habits die hard). Rival trading houses no doubt want a piece of your action, so they must be dealt with also. These are exciting times for those with the daring to forge new paths on the roads less traveled on Mars.

The Great Hordes

Not much changes for the great hordes at the beginning of the missing years. Only recently has the Thark horde joined an alliance with Helium. The friendship of John Carter and Tars Tarkas is causing ripples among both the green and red Martians. It shows a way of life that was not conceivable before.

In many ways Tars Tarkas is a more remarkable hero than John Carter. Tars was born and raised in a grim culture that laughed at the suffering, misfortune, and death of others. Torment and misery is a dish served up daily in the dueling of the green Martians, with extra portions heaped up in the arena of the great games. Love, empathy, and friendship are alien concepts. John Carter — being a stranger to



Barsoom — can be accepted to have different morals and ethics, but for a green Martian to go against such tradition and learning is remarkable. Tars Tarkas is unique among the Tharks in this way.

A campaign set among the Thark horde would have this change brought by Tars Tarkas as its central conflict. Initially Tars' leadership would be challenged daily, and there might even be those who would resort to underhand tactics to bring down the great Jeddak. Change is difficult for people to accept, especially among the stoic green Martians, who are more than willing to fight to the death for what they believe. The alliance with the red nations is based on the personal friendship between Tars Tarkas and John Carter. This could be an opportunity for a player character to take on the responsibility to continue to cement that alliance or hasten its demise with Carter not present to act.

Also, consider that not all red Martians would be accepting of the friendship of the green horde. It cannot be easy to forget the thousands of years of raiding, slavery, and brutal death at the hands of the hordes of the dead sea bottoms. There will be those who work to undo the friendship and alliance of Helium and Thark. These are certainly political ramifications to consider for a campaign set in the missing years involving these cultures.

The Valley Dor and the Therns

The therns are a largely hidden people during the missing years. A few Holy Therns in disguise may be present in the cities and courts of nobles to spread the word of eternal life in the realm of Issus. They are mostly content to remain hidden in the Valley Dor, preying on those seeking the Martian afterlife. With an extensive spy network they keep abreast of developments on Barsoom, but otherwise life continues for them much as it has for millennia.

Not all may be content with the status quo, however. There are those who might reject the opportunism of the therns on moral grounds. Others still who know the history of the Orovars long for the days when the white Martians built the cities and civilization of Mars. Today the green hordes and white apes rule the ruins.

In the missing years there may be a few who think such thoughts in private, and they may even act in secret to counter the direction of thern culture. For a campaign you can easily have such a dissenter in your group in disguise. There are rumors in the lands of Helium of a white man ushering in sweeping changes — perhaps a thern operative?

The Omean Sea and the First Born

The First Born are a secretive and secluded people. They have been running the biggest deception on Barsoom as far back as known history. They are the source of Issus the Immortal and the widespread belief of the pilgrimage to the Valley Dor for all Martians that reach a life span of a thousand years.

They have duped the therns into perpetuating the divinity of Issus and in turn prey on them as the therns do on the pilgrims to the Martian afterlife. The First Born have no other concerns than living in luxury and the pursuit of piracy.

The other great misconception of the First Born is that they hail from the Martian moon Thuria. In reality they originated from a great crater in the South Pole where they have an exceptional air force that raids Barsoom periodically. The deception that they come from the moon Thuria keeps them safe from pursuit by other naval forces.

In campaign terms, the First Born have very little impact during the missing years on the greater world of Barsoom. They are largely an unknown factor, and beyond infrequent raids made on the southern cities from time to time have no real impact on the world.

A narrative might feasibly be contained in the microcosm of the Omean Sea and the Temple of Issus. The politics of the First Born would be fascinating to explore in a standalone serial. Since they have slaves from every nation, it would be an interesting roleplaying opportunity to contrast the culture of the First Born with the other races before they are opened to the greater world by the events of *The Gods of Mars* and *The Warlord of Mars*.

The Omean Sea is a closed microcosm in the Prince of Helium era until radical change is forced upon it once Carter returns. Narrators and players can take advantage of the closed societies before the changes if they want to experience these areas without the influence of Carter and the red nations.

The Okar

Like the therns and the First Born, the Okar are a hidden people during the missing years. They are secluded in the North Pole, safe behind a large ice barrier and the cold desolation of the empty plains surrounding them. The Guardian of the North keeps them safe from any overflying aircraft.

When setting a campaign in an Okarian kingdom, it would be best to contain the narrative to that region so as to not alter the canon of the later novels. Again, if the narrator and players want the Okar to be a presence in Barsoom in the missing years, just be aware that it would alter the story for the latter period of the Prince of Helium era.

One such contained narrative is the rebellion of Marentina against the capital city Kadabra.

Prince Talu is set against his tyrant uncle Salensus Oll in *The Warlord of Mars*. We encounter the stage set this way, but not what leads up to it. There are slaves from all over Barsoom, so many viewpoints and voices are available to the player characters to explore. The backdrop of the avarice of Kadabra makes for a great setting in pitting the haves against the have nots.

Further opportunities would be to explore the capture of Mors Kajak and Tardos Mors. How have they fared all these years as prisoners of Salensus Oll. What purpose do these high-value prisoners serve? Do they play a role in the rebellion of Marentina?

Like the Omean Sea, the cities and societies north of the great ice barrier are entirely self-contained until Carter journeys north. The period just before Carter appears in the Okar nations can provide an interesting backdrop for campaigns centered on rebellion and espionage. Players might be part of the rebel forces of Marentina, or perhaps they find their way to the north and are caught up in the conflict between the Jeddak and his nephew.

Analysis of the Era's Stories

The following section analyzes the novels set in the Prince of Helium era, with an eye on how to use them for inspiration in your own adventures, series, and campaigns. Two such stories are chronicled in the Burroughs novels, narrated by John Carter himself: *The Gods of Mars* and *The Warlord of Mars*.

This brief summary of both books combines a general description of their contents with ideas and advice about which elements might be most useful for narrators, and how rules might be applied to the action therein. It is organized along the chapter structure of the books themselves. Though it is primarily intended for narrators, it also contains valuable insights for players.

Twenty More Years!

Prior to the opening action of *The Gods of Mars*, two full decades pass after the end of the Dotar Sojat era. The first ten years are mentioned briefly near the end of *A Princess of Mars*: a period during which John Carter and his friends had many suggested but undetailed adventures. Immediately following that period was another ten years during which Carter was stuck on Earth, a time in which any sort of untold actions might have taken place.

The Gods of Mars

After a foreword from the narrator's nephew describing John Carter from an outsider's point of view, the novel opens.

The Plant Men

John Carter, stranded on Earth and missing his friends, wife, and son who still live on Mars, is again transported to Barsoom through inexplicable projection. He finds himself in a wooded valley next to a shining sea, surrounded by gleaming, mile-high cliffs. Soon thereafter, he spots the grotesque forms of a herd of the plant-men of Mars, which are attacking a party of Martians. He leaps to join the fight, only to discover his old friend and ally Tars Tarkas, Jeddak of Thark, among the beset warriors.

Although many a great adventure begins with subverting a belief or assumption about the world, use caution with opening an adventure by subverting something about a player character. Your friends put thought and effort into those details, and they should not be eliminated casually.



A Forest Battle

Carter, Tars Tarkas, and a handful of green Martian warriors engage in a running battle with the ferocious plant-men. Though they fight mightily, they are profoundly outnumbered and soon only the two friends are left. Tars Tarkas spots a hollow in a tree. The refuge turns out to be a large chamber with a ladder leading thousands of feet upward into the hollow interior.

The heroes follow the ladder to a hole in the trunk, the hole to a thick branch, the branch to a cave in the cliff face, and the cave through a tunnel to a mysterious door. When they enter the dimly lit chamber beyond, the door closes and locks, while cruel and mocking laughter rings from an unseen source.

This entire story predicates on Tars Tarkas and John Carter losing the battle with the plant-men. When you want the heroes to be at point B while they insist on remaining in point A, Threat is an excellent tool for keeping a battle pitched against the heroes long enough to force a retreat.

The Chamber of Mystery

A brief exchange with Tars Tarkas tells Carter they are in the Valley Dor, the fabled "heaven" promised to Martians who journey down the River Iss, all while the heroes unsuccessfully scan the room for exits. The apparently disembodied voice taunts them as wild banths attack from unseen quarters. Carter discovers rotating doors through which the banths enter, and passes through them into a room with red Martian prisoners and white-skinned Martians of a type heretofore unseen. Carter kills two, but is knocked unconscious in the final moment of his second duel.

What if the heroes never think to look for an escape, and just keep fighting wave after wave of creatures? Narrators could call for an appropriate attribute test, or co-opt some Momentum to give clues. If all else fails, a mechanical failure or malfunction could give more obvious hints.

Thuvia

Carter awakens, still in the room, eager to help Tars Tarkas escape the banths on the opposite sides of the rotating doors. With one of the prisoners, he opens the door and leaps to his friend's aid. The prisoner, a beautiful red Martian woman, whistles a tone that tames the banths, and all escape back through the rotating door. The captive, Thuvia of Ptarth, informs the heroes they are in the palaces of the Holy Therns. These "angels" of the "heaven" of Valley Dor are in fact cannibal slavers, who use the religion of red and green Martians to keep their stables filled with Martian men and women. Intent on escape, Carter frees the other prisoners and they slip through the tunnels of the palace, ultimately encountering a thern leader. Carter kills him and takes his clothing and blonde wig, then the party rests in a storeroom to which Thuvia has led them.

Different races in the game have different relationships with Martian mythology. Consider how a newly-arrived Earthborn would respond to the truth about the therns, as opposed to red or green Martians and Okar, or the First Born and therns who knew all along. This is an example of an opportunity for using a character's species to encourage strong roleplaying.

Corridors of Peril

A raging battle wakes John Carter to find only Thuvia and Tars Tarkas alive. He uses his disguise to convince the attacking guards that he is a Holy Thern, and sends them away. The three flee through the tunnels, emerging into the gardens of the therns, set high on the cliffs encircling the Valley Dor. They hear a cry of alarm and fearing themselves spotted, draw swords.

A narrator could spend Threat to bring in reinforcements here to target the heroes' minions, forcing the heroes to engage with a stronger enemy while also fighting to keep their allies alive. This brings interesting tension to combat, making it about personal and tactical decisions rather than just an all-out fight.

The Black Pirates of Barsoom

Carter sees the alarm is not for them, but due to attack from above by the First Born, a race of raiders who treat the therns much as the therns treat the red and green Martians. The three companions at first witness the raging battle, then Carter leads them to a First Born airship as a means of escape. When he discovers it can only carry two passengers, Carter thrusts Tars Tarkas and Thuvia into it and sends it away. Surrounded by thern and First Born enemies, he springs into the air to catch and climb the anchor chain of a large, retreating flier. At the top, he comes face to face with a First Born guard.

Introducing new enemies can be tricky, as your players don't yet know how seriously to take the foe. In this scene, John Carter has a few moments to observe (read: make an appropriate attribute test) and assess. Seeing an enemy from afar gives a chance to foreshadow the opponent and allow the heroes to prepare. Narrators could also allow bonus dice for stratagems based on what the heroes observed.

A Fair Goddess

Carter flings the guard to his doom, then sneaks on board the craft to find it filled only with sleeping First Born and a single, beautiful thern prisoner. He kills all but one of the raiders in their sleep, then fights a mighty duel with the single survivor, ultimately knocking him unconscious with a punch to the chin. He frees the prisoner, who introduces herself as Phaidor, daughter of the ruler of the Holy Therns. As day breaks, Carter sights a great battleship, nearby and closing fast.

*In games and stories where the protagonists are nigh-superhuman (and **John Carter of Mars** games definitely qualify) it can be difficult for narrators to come up with sufficient challenges. Adding a noncombatant who must be helped, or protected, or who otherwise splits the heroes' attention and resources, is an excellent tool for this.*

The Depths of Omean

Captured by the First Born of the battleship, Carter and Phaidor are brought across glaciers and down an impossibly deep shaft into the secret underground city of the First Born. As they are brought toward the center of the ice caps and a fate worse than death, Phaidor professes her love for John Carter.

This kind of downtime is a good opportunity to share details about characters and the world. It's especially useful when the narrator takes the time to describe a new area for the first time, especially when care is taken to get the tone right with word choice and delivery.

Issus, Goddess of Life Eternal

Carter rejects Phaidor's advance as gently as he can, professing his undying love for Dejah Thoris. The spurned princess threatens horrible revenge, though as a captive she is helpless to exact it. Both are brought to meet holy Issus, the goddess of all races of Mars. She is revealed to be an incredibly old, loathsome, lustful creature, not the immortal goddess she is portrayed to be. During the audience, the First Born that Carter knocked out — Xodar — is brought in and made a slave for losing a fight to a member of an inferior race.

This is an example of how a narrator can insert unanticipated consequences to heroes' actions. Seeing somebody bested in combat suddenly disgraced shows that the heroes are not acting in a vacuum, and provides "hooks" to hang lasting relationships on.



The Prison Isle of Shador

Encountering the disgraced Xodar in a crowd of detractors, John Carter observes the mighty Thurid leading the attack. He fells Thurid with the same punch that laid Xodar low. Carter and Xodar are taken to a prison on an island in a subterranean sea, where they meet a captured red Martian youth.

Making enemies is part of building a reputation. Xodar is an example of an enemy made in what could have been a simple brawl, but instead dominates the action through much of a campaign. It's tempting to decide which narrator characters become recurring "guest stars" on your own, but we recommend instead seeing which ones the players naturally gravitate toward.

When Hell Broke Loose

Carter and the youth are taken to the monthly rites of Issus, where the First Born slaughter slaves and beasts in a great amphitheater. Carter leads a slave revolt, which comes within inches of killing Issus before the ersatz goddess escapes through a secret trapdoor.

The action of this is a good example of Momentum and Threat spend, with each point of Momentum bringing more slaves into the revolt, and each point of Threat representing escalating stakes. Escalation is most interesting when it takes different forms with each iteration. Instead of several impulses of arriving reinforcements, instead insert one wave of guards, then a sniper, then some kind of equipment failure, all combining to push the heroes to their utmost.



Doomed to Die

Carter and the youth pursue Issus down the secret trapdoor, only to lose her in subterranean tunnels. The youth, who was part of the slave crew who restored them, leads Carter through the tunnels and back to the prison, where they pretend to have been uninvolved in the insurrection and allow themselves to be returned to their cell, where they find Xodar still waiting.

There's always a secret door. The trick is knowing whether to just reveal it, allow its detection with an attribute test, or attach it to a Momentum spend. There's no right or wrong answer other than it's probably best to alternate between all three.

A Break for Liberty

The three companions break out of their prison, steal an airship, and escape under hot pursuit up through the great shaft and to the surface of Barsoom. As they cement their escape by slipping their vehicle into the clouds above the pole, the youth identifies himself as Carthoris, John Carter's son.

Imprisoned heroes should never have to simply wait for release or rescue. Always leave a chain of opportunities to follow, with clear signposting and benchmarks along the way to freedom.

The Eyes in the Dark

A joyous reunion results in John Carter learning that his wife remains alive, and Helium misses its prince. The companions discover that their airship, damaged in the escape, is losing altitude. Miles and hours later, they touch ground without incident and find a place to sleep. They wake to find Thuvia, who tells of her own escape and subsequent crash, and Tars Tarkas' capture by the Warhoon horde. Carter follows the information into a Warhoon city and down into their dungeons on a rescue mission, where he becomes lost in the dark.

Navigating mazes in real time can be frustrating and even boring at the table. It would be better here to use attribute challenges or a series of attribute tests, using Threat to introduce hazards like traps or lurking creatures. Luck and Momentum spends can also provide interesting shortcuts or other methods of escape.

Flight and Pursuit

Carter ultimately finds and frees Tars Tarkas, and the three reunite with Thuvia, Xodar, and Carthoris at the outskirts of the Warhoon city. They are hotly pursued by a vast horde of mounted Warhoons, during which chase Thuvia attempts to sacrifice herself for Carter. He refuses, and in the nick of time a Heliumite battleship crests the horizon and bombards the green Martian force.

The "eleventh hour rescue" is another trope of pulp fiction and absolutely appropriate to John Carter games. Narrators can use in-action benchmarks ("you must reach that tree safely before the cavalry comes") or attribute challenges ("once you have collected 10 Momentum, your reinforcements arrive") to help time such a rescue for the most impactful and appropriate moment. Alternatively, characters could use allies bought with renown or Momentum to bring in the cavalry. Of course, what's good for the goose is good for the gander. Narrators should feel free to use Threat benchmarks or spends to have overwhelming support arrive for the heroes' enemies, if the story calls for that.

Under Arrest

The battleship turns out to be part of a great Heliumite fleet, and Carter encounters his close friend Kantos Kan. He informs our hero that the rulers of Helium, Mors Kajak and Tardos Mors, were lost with an expedition searching for Carter. In their absence, Zat Arras serves as regent and has consistently pressed Dejah Thoris for her hand in marriage. Dejah Thoris disappeared, thought to have taken the pilgrimage down the River Iss. Zat Arras uses the fact

that Carter has returned from the Valley Dor — an unforgivable sacrilege — as an excuse to imprison him pending a trial for execution.

As your heroes accumulate renown, always remember that somebody is watching jealously from a corner. With great reputation comes great enmities. As with allies, it's often best to watch who the players take a dislike to, or slight, or otherwise find "sticky," then insert them into the storyline of the campaign.

The Death Sentence

Standing trial in front of a jury hand-picked by Zat Arras, John Carter is sentenced to death. However, Kantos Kan springs forward and delays the trial by a year in order to await the return of Helium's rightful rulers. At dinner that night with Carthoris, Tars Tarkas, Kantos Kan, and others, the group receives news from one of Dejah Thoris' personal guard, just then returned to Helium: she has been taken by the First Born.

Although it came from a non-player character, this is a great example of using social tests, Momentum, and Threat to portray a problem. Narrators should establish a flow of partial victories, resolving a success and even allowing for some celebration and discussion before Threat or the following scene bring in the next challenge. Although we're talking about a social confrontation in this scene, the same can apply to action sequences.

Sola's Story

Dejah Thoris' guard and friend of John Carter, Sola, tells of their capture by the First Born. Carter and his friends make a plan for a military raid on Omean to rescue their princess and punish the raiders, a plan which will require six months of preparation. Later, an informant leads Carter to a "secret meeting" which is actually a trap laid by Zat Arras.

Raymond Chandler used to say, "When in doubt, bring in a man with a gun." Narrators can also bring in a trusted friend with terrible tidings when they need to get the action moving again.

Black Despair

Carter is imprisoned for months before being broken free by Carthoris. He returns to his friends to discover they have carried out his plan, and all is in readiness for the invasion. They leave Helium for Hastor, the staging area for their force.

When heroes are imprisoned or otherwise spending long periods without much opportunity to act, narrators should "fast-forward" with a quick description of what happens before cutting to the first meaningful scene.

It can also be good to ask the players to describe the misery of confinement, or the languor of long journeys, taking just a few minutes of table time before moving on to the action.

The Air Battle

The invading force engages in an epic air battle with three sides: the therns, the First Born, and John Carter's red navy. Through the chaos, Carter makes his way to the First Born capital and toward the Temple of Issus. On the way, he learns the foul "goddess" plans to imprison Dejah Thoris in the Temple of the Sun, in which a cell can only be opened once a year.

*See the **Narrator's Toolkit** that comes with the **John Carter of Mars Narrator's Screen** for rules on how to run truly huge battles. If you are not using these rules, instead focus in on the heroes' individual actions, then portray the impact that those actions (and their success or failure) have on the conflict as a whole. A scene like this is also an opportunity to use the support character rules described later in this book.*

Through Flood and Flame

Carter and Carthoris lead their men through the burning and flooding tunnels and chambers of the city, during which melee Carter becomes separated from his men. Stumbling through the passages disoriented, he suddenly encounters a woman: Dejah Thoris herself, alone in a sumptuous chamber.

When running larger-scale combat, the key for narrators is to focus on the actions of the heroes. Key their victories to the progress of the battle overall. When spending Momentum or Threat, have the battle impact their individual stories. A Momentum spend for a bonus die might result in a nearby explosion momentarily distracting an enemy. Threat spend for additional enemies could be a retreating squad suddenly entering the area.

Victory and Defeat

John Carter leaves Dejah Thoris in safety, long enough to see victory secured and Issus torn limb from limb by slaves and disenchanted followers. When he returns for his princess, she has vanished. A panicked pursuit finds her already locked in the Temple of the Sun, along with Thuvia and Phaidor. At the moment before the door locks and they vanish from sight, Phaidor leaps toward Dejah Thoris, dagger in hand. Carter must spend a year agonizing over the result before he can again hope to see his love again, dead or alive.

Novice narrators may find it daunting to try getting that many moving parts into such a complicated configuration with the players thwarting them at every turn. Experienced narrators may find the idea laughably impossible. That's what Threat is for. It's there to keep things dramatic by introducing complications and challenges to keep things exciting, or to lead the heroes into a cliffhanger as one session closes.

The Warlord of Mars

Unlike the previous two Barsoom novels, this book picks up immediately on the action with no preamble or framing manuscript. Six months have passed since the end of *The Gods of Mars*, our hero agonizing through every day of them. We learn that through those six months, Carthoris has been named Prince of Helium, while Xodar and Tars Tarkas have taught much of Barsoom the evil truth behind the lies about Issus and the Valley Dor.

On the River Iss

Spying Thurid moving stealthily in the night, Carter follows him via boat into a hidden chamber beside a subterranean river, accompanied by his loyal Woola. There, Thurid meets with Matai Shang, previous ruler of the Holy Therns and now a fugitive. He overhears them tell of a secret passage into Dejah Thoris' cell, and their plan to harm her as revenge for Carter's leadership of their personal and national downfalls.

This opening is instructive for narrators. It's likely John Carter had been watching Thurid for months, and only starts telling the story when things get interesting. Your adventures should do likewise, glossing over uneventful stretches.

Under the Mountains

Carter follows Thurid and Matai Shang through a subterranean labyrinth and believes he has bluffed his way past a rearguard. He hears them approach from behind and hides in a position of perfect ambush — only to sneeze and give away his position.

This is a great example of how a complication that has been bought off previously can impact a scene. The original complication could have been earned while John Carter was successfully following people in a canoe unnoticed. Now the narrator takes that Threat from the bought-off complication and uses it here instead, where it provides much more interesting consequences.

The Temple of the Sun

After defeating the guards in a vicious battle, Carter passes by traps to reach the secret entrance to the Temple of the Sun. There he finds a hall of mirrors, and spies Dejah Thoris just as Thurid and Matai Shang escape with her as a captive.

This scene illustrates how getting through the environs of Barsoom isn't always about fighting through or sneaking past enemies. Sometimes it's a matter of dealing with the physical environment, whether that means traversing mirrors, finding secret passages, or scaling impossibly high fences

The Secret Tower

It takes several days for John Carter and Woola to navigate the maze of mirrors and find the trail of his lover's abductors. Carter follows it to a tower, where he bluffs his way past the guards in the guise of a Holy Thern. Once inside he discovers his ruse did not work, and finds himself in a pit, with Thurid, Matai Shang, Phaidor, Thuvia, and Dejah Thoris in a balcony far above. His enemies loose wild banths upon him and flee, pursued hotly as Carter leaps to the balcony and makes hot pursuit. Carter climbs the side of the tower to beat his quarry to the airships moored at the top, only to be kicked over the side by Thurid.

Hot pursuit is exciting. Long chases of a distant quarry are not. Much of this chapter can be handled with a series of quick attribue tests, with the Momentum and Threat both accumulating for expenditure when Carter is trapped. One trick here is to allow partial successes to give the heroes a momentary glimpse of their goal, before the fog of war pulls them again out of sight. Bonus points for upping the tension by showing their goal being mistreated or otherwise imperiled.

On the Kaolian Road

Carter falls but a few feet before his harness catches a crenellation, saving him. He steals an airship and gives chase, only to be shot down over the forests surrounding the mysterious city of Kaol. On one of the city's raised roads, he meets and befriends Torkar Bar, a Kaolian warrior. He follows the man's directions to the city, but finds himself unable to scale its glass-smooth walls.

Certain death is never certain in the pulps, or in **John Carter of Mars**. *Narrators should be ready with some kind of unanticipated savior when the options are success or death, unless the character's death would be dramatically important.*

A Hero in Kaol

Waking in the bush outside the city, John Carter discovers a party of green Martian raiders stealthily approaching the city gates. He warns the city and fights fiercely alongside its defenders, and is brought to its Jeddak, Kulan Tith. Disguised with red paint and introducing himself as "Dotar Sojat," he is made part of the jeddak's personal guard. He is presented to Thurid and Matai Shang, both still worshipped by the Kaolians and there as honored guests. The next day, Carter joins all three and a great column of men and beasts in a procession to welcome Thuvan Dihn, Jeddak of Ptarth. The mission goes without incident, but sleeping in his chambers that night, Carter feels the presence of an intruder but cannot capture him. In the morning, he is called to the court of Kulan Tith.

When acting under an assumed name, heroes can earn renown and experience under a false identity. If their true identity is discovered, the impact of their deception may or may not be outweighed by the services they have rendered and the renown of their true selves.

New Allies

Before Kulan Tith, Matai Shang and Thurid unmask John Carter and accuse him of both blasphemy and plotting to assassinate them. As Carter prepares to sell his life dearly, Thuvan Dihn calls a halt. The father of Thuvia, he knows that John Carter saved her from the therns. The debate results in Kulan Tith bringing all to the chambers of the visiting holy men, in search of Dejah Thoris and Thuvia... but the thern and the First Born escape with their captives, fleeing to a secret destination far to the north.

Although the appearance of Thuvan Dihn as savior was well foreshadowed and earned fairly, heroes in such a situation could spend Momentum or Luck to add such a plot element. Coincidences of this sort are thick on the ground in pulp adventures, and should be readily available.

Through the Carrion Caves

Thuvan Dihn, Woola, and John Carter pursue their quarry far north until they collide with a great wall of ice, wrecking their flier. On foot, they find a series of caverns filled with charnel remains, which they follow to the interior of the pole. Leaving Woola with a note for Carthoris and instructions to find home, they find a single, yellow and bearded Martian, being ambushed by a half-dozen assassins.

Though John Carter and Thuvan Dihn chose the stealth approach, other parties of heroes might prefer to hew a path that brings them face to face with the monstrous apts that live in the carrion caves. Others might want to use an attribute test to tame the beasts. Narrators should make it possible to attempt all of the above, even though some tactics might be markedly and obviously better than others.

With the Yellow Men

Offended by the uneven odds, Carter leaps to the man's assistance and together they dispatch the brigands. His new friend is Talu, Prince of Marentina and member of the Okar race. Carter and Thuvan Dihn stay in Talu's his city a while, learning that he is the nephew of Salensus Oll, Jeddak of Kadabra, an evil tyrant who plays host to both Thurid and Matai Shang. Talu disguises, informs, and equips the companions for a journey into the capital city. They join with a hunting party, intending to re-enter the city amidst them. As they return, they spy a giant electromagnetic shaft drawing a party of red Martian ships in to crash, their surviving crew taken as slaves.

Rescue is one of the best ways to make friends and allies on Barsoom, and a battle in progress is one of the best ways to involve heroes in a narrator's plot. This is a one-two punch of solid design that gives motivation with believable causation.

In Durance

Learning of employment opportunities in the court of Salensus Oll, Thuvan Dihn and John Carter apply, and are led to quarters where they await the testing of their qualifications. While there, Carter espies Dejah Thoris and Thuvia in a garden below. When Thurid attacks the women, John Carter rips his window bars free and leaps down to their defense. Interrupted by Matai Shang and Salensus Oll, Carter is imprisoned pending trial.

This is an example of how to handle heroes failing an important roll. A narrator could have had guards swarm and kill Carter there, but instead he is imprisoned. Time is running out before his true love marries another, providing a meaningful consequence of the failure, but time and life to fight another day remain.

The Pit of Plenty

Before a proper trial can commence, Thurid identifies John Carter. Because Carter is the husband of Dejah Thoris, whom Salensus Oll wishes to marry, Oll sentences Carter to be cast into the Pit of Plenty — a deep place where captives are starved while food lies just out of reach behind walls of thick glass. Carter languishes there for nearly a week before he receives a coded message: "Courage! Follow the rope."

In general, narrators should avoid just keeping heroes in a trap from which they cannot escape. If time needs to pass, have it pass meaningfully — either by having them wait for an event in the outside world, or by waiting for a necessary reveal or insight from the time spent trapped.

"Follow the Rope"

Carter follows the indicated rope up the wall of the Pit of Plenty, down a passage in the wall, and into a subterranean workshop. There he sees Thurid plotting with Solan, the keeper of the Guardian of the North, to allow him to escape the city with Dejah Thoris. Once Thurid leaves, Carter slips past Solan and through a tower, accidentally finding himself in a room filled with Okarian guards and captive red Martians.

When allowing eavesdropping to provide a piece of vital information, narrators should not call for stealth rolls. Instead, deliver the information, then call for tests to get out alive with the information.



The Magnet Switch

The captives include Tardos Mors and Mors Kajak, and a great battle ensues. The Heliumites fight their way to the top of the tower, where they find a force of red and green Martians besieging Kadabra. The battles within and without rage from side to side, then John Carter sees a great fleet of Helium warships. His elation is short-lived as he realizes they are being drawn to the Guardian of the North and their doom. He fights his way down to the workshop, defeats Solan in a desperate sword duel, and deactivates the magnet in time.

This kind of climactic conflict lets narrators pull in the results of multiple threads: Renown, , allies, enemies, and action from earlier in the campaign. As you design your adventures, series, and campaigns, look for threads to lay down early so they can pay off in exciting, climatic ways in the end.

The Tide of Battle

John Carter again battles his way to the top of the tower, where he discovers Dejah Thoris in the clutches of Salensus Oll. Carter slaughters him easily, but is engaged by a force of Okarian troops. When he is finally free of the battle, he sees Dejah Thoris has once again disappeared, taken by Thurid through a passage behind a throne.

This scene relies heavily on the "fog of war" as Carter would have immediately broken off and pursued Dejah Thoris had he seen the abduction. Threat and high-difficulty attribute tests are tools at your disposal for this.

Rewards

Through tunnels and over packed ice Carter pursues Thurid, Matai Shang, Phaidor, and Dejah Thoris, finding them aboard an airship and readying to launch. The distance is so great he has to leap to the anchor chain and climb it as the vessel gains altitude. Thurid betrays and murders Matai Shang, then turns his attention to the still-helpless John Carter. When all seems lost, Phaidor stabs Thurid in the back. Proclaiming that her love for Carter is now selfless enough to want to see him happy with Dejah Thoris, Phaidor leaps from the ship and to her death. At last, our hero and his love are reunited.

*What sort of mechanic or story event could lead to an enemy's change of heart? This kind of important "off-screen" development breathes life into a game world. Narrators would most likely link it to renown, which is the system **John Carter of Mars** uses for how the world interacts with individuals.*

The New Ruler

In the denouement of this two-book adventure, John Carter is reunited with his wife. Talu is placed as Jeddak of the Okar, just as Xodar was made to rule the survivors of the First Born. Carthoris falls in love with Thuvia. An era of peace and enlightenment is ushered in. To his great surprise, John Carter is called to a special council where he is named Jeddak of Jeddaks, supreme ruler and warlord of Barsoom!

This is the "happily ever after" of the first three Barsoom novels, and demonstrates the peak of the renown system at work. Whether or not your campaigns aim for such lofty heights, they should result in an equally powerful payoff.



PEOPLES OF THE ERA

"There was Tars Tarkas, Jeddak of Thark, and Xodar, Jeddak of the First Born, there was Talu, Jeddak of Jeddaks of the North. . . and among them sat Tardos Mors and Mors Kajak, with enough lesser jeds and jeddaks to make up the thirty-one. A right royal tribunal. . . ,I warrant , as never before sat together during all the history of ancient Mars."
– John Carter, *The Warlord of Mars*

The Prince of Helium era is one of sweeping changes. In two decades the political and cultural landscape becomes unrecognizable from the millennia of stagnation before. Every nation and race of Martians are caught up in the wave of change and face new life paths and choices. For the players and the narrator it's an exciting time as rules of society are fluid and many things are possible that were not in times past.

In this section we will explore some of those possibilities. We will focus on how players can use the themes of alliances and friendships, the uncertainty that the ideologies of the past being questioned brings, and how characters feel the impact of the changes of the Prince of Helium era on their lives.

The Green Hordes

Since the rise of the green hordes when the oceans dried up on Mars, there has only been one profession, that of being a warrior. The outlook of the green Martians did not include empathy, understanding, friendship, or love. This has changed for the Thark horde. Tars Tarkas has openly embraced his daughter Sola and it is now possible for a warrior of the green horde to be a parent. Although this may not seem like a glamorous roleplaying opportunity, it could be an intriguing development arc for a savage warrior to take on the mantle of childcare.

With empathy and emotion comes the challenge of considering viewpoints not set in the dogma of the past. In dealing with conflict, the option of open dialogue, rather than just violence, is more prevalent. Players with green Martian characters are encouraged to consider whether their character is open to the new ways, being more empathetic and accepting of new views. If, however, they wish to play green Martians who are unwilling to accept change, this can present interesting personal conflicts and character progression. Players and narrators should focus on ways to challenge these kinds of characters, allowing them opportunities to both be proved right in their resistance and question the redundancy of old traditions. Players should also consider how this affects the relationship with their horde, or other hordes such as the Warhoon who oppose such changes.

Additionally, Tars Tarkas has unified the green Martians of the Thark region and brought them into an alliance with Helium. One ramification of this is that the traditional way of life with intertribal raiding and advancement based on hierarchical dueling will be curbed as the borders to find enemies are much farther afield. With the alliance of the red Martians of Helium, the Tharks can no longer raid the red nations.

Green Martian players should consider how the influx of red Martian culture affects them. Not everything can be solved by the sword. In fact, the new rules set by Tars Tarkas forbid it. How much of this culture a character will take on, and how much of that acceptance is personal or just loyalty to the horde, can provide real depth to a character's motivations and moral outlook.

This also opens up some new possibilities. As the green Martians are considered some of the fiercest warriors on Mars, there is always work somewhere. This new influx of red Martian culture means that green Martian characters might be found as a part of a mercenary or trading company from an allied nation. Green Martians may find glory in becoming part of an organized military.

Red Nations

Culturally, the red Martians are in harmony, but politically they have always been fractured by feuds going back generations that pit city against city both militarily and economically. Their air navies are constantly on watch as each tries to outmaneuver the other for the tiniest of edges to break the deadlock.

It's never been a better time to head out and establish trade between newly allied and, in this era, newly discovered nations. Perhaps you are a weaponsmith; the Thark can certainly appreciate a fine weapon. Many exotic animals and foods can be imported to delight your customers in the red cities from the new territories of the North and South poles. The fortunes to be made are endless for those with some creativity and moxie. The chances of being enslaved out in the wilds of Barsoom are the lowest they have ever been.

Players need to consider how years of enmity can be overcome when dealing with former enemies like Zodanga and the green hordes. They should consider their character's view of, and feelings about, newfound alliances. Are they trusting and accepting of the new bonds, pleased that finally there is peace, or are they suspicious and critical of these new alliances, looking for a sign of betrayal at any turn? Consider

how they feel about the emergence of former pirates and slavers in the form of the First Born, the therns, and the alliance with the Okar.

It is also worth considering how the fall of Issus affects red Martian characters, especially those who may know someone who took their pilgrimage down the River Iss. Think about how it might affect them personally and color their outlook of the peoples of the First Born and the therns. Do they think everyone is complicit and guilty of the deception, or are they sympathetic and able to empathize with the shock of having so much ripped from their worldview?

The First Born

For much of the era the First Born operate as they always have. However, once Issus falls that is no longer true. With their old ways as dead as their false goddess, everything begins to change. While Issus was nothing more than a petty tyrant perpetuating a myth for personal gain, Xodar now rules as a true jeddak of the First Born and the therns. Raiding is no longer an option as the therns are now vassals and the red nations are allies. Undoubtedly, though, there are those who have departed for the less civilized places of Mars beyond the reach of law to continue the old ways of piracy.

As expert air naval operators, surely the First Born will be in demand in the merchant navies of the red nations. They may even find positions as instructors and trainers, as the First Born are the finest air raiders on Barsoom. There is also no reason some of the battleships or even a new class of trader vessel cannot be built to start a merchant house of the First Born. It will take time for trust to be earned that the Firstborn have come to trade and not raid, but that is their new path.

First Born player heroes should be prepared to meet prejudice and resentment when venturing forth into greater Barsoom. There will always be those not willing to forgive the transgressions of the past, having been victims of piracy or having lost loved ones to the sham of the Martian afterlife. This will be the biggest challenge the First Born face in the Prince of Helium era. Players should consider how the fall of Issus has affected their First Born character. Were they a supporter of the regime, now struggling to adjust? Do they feel remorse for the deception or the piracy and attempt to show the First Born in a better light? Or are they pleased to be free of such a conspiracy, taking pleasure in the new horizons open to them?

Therns and White Martians

Though they hold great power for much of the era, by its end both the power base and worldview of the therns is completely destroyed. With religion of Issus discredited, the therns are no longer welcome anywhere save those few nations that refuse to believe the truth. In most places, there are those that still cling to the old ways, but they are considered nothing more than a cult now. Politically, most therns are nothing more than the vassals of the First Born, though some might join other pockets of white Martians or retreat to remote corners of Barsoom to form their own communities.

Despite these changes, many therns still have training in spycraft and diplomacy. The courts of Barsoomian nobles likely still have use for a spy master or an assassin in their service. As masters of disguise, the thern could start another life, forget the past altogether, and follow a new path.

Players wishing to play as the thern are encouraged to take advantage of the disguise talent to travel in safety in greater Barsoom. In time some societies forgive and forget the great deception of the false religion of Issus, but shortly after the revelation it is very dangerous to adventure openly as a thern. Players with thern characters should consider how the new leadership of the First Born affects them, especially since it is discovered that the First Born were selling them a lie about the afterlife. How thern characters feel about their future as a culture and as an individual, especially as many on Barsoom are still coming to terms with the sweeping change their reveal has caused, is something that should become a foundation to their character.

Players who wish to play other kinds of white Martian, such as the Lothar or some other separated group, should consider how the legacy and view of the therns might affect them.

The Okar

In the early days of the era the Okar operate in isolation in their northern realm as they have for centuries. However, this era sees great change for the Okar. During the adventures of Carter in the later part of the era, the tyrant Salensus Oll is dead. Talu is Jeddak of the Okar. By his decree the Guardian of the North is decommissioned, the Carrion Caves cleaned, and Okar is opened up to all of Barsoom. The cities are largely self-sufficient and, without the decadent standards of the period under Salensus Oll, require little from the outside world. All the slaves have been freed, so it is time for the Okar to do their own labor.

There are opportunities in trade for the opulent fur of the apts. Guides will be needed for the influx of those challenging themselves hunting on the frozen plains. Other avenues could see the fighting skills of the Okar in the grand arenas, or serving as mercenaries throughout Barsoom. The yellow Martians no longer need to stay hidden and secretive; it's time for them to join the rest of Barsoom in this era of flux.

Those playing as Okar will face far less scorn and prejudice than white Martians or the First Born. However, there will still be some bitterness there; many red Martian slaves were kept under the tyrant Salensus Oll and such harsh treatment fades slowly from memory. Okar characters should expect some confrontation regarding the issues in the north during the Prince of Helium era. It is worth considering which "side," so to speak, an Okar character took during the reign of Salensus Oll. Were they on the side of Talu and part of the army who helped bring about change? Were they supporters of Salensus Oll who are now learning a new way of life? Or were they ambivalent about who was Jeddak of the Okar nations so long as their life continued as normal?

It is also worth considering how an Okar character will react to the Barsoom that exists beyond the great ice barrier. Having lived essentially in exile for thousands of years, the Okar have little to no knowledge of the other cultures, cities, and climates of the south. How quickly an Okar character adapts, and the approach they take to do so, is up to the player to decide and can lead to interesting character moments and interactions.

New Talents and Accolades

This section presents various accolades and talents in two categories. The first covers talents, accolades, and flaws appropriate to Okar, First Born, and white Martian characters. The second gives talents appropriate for any character and following the era's primary themes: discovery, exploration, and the forging of alliances. These elements are designed to be ready to pick up and use for both player heroes and narrator characters.

Okar



Okar Talents

The following talents are particularly appropriate for Okar characters. Talents based around Okarian swordplay and dueling are found later in *Chapter 7: Dueling and Honor.*

MASTERS OF THE NORTH (GRADE 4)

Your people are the undisputed lords of the northern wastes and arctic cold. Others may fear the frozen wastes and the beasts that dwell there, but you've learned to survive and even thrive.

- **Circumstance:** When operating in arctic regions.
- **Effect:** You get a 2d20 bonus when dealing with any terrain- or climate-based tests in arctic conditions, including dangers. In addition, when making a successful test to fight, track, or elude targets in the arctic, including native beasts such as apts, you gain 2 bonus Momentum.

YOU ARE DISMISSED (GRADE 3)

The halls of Kadabra and beyond are among the most politically dangerous on Barsoom. You are skilled at navigating this environment, even thriving among the deceptions and whims of the powerful. Lesser players in this great game of intrigue and espionage don't even give you pause — you simply outmaneuver or dismiss them without breaking stride. This regularly gives you access to people and places who expect their servants, guards, and attendants to keep others away.

- **Circumstance:** When dealing with political intrigue, especially minions.
- **Effect:** You gain a bonus d20 when dealing with political intrigue. You may also automatically dismiss, discredit, or ignore without consequence any 2 minion-class characters. You may do this without making a test, or as an additional effect of any successful test.

CHILDREN OF THE PAST (GRADE 2)

The Okar are among the oldest races on Barsoom, and their technicians and scientists know secrets of machines unknown across the planet, such as the famed Guardian of the North. You are especially adept among your people when dealing with such technology.

- **Circumstance:** When using ancient technology.
- **Effect:** Reduce all difficulties to understand and operate ancient technology by 1. This includes attempts to avoid or overcome dangers based on ancient traps, security measures, and other technology.

ARCTIC SURVIVAL (GRADE 1)

Through experience and practicality, there are none better suited to survive arctic climates than you and your people.

- **Circumstance:** When operating in arctic conditions.
- **Effect:** You may ignore 1 ◆ from arctic-based dangers or threats. This includes exposure to cold and other environmental hazards, but not attacks from beasts native to such regions.

Okar Accolades

The following accolades involve Okar cultures. They can be taken by other characters who earn these rewards through alliance and service to an Okar city or nation.

APT (ALLIES)

- **Cost:** 3 points.
- **Effect:** The deadly apt is an important figure in Okar culture. The beasts are worshipped in Kadabra and domesticated across the north. Even tame apts can be unpredictable and dangerous, requiring a skilled handler. Characters who purchase an apt as an ally possess a beast of exceptional loyalty and intelligence. These creatures possess the stats for a normal apt found in the core rulebook (see *Chapter 13: Beasts of Barsoom*) and will never attack the character unless particularly abused or controlled by some exceptional power or technology. Mistreating one's apt companion is seen as a grave offense in Kadabra and other parts of the north.

SAVVY (TITLE)

- **Cost:** 2 points added to an existing title.
- **Effect:** Okar value honor and courage as much as any culture, but they also value cunning and skill at intrigue more than most. What some cultures consider underhanded or questionable, the Okar see as business as usual. Characters with the Savvy Leader accolade are known for their skill at spycraft, intrigue, and political maneuvering.

To purchase this accolade, a character buys a title accolade normally and pays 2 additional renown. This reflects that they are understood to be exceptionally cagey and insightful for a leader of their rank. This devotion has various roleplaying advantages, and grants 1 bonus Momentum from successful tests involving courtly intrigue or political maneuvering. Characters with the Savvy Leader accolade can simply add Savvy to their normal title, thus creating accolades such as Savvy Odwar, Savvy Noble, and so on.

DISFAVORED (TITLE)

- **Cost:** 2 less than normal title.
- **Effect:** Okar society, in its isolation, at times creates problems for some of its esteemed members. As few Okar range beyond the arctic north, and the environment concentrates power and influence in core cities and settlements, it is hard for a noble or officer who runs afoul of their leaders to avoid unpleasant treatment and disregard.

Adding Disfavored to an existing title makes it cheaper, but less effective. The title still mostly works normally, but the character's lack of influence and power increases the difficulty of tests to exercise this power or gain support by 1. If the character's situation improves, they may buy off Disfavored for 2 renown and use their title without penalty going forward. Disfavored is usually appropriate for titles valued 10 renown or under — expensive titles like jed and jeddak are rarely disfavored because their holders don't last long enough to experience future problems.

Okar Flaws

Okar characters possess certain cultural tendencies and eccentricities. When taken to extremes, these make excellent flaws.

ISOLATIONIST

You are sure your people are safer and better off alone. History bears this out, with wars and conflicts between other cultures being chief among the causes which drove your people to the frozen north. You don't necessarily balk at the occasional personal relationship with outsiders, but you are loath to entangle the Okar in outside conflicts and struggles. When you pledge support for the martial, political, or social problems of a non-Okar culture or group, you lose 3 Momentum. This includes helping or saving important leaders or dignitaries from foreign lands, provided helping them would potentially entangle your people in outside politics.

FIERCE AS AN APT

You emulate the revered apt in your demeanor and actions. Aggressive but unwavering, you are both bloodthirsty and brave, a combination that wins you allies and enemies in equal measure. When you fail to finish off a foe or back down from a fight, lose 3 Momentum. If you cannot afford the Momentum, you take the excess as Confusion stress.

First Born



First Born Talents

The following talents are suitable for First Born player heroes and narrator characters. They may be taken by other characters who spend time privy to the secretive ways of the First Born.

PERFECT HEALTH (GRADE 4)

First Born are known for their perfect physiques, standing out even among the exceptional physicality of most Barsoomians. Your health allows you to shrug off initial trauma, making you harder to defeat in battle.

- **Circumstance:** When suffering a Wounds affliction.
- **Effect:** Once per scene, you may spend your move action to catch your breath and remove one Wounds affliction.

FEAR OF THE FIRST BORN (GRADE 3)

Raiders among the First Born are experts in using lightning-fast raids and fear to shock and awe opponents. Your merciless assault causes lesser foes to flee and even gives the most valiant foes pause.

- **Circumstance:** When making your first attack in a conflict.
- **Effect:** Once per scene, when you make your first attack in a physical conflict, gain a bonus d20. If your attack is successful you also gain a bonus 1 to damage. This attack is automatically Fearsome in addition to whatever other qualities it possesses. If the attack is already Fearsome, it does an additional 1.

RUTHLESS EFFICIENCY (GRADE 2)

First Born are known for their ruthless efficiency, especially in battle. They exploit weakness and do away with the wounded or weak. This allows them to quickly focus their attention on larger threats.

- **Circumstance:** When targeting weaker or wounded opponents.
- **Effect:** When engaging in a Conflict action that targets a minion or monster-class opponent, you deal an additional 1 of damage. This talent also applies to any villain-class opponent currently suffering more afflictions than you.

HIDDEN ORIGINS (GRADE 1)

Years of misinformation, covert operation, and outright deception make it easy to conceal your background, origin, goals, and those of your people.

NAME: HIDDEN ORIGINS

- **Circumstance:** When hiding your origin and goals.
- **Effect:** Gain a bonus d20 on tests involving hiding your true goals and intentions or convincing others of a false background or origin.

First Born Accolades

These accolades involve First Born cultures. Other characters who live among or interact with the First Born may earn these as well, but given their arrogance and secrecy, this is unlikely.

CHOSEN LEADER (TITLE)

- **Cost:** 2 points added to an existing Title.
- **Effect:** For much of their history, the First Born serve at the pleasure and whims of the living goddess, Issus. Later, they serve under Xodar and more benevolent leaders. However, old habits die hard and First Born culture tends to favor leaders who seem to be chosen and favored by their superiors. Where the Okar respect skill and subtlety, the First Born adhere to ruthless exhibitions of efficiency and service to their leaders and people. This accolade costs an additional 2 renown on top the normal title cost. Chosen Leader comes with various roleplaying-based benefits, and it also provides a bonus d20 for attempts to earn respect from other First Born, either as a skilled subordinate or powerful superior.

> Characters with the Chosen Leader accolade can simply add Chosen in front of their normal title, creating accolades such as Chosen Dator, Chosen Dwar, and others.

CREW (ALLIES)

- **Cost:** 1 point added to normal cost for allies (see below).
- **Effect:** First Born are most commonly encountered as raiders, pirates, and other crew on airships and the occasional submersible or outpost. Over time, First Born commanders cultivate a particularly loyal and efficient collection of crew members to serve and assist them. While titles provide access to similar benefits, this accolade provides exceptionally loyal and effective crew who tend to travel with the hero, making their aid easier to acquire.

Purchasing crew as an ally costs 1 additional point over the normal ally cost. This reflects the increased loyalty and accessibility the ally provides as a member of the First Born's crew. Allies can be purchased individually or as a group in this way, allowing for a single ally mate or officer or multiple crew members such as a group of loyal marines. At the narrator's discretion, an entire crew may be purchased as an ally; however, it is recommended that heroes wanting truly exceptional officers or other individual crew members should purchase those unique allies separately.

DISFAVORED (TITLE OR ALLY)

- **Cost:** 2 less than normal cost of title, 1 less than normal cost for an ally.
- **Effect:** First Born culture, especially under the rule of Issus, takes a dim view of failure. Those officers, raiders, and other individuals who displease their leaders are often targeted for humiliating duties and even imprisonment. They still retain their title, but they are often assigned to serve subordinates on specific missions or otherwise perform various punishment details until they once more prove themselves. This reduces the overall effectiveness of the title.

A First Born character may purchase a Disfavored title for 2 less than its normal cost (Disfavored Dator, Disfavored Dwar, etc.). In addition, First Born allies who are disfavored among their people cost 1 less renown to purchase, but they can lend far less assistance when dealing with the First Born.

Should a Disfavored title or ally status ever be removed or undone through great service, heroism, or some other change or upheaval, player heroes may buy off Disfavored by spending the difference between their Disfavored title or ally and its normal cost. Other cultures may have their own version of this accolade, especially those who have strong and demanding leadership.



First Born Flaws

First Born culture is generally focused on tradition and securing and proving superiority to others. This leads to certain flaws very appropriate for First Born characters.

BORN RAIDER

First Born are among the most feared and successful raiders and pirates on Barsoom. You are among the best and most driven of this group, a position that comes with some drawbacks. Once per session, the narrator can present you with a complication relating to your life as a raider. This could be a rival, a vengeful victim, or authorities seeking your capture or execution. You can avoid this complication by spending 4 Momentum, but you must also flee the current scene to avoid trouble.

COLD-BLOODED

Despite your passion, heroism, and loyalty, there is still a certain coldness in you. You are accustomed to viewing strength and aggression as positive and compassion as a weakness. Even if aware of the problems with your outlook, you find yourself too often engaging in acts of ruthless cruelty or callous disregard when the pressure mounts. When presented with a ruthless solution to a problem facing you, spend 3 Momentum if you refuse to take it.

White Martians



White Martian Talents

These talents are designed to be used by white Martian characters. Note that white Martian player heroes are not a default option for character creation, but an option detailed in *Chapter 14: Secrets of Barsoom* in the core rulebook.

TELEPATHIC FORCE (GRADE 4)

White Martians often develop the natural telepathy of the Martian people to push their will on others. This demoralizes foes and throws opponents off, creating opportunities to exploit.

- **Circumstance:** When you use telepathy to harm someone.
- **Effect:** Make a D1 **Cunning** + **Reason** conflict test opposed by the target's **Empathy** + **Passion**. This attack deals a base 3 Psychic damage. The attacker must be able to communicate telepathically with the target to perform this attack.

Note: *Other races may develop similar talents; it is simply common among the cerebral, detached, and disciplined white Martians.*

LAYERS OF DECEPTION (GRADE 3)

You are skilled at protecting yourself and your schemes with half-truths and misdirection, winning friends and confounding enemies. This allows you to regain your composure and hide your weaknesses with ease.

- **Circumstance:** When suffering a Trauma or Madness affliction.
- **Effect:** Once per scene you ignore the effect of a Trauma or Madness affliction until the end of the scene. For 3 Momentum, you may remove the affliction instead of ignoring it.

REVERED COMMAND (GRADE 2)

The white Martians are viewed as sacred, mystic, ancient, and otherwise exceptional throughout much of Barsoom. When dealing with "lesser" cultures and races, you are adept at forcing them to submit to your whims and desires.

- **Circumstance:** When commanding those of other cultures or races.
- **Effect:** When you seek to command or intimidate a member of another race or culture, gain a bonus d20 and automatically command, dismiss, or otherwise non-violently remove one additional minion from the scene. This talent doesn't work on sworn enemies or the First Born, only those inclined to accept your people's power, superiority, or wisdom.

PSYCHIC RESISTANCE (GRADE 1)

Many among your people have potent psychic defenses, and you are no different.

- **Circumstance:** When resisting psychic attacks and influence.
- **Effect:** All psychic powers targeting you suffer a +1 difficulty penalty.

White Martian Accolades

White Martian characters, especially the Holy Therns, possess specific accolades largely unique to their culture.

THERN PRIEST (TITLE)

- **Cost:** Varies
- **Effect:** Another accolade largely limited to the therns, Thern Priest is actually a collection of titles that reflect rank and influence among the religion of the Holy therns. Such individuals are respected among the faithful and can command subordinates in their own ranks.

COST	TITLE AND DESCRIPTION
20	**Hekkador** *Leader of the cult of Issus. Only one Hekkador may exist at a time.*
9	**High Priestess** *High Priestess of the cult. Daughter or wife of a Hekkador.*
7	**Priest** *Respected leader of the cult of Issus.*
4	**Initiate** *Agent of the cult. Equivalent to a lesser priest.*

After the Prince of Helium era, the Holy Therns are more fragmented and fractured. However, pockets of them still operate across Barsoom. Where they are dominant they hold substantial power, bolstered by the support of zealots and those unaware of the true nature of the goddess Issus. During these times, reduce the cost of all thern Priest titles by 2. There is no true Hekkador during these times, though many pretenders and would-be leaders exist. These High Priests have a title costing 15 renown.



HONORED THERN

- **Cost:** 2 points
- **Effect:** The Holy Therns are viewed as priests of the goddess Issus and keepers of the common faith of Barsoom. Among the faithful they are respected and feared. Even cultures that generally avoid other races tend to favor therns, provided they recognize their religious status. A character with this accolade gains a bonus d20 to gain the attention or respect of another character who believes in the thern's religion. This even works on characters of extremely high status, such as jeds and jeddaks.

After the Prince of Helium era, the Holy Therns are largely exposed as villains and frauds. However, there are still numerous individuals and cultures who still believe in the goddess Issus and the therns' connection to her.

MYSTIC (TITLE)

- **Cost:** 2 or Variable
- **Effect:** Most white Martians keep to themselves, keenly aware of the danger modern Barsoom poses to their kind. However, among themselves and a few select others, some skilled and knowledgeable white Martians come to be known as mystics, sages, and wise elders. This is particularly common among white Martian enclaves such as the Orovar, but these individuals are sometimes found elsewhere.

  Mystics more easily win the support and respect of those who believe in the power and might of the white Martians and their cultures and groups. This could be a loyal Orovar who marvels at their people's psychic powers or an outsider who believes white Martians possess unusual powers. Whenever they succeed in a test to influence or persuade someone of their powers, they gain 1 bonus Momentum.

Mystic is an accolade that is both its own title and a possible addition to an existing title. As a standalone title, it is a general honorific not explicitly tied to any one group. As an addition, it adds 2 renown to the cost of another title, which usually is described by adding "Mystic" to the title, such as "Mystic Priest" or "Noble Mystic." At times "Holy" or some other similar adjective is added instead, but the effects are the same.

White Martian Flaws

White Martian characters' history and unique place in Barsoomian culture suggests certain flaws.

CONSERVATIVE

You naturally resist change, including the rise to dominance of other cultures and races in areas you believe are better handled by established powers. You don't necessarily lack compassion or trust, but you believe that the old ways are the best. When you embrace a new method or concept when a more traditional method or pathway is available, lose 3 Momentum.

OLD PREJUDICES

You are not necessarily conservative overall, but you cling to some old ideologies that cause you to resent or dislike certain other races or cultures. You may embrace this or work to fight it, but in any case it sometimes causes trouble. Select one or more common groups you feel inherently superior to. When you treat them as an equal or embrace their customs and methods, lose 2 Momentum.

Note: *Racism and bigotry is decidedly unheroic. Player heroes who take this flaw generally do so with the intention of confronting and eliminating it. Overuse of this flaw may also annoy or upset other players. In this case, the flaw should not be selected.*

Other

These additional talents and flaws touch on the central themes of the era: seeking new alliances, breaking down old prejudices and beliefs, escaping oppression, expanding awareness, and adapting to new experiences. They are appropriate for any character.



Other Talents

TAKE MY HAND (GRADE 4)

You may offer those you defeat a better choice than the end of your blade — joining your cause. The defeated foe might not become a long-time ally or friend, but they will aid you for a time.

- **Circumstance:** After you defeat another character in a conflict.
- **Effect:** After defeating a minion or monster-class character, you may offer them mercy in exchange for agreeing to join your cause. The defeated character will perform one task in exchange for your mercy. This task cannot be used to force characters to harm themselves. A villain-class character may also agree to aid you, but only at the narrator's discretion based on their personality and background — an honorable or reluctant foe may agree, while some villains will never agree to such terms even in the face of death.

COURAGE TO DEFY THE GODS (GRADE 4)

The greater the forces against you, the harder you fight and the more you struggle to change things for the better. You face false gods, age-old conspiracies, and other terrible threats without wavering.

- **Circumstance:** When facing superior forces.
- **Effect:** You thrive when outclassed or overwhelmed. When directly facing a threat that is beyond your normal resources or capabilities (narrator's discretion), you gain 2 bonus Momentum when you succeed in a Conflict action against them. Further, you turn the first affliction you suffer into a Trauma affliction (if it is Madness or Injury based) and ignore its effect for the rest of the scene. You must face this threat directly; you gain no bonus Momentum for fleeing or avoiding such threats.

UNFETTERED (GRADE 4)

You are difficult to contain, confine, or silence. Digging deep within yourself, you can overcome great hardship to break free from oppression and adversity. This talent covers physical attempts to enslave and imprison, and can also be used to free one's mind or spirit from domination or control.

- **Circumstance:** When seeking to escape.
- **Effect:** You gain a 2d20 bonus when seeking to escape confinement, enslavement, or oppression, and reduce all difficulties to break physical bonds or pick locks by 1. Furthermore, you deal an additional 1 of damage when attacking those who seek to oppress or imprison you.

DAREDEVIL (GRADE 3)

You laugh in the face of unknown dangers and delight in new experiences.

- **Circumstance:** When facing unknown dangers and obstacles.
- **Effect:** You may always use Daring in tests relating to any danger or obstacle you've never before experienced, such as a new trap or unknown hazard. If you successfully overcome the danger or obstacle you generate 2 additional Momentum. This talent only works on newly discovered threats and dangers.

EARN AFFECTION (GRADE 3)

You are admirable and attractive, often winning others over simply by being yourself and helping them in some minor way. These people may fall in love with you, befriend you, or simply think well of you. Others seek to help you and protect you as best they can.

- **Circumstance:** When aiding others.
- **Effect:** Spend 2 Momentum after you act in a way that benefits another. This doesn't need to be a major benefit — a small act of kindness is enough. The character acts as an ally for the rest of the session.

REASSURE OTHERS (GRADE 3)

You always seem to know the right words to encourage or advise others, making them forget their troubles and find new focus, often at exactly the right moment.

- **Circumstance:** When helping another suffering from a Madness or Trauma affliction.
- **Effect:** Once per scene, you can spend a Spoken action to reassure another, allowing them to automatically remove a Madness or Trauma affliction. You also gain a bonus d20 on tests to aid others in removing Madness or Trauma afflictions.

ARMOR OF FAITH (GRADE 2)

When acting in accordance with your loyalties or beliefs your will and drive sustains you in the face of adversity.

- **Circumstance:** When acting to further your beliefs or loyalties.
- **Effect:** Yyou may ignore the effects of an affliction for the rest of the scene. The affliction doesn't go away, you simply ignore the effects.

DANGER SENSE (GRADE 2)

Perhaps it is a latent psychic ability, keen senses, or lightning-fast reaction times, but you are rarely caught unawares by the unknown or unexpected.

- **Circumstance:** When facing unknown or unexpected threats.
- **Effect:** You gain a bonus d20 to avoid ambushes and surprise attacks. You also gain 1 bonus Momentum if you successfully avoid an ambush or surprise attack.

LOOK WITH YOUR HEART (GRADE 2)

Through luck or insight, you can usually figure out which path leads you to find lost friends or comrades. This doesn't mean the road to reunion is easy or quick, but eventually you will be reunited with those you cherish.

- **Circumstance:** When trying to find lost friends or comrades.
- **Effect:** Once per scene you may ask the narrator, "Will this help me find (insert name of friend or comrade)?" with regard to a particular action, path, or idea. The narrator must answer this truthfully, though they don't need to provide any other details. You may also always use Passion for tests to locate clues or information about lost friends and comrades.



UNEXPECTED REVELATION (GRADE 2)

You have a knack for discovering things as a side effect of your adventures. From secret places to the true nature of a threat, you often unearth hidden truths simply by interacting with people and places.

- **Circumstance:** When encountering a secret or hidden phenomenon or place.
- **Effect:** Once per scene, you may gain 2 bonus Momentum after a successful test to uncover, reveal, or otherwise expand your awareness of something hidden or secret. This revelation must be related to the action performed, but the connection may be vague or indirect — a foe smashes backwards to reveal a secret door, a rival lets a secret slip while discussing an unrelated topic, etc.

I THINK I'VE GOT IT (GRADE 1)

You are adept at quickly figuring out new weapons and technology.

- **Circumstance:** When using unknown weapons or technology.
- **Effect:** Reduce any increased difficulty from using unknown weapons or technology by 1.

INFLUENCE PEOPLE (GRADE 1)

You are adept at using your allies and contacts to get things done.

- **Circumstance:** When dealing with allies, subordinates, and peers.
- **Effect:** Gain 1 bonus Momentum from social tests with allies, subordinates, and peers. In this case "peers" are defined as any member of the same organization or closely defined group such as an army, navy, guild, or royal court.

OPEN-MINDED (GRADE 1)

You lack the xenophobic caution and distrust of so many others on Barsoom. When dealing with foreign cultures and individuals, your openness and sincerity is evident and attractive.

- **Circumstance:** When dealing with foreign cultures and individuals.
- **Effect:** Gain a bonus d20 on tests to win the trust and support of individuals from new cultures. This bonus applies both to those from cultures you've never met before and future tests against those who you've had good relations with — it won't win over those you've alienated or betrayed.

WIN FRIENDS (GRADE 1)

You are skilled at winning over others, especially when you prove yourself valiant or trustworthy through your actions.

- **Circumstance:** When seeking to charm or befriend others.
- **Effect:** Gain a bonus d20 in tests to befriend, charm, or win over any individual who has seen you act heroically or honorably.

Other Flaws

ARROGANT

You were raised to believe you and your people are superior to others. Even if you make allies and friends outside your culture, old habits die hard. When you have a chance to prove your cultural or personal superiority, you must act to do so — even if it would be more diplomatic or prudent to remain quiet. Failing to do so costs you 3 Momentum.

HERETIC

You rejected an honored belief of your people and your heresy was discovered. You are labeled an enemy of theocrats, officials, and zealots. In places where these forces hold sway, citizens are reluctant to grant you aid for fear of being ostracized or attacked. Once per adventure the narrator may arrange for you to encounter an enemy or obstacle based on your heretical status. This can be avoided by paying 3 Momentum.

SKEPTIC

Through experience and hard-won cynicism, you constantly question the beliefs and traditions of Barsoom. You cannot take things "on faith" and require evidence of claims of strange phenomena and creatures before you will accept them. When you fail to question or challenge a religious belief or tradition whose purpose is not clear and logical, you lose 4 Momentum. If you cannot afford the Momentum, take the excess as Confusion stress. This tendency can easily earn you rivals and enemies among the faithful.

Role of the Narrator Characters

While the narrator characters are powerful and many shape the future of Barsoom, their stories should not overshadow the stories of the player characters. Remember that the player characters are supposed to be the protagonists of the drama, the stars of the show. The narrator characters set the atmosphere and flavor, provide challenges and support, establish tone and themes, and can help the events of the plot unfold, but their actions are always assumed to be secondary. They are the supporting cast for the heroic (or infamous) story arcs of the player characters.

The narrator should feel free to ad-lib or modify on the fly the actions or abilities of the narrator characters (within the limits of credibility) if it aids in telling the story of the player characters. If a player character has a talent or action similar to a narrator character, allow the player character to be the active protagonist. It's fine to downplay the talents of the narrator characters if it lets the player characters shine.

Remember that the narrator is not playing against the players, so they should temper the narrator characters to be a challenge but not overwhelm the player heroes. When the narrator characters are in the role of allies they should be supporting actors, not the stars of the drama.

Try to be fair in judging all the characters by the same rules, but err on the side of the player characters. With some practice and experience the narrator will be able to dial in the power level of the narrator characters to be a challenge but not overwhelming.



CHAMPIONS OF THE ERA

Today, by the might of my sword and the loyalty of the friends my sword had made for me, black Martian and white, red Martian and green rubbed shoulders in peace and good-fellowship.
– John Carter, *The Warlord of Mars*

The world of Barsoom features numerous characters, both heroic and villainous, that can be used by the narrator as friends, foes, lovers, foils, enemies, and allies for the player characters. This chapter presents the significant and standard narrator characters from the novels *The Gods of Mars* and *The Warlord of Mars*, with a summary of who they are and the key events they were involved in. They are portrayed as they were in the novels set during the Prince of Helium era.

The narrator characters are not provided with a comprehensive list of resources or equipment, but should be assumed to have what is needed by the circumstances of the plot. The narrator is free to provide them anything needed to further the story, as seems logical and appropriate. Many of the narrator characters have extensive political connections, networks of allies, and extensive resources, so be mindful when using them to include the circle of influence they exert.

Narrators can alter talents and attributes as they see fit to represent less experienced versions of the narrator characters for a story taking place before the novels. Equally, they can be modified to represent more experienced versions for a story set beyond the events of the two novels. In general, these write-ups represent a best fit for the Prince of Helium era. Obviously your campaign is your own version of Mars, so feel free to use and alter these characters to tell your story.

The narrator can also use these characters as archetypes for adventures set beyond the scope of the Prince of Helium era by giving them minor variations and name changes.



New Narrator Characters

The most notable personages of the Dotar Sojat era are already detailed in the ***John Carter of Mars*** core rulebook. Below you will find several individuals of lesser fame, but who still played a role in the story told in *A Princess of Mars*.

Zat Arras

JED OF ZODANGA

"The sentence of the court is passed, but the day of retribution has not been set. I, Zat Arras, Jed of Zodanga, appreciating the royal connections of the prisoner and his past services to Helium and Barsoom, grant a respite of one year…"

ATTRIBUTES

DARING	CUNNING	EMPATHY
6	7	4

MIGHT	PASSION	REASON
5	6	6

TALENTS

AUTOCRAT (GRADE 6)

You are born to rule; all in your vision is yours to command.

- **Circumstance:** Any political or court-based action.
- **Effect:** When performing political or court-based actions, including intrigues and non-physical attacks on political rivals, you gain a bonus 2d20. Furthermore, any subordinate successfully executing one of your commands gains 1 bonus Momentum. Your network of spies and informants allows you to ask two "yes or no" questions of any character when you first meet or hear of them — you may only gain answers your spies or informants would realistically know.

BACKGROUND

After the defeat of Zodanga and death of Than Kosis at the hands of John Carter, Tars Tarkas, and their horde of green and red Martians, Zat Arras is appointed jed of the city.

This appointment followed the tradition John Carter established, of choosing as the leader for a defeated people someone who will swear allegiance to Helium. This gives Zat Arras the opportunity to rise in power among the court of Helium.

After the disappearance of Tardos Mors, Mors Kajak, and Carthoris, Zat Arras is appointed regent of Helium. Taking advantage of the power vacuum and a desire to cement his position in a more permanent fashion as Jeddak of Helium, he pressures Dejah Thoris to be his wife. Rather than acquiesce, Dejah Thoris goes on a pilgrimage to the Valley Dor to end her mortal existence.

Having lost Dejah Thoris, a further opportunity presents itself with the return of John Carter to Helium. As per the customs of the Martians, any who return from the Valley Dor are judged to be blasphemous, and the punishment is death. Zat Arras immediately calls John Carter to court and charges him with the crime of blasphemy — demanding the death sentence.

Underestimating the support John Carter has in Helium and the loyalty of certain nobility and officers, the stage is set for a civil war. To avoid involving his beloved Helium in such a conflict, Carter convinces Zat Arras to make a compromise: that his judgment be postponed for a year. Zat Arras agrees, and for the moment the matter is settled. All parties depart without bloodshed.

Zat Arras has spies everywhere and learns of Carter's plans to invade the south pole. The spies manage to kidnap Carter from his sleeping quarters and place him in the dungeons of Zat Arras.

Zat Arras offers John Carter a deal: if the Earthman will support him as Jeddak of Helium, Zat Arras will grant his freedom. Carter refuses and spends almost a full earth year in the dungeons. His only contact is Parthak, a soldier loyal to Zat Arras, whose duty it is to feed him.

Carter eventually wins his freedom by tricking Parthak and joins up with his comrades to continue their plans for the invasion of the south pole. They launch the invasion and a terrific battle ensues with the forces of John Carter eventually close to complete victory.

Zat Arras, aware of the invasion plans, follows John Carter to the south pole with the remaining might of the Helium fleet. Zat Arras commands the Helium fleet to fire upon Carter's forces. At this point many of the ships under his command mutiny, and eventually all but his capital ship turn over their allegiance to John Carter.

During the battle John Carter's forces board Zat Arras's flagship. Carter offers Zat Arras a duel to settle matters between them. Zat Arras jumps over the side of the ship to his death.





Hor Vastus

TRUSTED NAVAL OFFICER OF HELIUM

"That you are back is sufficient, and let Hor Vastus' sword have the high honor of being first at thy feet."

ATTRIBUTES

DARING	CUNNING	EMPATHY
7	7	5

MIGHT	PASSION	REASON
5	6	6

TALENTS

CUNNING COMPANION (GRADE 3)

Your support of your friends and superiors often helps carry the day.

- **Circumstance:** When supporting an ally.
- **Effect:** When performing actions involving understanding, convincing, or aiding your friends or superiors you may always use Cunning. Further, once per scene you may take a spoken action to make a **Cunning + Daring** Challenging (D2) test. If successful, give a friend or superior a Momentum. You may give additional Momentum earned in this test to your friends and superiors as well, or you may spend 2 Momentum to remove an existing complication, provided you can explain how your strategy or advice renders the complication irrelevant or ineffective.

DARING STRATEGIST (GRADE 3)

You are a skilled, bold strategist who knows the capabilities of your crew and ships like your own arm.

- **Circumstance:** When commanding troops or making battle plans.
- **Effect:** You may always use Daring when making or executing battle plans or strategies. Any difficulties for such tests are reduced by 1.

BACKGROUND

An officer of the navy of Helium and member of the household of the Prince of Helium, Hor Vastus is a highly valued and trusted friend of John Carter and company. Hor Vastus has a seat of honor at the side of Carthoris in the great dining hall of the palace of the Prince of Helium.

While commanding the airship Xavarian, Hor Vastus rescues John Carter and companions after their escape from the Valley Dor. They are safely conveyed to Helium, after which Carter is put on trial by Zat Arras.

Hor Vastus joins the circle of John Carter in planning an invasion of the Valley Dor and the lands of the First Born. He is trusted with organizing and raising a million-person army for the land invasion. Unfortunately, John Carter is kidnapped and imprisoned by Zat Arras before the invasion takes place.

Hor Vastus plays a critical role in Xodar's clever plan to free Carter from the pits of Zat Arras' dungeons. He pretends to be a soldier of Zodanga and is imprisoned beside another Zodangan soldier. This individual, Parthak, guarded John Carter while imprisoned by Zat Arras and thus knew the location of Carter's cell. Working over fifteen days, Hor Vastus was able to win the confidence of Parthak and get the information needed to find Carter.

Once John Carter is rescued, Hor Vastus returns to organizing the army and transports needed in the invasion of the south pole. He is the commanding officer in charge of the ground assault on the Valley Dor for the red Martians against the therns. In conjunction with Tars Tarkas and the green Martians the therns are utterly defeated. Later again Hor Vastus leads the red Martians on an assault of the First Born in the Gardens of Issus. Once again he and Tars Tarkas are victorious.

Yersted

DATOR OF THE FIRST BORN, COMMANDER OF THE SUBMARINE OF ISSUS

"No, John Carter, Issus will not give up her own. She knows that you are coming, and ere ever a vandal foot is set within the precincts of the Temple of Issus… Dejah Thoris will be put away for ever from the last faint hope of rescue."

ATTRIBUTES



TALENTS

EXPERIENCED COMMANDER (GRADE 5)

You have years of experience commanding a ship and its crew.

- **Circumstance:** When commanding a ship.
- **Effect:** Whenever you use teamwork to provide assistance to a crew-member on a ship you command or are an officer of, gain a bonus d20. You may also use a spoken action to automatically intimidate, stand down, or command up to 4 minions in your military — they will automatically follow your orders. This talent does not summon minions; it merely allows you to command those already present.

BACKGROUND

Yersted is the commander of the submarine that ferries the prisoners of the First Born from the docks on the Omean Sea to the Temple of Issus proper. As an officer in the First Born navy, Yersted has command of many soldiers and junior officers.

John Carter first encounters Yersted when he's captured and taken to Issus. The second encounter is after the invasion of the lands of the First Born. The tables are turned this time and Yersted becomes Carter's prisoner.

At length Yersted taunts John Carter that he is too late to save his beloved Dejah Thoris. She will be put in the Temple of the Sun and be lost to him. In detail Yersted describes the working mechanics of the Temple of the Sun. He takes a certain amount of pride in the technology and superiority of the First Born.

In the end, however, he is just another prisoner of John Carter, Prince of Helium.

Torkar Bar

DWAR OF THE KAOLIAN ROAD

"His title of Captain of the Kaolian Road explained his timely presence in the heart of the savage forest, for every highway upon Barsoom is patrolled by doughty warriors of the noble class…"

ATTRIBUTES



TALENTS

EXPERT LANCER (GRADE 3)

None can match the riding or jousting skill of the warriors who patrol the lonely and dangerous highways of Barsoom.

- **Circumstance:** When using a spear or lance.
- **Effect:** You gain a d20 bonus when attacking with a lance or spear. These attacks deal +1 damage, +3 if mounted.

GUARDIAN OF THE ROAD (GRADE 3)

All travelers are under your protection as the road is your domain.

- **Circumstance:** When riding to the rescue in your territory.
- **Effect:** You may join any scene reachable by the highways and roads of your territory. If you use this ability during combat, you join the battle after the next character to act once you declare you are joining the scene. If desired, you arrive armed and mounted.

BACKGROUND

Torkar Bar is the guardian of the Kaolian road. He patrols the forest through which the road to the city of Kaol runs. He saves John Carter from a sith by arriving just in time to run it through with a poisoned spear.

While loyal to Kulan Tith, Jeddak of Kaol, Torkar Bar is not above using his better judgement in dealing with John Carter. Knowing Carter to be a man of honor by reputation, Torkar Bar allows him passage to Kaol with the promise that no overt acts against the nation of Kaol or its jeddak be committed.

Parthak

LOYAL SOLDIER OF ZODANGA

"No threats of torture or death, no bribes, however fabulous, would move him. His only reply to all our importunities was that whenever Parthak died, were it to-morrow or a thousand years hence, no man could truly say, 'A traitor is gone to his deserts.'"

ATTRIBUTES



TALENTS

LOYAL TO A FAULT (GRADE 4)

You are exceedingly loyal, though at times this gets you into trouble, especially since you're not that bright.

- **Circumstance:** When following commands.
- **Effect:** Gain a bonus 2d20 to resist any attempts to bribe, coerce, or intimidate you to abandoning a sworn duty or defying an order. However, if you elect to take a bribe or allow yourself to be tricked, you gain 2 Momentum or add 2 to the Threat pool (for narrator characters).

BACKGROUND

Parthak is a loyal soldier in the employ of Zat Arras, serving as the jailer to John Carter. For close to a year Parthak did his duty with stoic determination, refusing to engage Carter in any way other than to deliver his daily meals.

Eventually, however, John Carter was able to appeal to Parthak's pride by offering him a harness and a prized short sword as reward for treating him well as a prisoner. Carter asked Parthak to bring him writing materials so he could send for Parthak's reward. Parthak accepted, the message was penned, and Parthak took it to Carter's household. Unfortunately for Parthak, it was a ruse and he was captured.

Despite falling for the reward, Parthak was still very loyal to his lord and country and would not give up any information even under extreme duress. John Carter's friends, specifically Xodar and Hor Vastus, tricked Parthak into revealing Carter's location in the dungeons of Zat Arras. Carter was soon thereafter freed by his son Carthoris, and Parthak was held as a prisoner of the Noble House of Helium.

Phaidor

DAUGHTER OF MATAI SHANG

"Phaidor has glorified you with her love, and you have spurned her. Ten thousand unthinkably atrocious deaths could not atone for the affront that you have put upon me."

ATTRIBUTES



TALENTS

ARROGANT RAGE (GRADE 1)

You are unused to being disobeyed, questioned, or challenged. Those who do feel your wrath.

- **Circumstance:** When acting against those who displeased you.
- **Effect:** Pick a target each scene who has displeased or insulted you. When attacking or otherwise acting to hurt this target, gain a bonus d20.

SURPRISING DEPTHS (GRADE 2)

Despite your outward shallowness, there are other hidden parts to your character that hint at an exceptional, even possibly heroic, individual.

- **Circumstance:** When acting against your outwardly shallow and spoiled nature.
- **Effect:** Once per session you may act against your spoiled or shallow nature to spare a foe, aid a loved one, or otherwise act heroically. This action, if successful, gains 3 bonus Momentum.

BACKGROUND

Phaidor is the daughter of Matai Shang, as such, she holds much sway over those who believe in the false religion of Issus. After being freed from the clutches of the First Born by John Carter, she falls in love with him. Being rejected by Carter, her main motivation thereafter is revenge on Dejah Thoris for the love she was denied.

Phaidor accompanies her father and Thurid in kidnapping Dejah Thoris. In the final confrontation, Phaidor has a change of heart and saves John Carter by killing Thurid. As atonement and proof of her change she jumps to her death.

Kulan Tith

JEDDAK OF KAOL

"At first the Jeddak of Kaol went white with rage, but before he spoke he had mastered himself, so that his tone was calm and even as befitted intercourse between two great jeddaks."

ATTRIBUTES

DARING	CUNNING	EMPATHY
6	5	5

MIGHT	PASSION	REASON
6	7	5

TALENTS

GREAT RULER (GRADE 4)

Your people love you as you are a just and fair ruler.

- **Circumstance:** When governing your people.
- **Effect:** Whenever you act for the direct benefit of your nation, gain a bonus d20. By using a spoken action and directing another to act in your stead for the benefit of your nation, you may give them a bonus d20. This bonus includes actions you mistakenly believe are helpful to your nation if you have been deceived, but does not include legitimate challenges to your authority.

HONORABLE FRIEND (GRADE 2)

You protect and cherish your friends, aiding them however you can. This includes those who you have wronged unjustly.

- **Circumstance:** When making amends or helping friends.
- **Effect:** When you offer assistance to a friend or someone you have unjustly wronged, you gain 2 bonus Momentum for any successful action taken towards these goals.

BACKGROUND

Kulan Tith, being a traditional jeddak, welcomed the fleeing Matai Shang to his palace. In his company was Thurid, Dator of the First Born, Matai Shang's daughter Phaidor, Dejah Thoris, and Thuvia — the latter two as prisoners.

John Carter followed in pursuit. Carter's arrival coincided with a visit by the Jeddak Thuvan Dihn. The green Martians of that region had planned an attack for this occasion. They were thwarted by Carter's actions, which won him an invitation to the court of Kulan Tith. John Carter was able to enter disguised as a red Martian.

Despite his disguise, Carter was called out by Thurid for crimes against the Gods of Mars and assaulting Matai Shang. Carter counter-charged that the therns had been deceiving the Martians with a promised afterlife, while actually enslaving them or killing them for profit.

Before the confrontation could come to a head, the visiting Jeddak of Ptarth, Thuvan Dihn, intervened on behalf of John Carter. Confirming Carter to be a noble and worthy person, he backed Carter against Thurid and Matai Shang. Eventually it was revealed that Matai Shang was holding two prisoners: Dejah Thoris, wife of John Carter, and Thuvia, daughter of Thuvan Dihn.

The friendship between Kulan Tith and Thuvan Dihn outweighed the allegiance to Matai Shang. The Jeddak of Kaol decreed that the women be freed and the quarrel with Matai Shang be taken outside the borders of Kaol.

Before the edict of the Jeddak could be carried out, Matai Shang, Thurid, and their prisoners escaped on the airship they had arrived in. John Carter could not follow in pursuit as the nation of Kaol did not have any airships of their own to follow.

At the loss of face for letting the villains escape his judgment, Kulan Tith vowed to place the resources of Kaol at John Carter's command to right this injustice. Carter was able to repair his flyer and leave to pursue Matai Shang northwards on friendly terms with Kulan Tith and the nation of Kaol.



Lakor

THERN SOLIDER

"Yet even so I came near to tasting death that day in the gloomy corridor beneath Mars's southern pole, for Lakor played a trick upon me that in all my experience of fighting upon two planets I never witnessed the like of."

ATTRIBUTES



TALENTS

CUNNING ADVERSARY (GRADE 2)

You are skilled at using your Cunning in any number of conflicts.

- **Circumstance:** When attacking.
- **Effect:** You can use your Cunning with any attack. Successful attacks using Cunning generate 1 additional Momentum.

TRICKY (GRADE 4)

Your years of experience and skill at deception give you an edge when luring others into ambushes, tactical errors, and traps.

- **Circumstance:** When luring another into danger.
- **Effect:** Gain a 2d20 bonus when convincing someone to act in a way that opens them up to some hidden danger such as a trap or ambush. When you lead another into a trap, ambush, or other danger they suffer +2 ◆ from damage they take from this danger.

BACKGROUND

Lakor is an experienced and crafty old thern soldier in the service of Matai Shang, who is left to guard the passage under the Valley Dor when Thurid and Matai Shang leave on a mission to kidnap Dejah Thoris from the Temple of the Sun. Lakor and a fellow soldier stand ready to enforce the will of the Holy Hekkador.

Upon encountering John Carter, who has been hot on the trail of Thurid and Matai Shang, instead of attacking him Lakor convinces his fellow soldier to parley. They negotiate that John Carter can pass provided he will only do harm to Thurid. Carter agrees and moves past their checkpoint.

Unknown to John Carter, this is a ruse by Lakor to lure Carter to his death by guiding him into a passage with a trap pit. Were it not for the keen senses of the faithful Woola putting Carter on the rightful path, Lakor would have ended Carter's quest there and then.

Even taking the right path, John Carter is beset by Lakor and his companion taking a shortcut to head him off. During their fight, Lakor takes the initiative by tripping Carter with a surprise trick using his belt. Were it not for Woola again coming to the rescue, the crafty veteran Lakor would have been victorious. Instead, Lakor is crushed to jelly by the mighty paw swipe of Woola.

In his methods and deceitful nature, Lakor is representative of various agents of Matai Shang and other high-ranking therns. Even after his death, this entry could be used to represent a similar cunning and treacherous agent of the Holy Therns or some comparable group.

Talu

PRINCE OF MARENTINA

"He is a cruel and tyrannous master whom all hate… My own people are faithful to me, and the little valley of Marentina has paid no tribute to the court of Salensus Oll for a year."

ATTRIBUTES



TALENTS

LET THEM COME (GRADE 3)

You have no fear of superior numbers and are adept at fighting more than one opponent at a time.

- **Circumstance:** When fighting multiple opponents.
- **Effect:** When facing multiple opponents, successful defend actions produce 1 additional Momentum and Counterstrikes only cost 2 Momentum.

SPIES EVERYWHERE (GRADE 3)

You have loyal spies throughout the land, ready to inform you of dangers and help your allies.

- **Circumstance:** When exploiting an opportunity.
- **Effect:** You have a hidden ally in every scene. This character can provide useful information, steal items, dispatch minion-class foes, and otherwise act to benefit you. You may even employ this ability in a scene you are absent from, provided your spies act to help an ally or further your goals. To represent this, once per scene you may generate any effect normally costing 1 Momentum (dispatch a minion, provide d20 bonus to a test, etc.) — this represents your spy at work.

In places where you would have no spies, the narrator can limit the use of this talent to once per session unless you pay 1 Momentum and explain how your spies have infiltrated the area.

SWORD MASTERY (GRADE 2)

You are a skilled swordsman, especially adept with the distinct blades of your people.

- **Circumstance:** When attacking and defending with a particular type of weapon.
- **Effect:** When wielding Okarian dueling weapons (hooked sword, short striking sword, cupped shield), you gain 1 Momentum for every successful attack or defense.

BACKGROUND

Talu is the prince of Marentina, a small valley located in the northern polar region of Barsoom behind the formidable ice barrier. The principality is in open revolt against the current jeddak Salensus Oll.

John Carter and Thuvan Dihn run into Talu while he is on an apt-hunting expedition in the open ice fields of the interior of the polar region. Talu is beset by half a dozen assassins sent by his uncle Salensus Oll. Six to one are not good odds, but the Prince stands ready to fight, drawing both his swords.

Impressed with the bravery and fighting skill of Prince Talu, John Carter and Thuvan Dihn rush to his side and aid him in dispatching the assailants. After being rewarded for their assistance, the men retire to the domed city of Marentina with Prince Talu to plan the next move.

John Carter and Thuvan Dihn — disguised by allies of Prince Talu as yellow Martians — make their way to the capital city of Kadabra on a mission to rescue Dejah Thoris and Thuvia. They pretend to be soldiers seeking employment in Salensus Oll's palace guard. Their cover is blown by John Carter's impatience and anger, and they are caught and put in prison.

Prince Talu's spies eventually free John Carter. A revolt starts in Kadabra, followed by an invasion by John Carter's allies. Prince Talu takes advantage of this situation by joining his forces to the invasion of Kadabra. The city is captured, Salensus Oll is killed and Prince Talu is elevated to the station of Jeddak of the Okar.



Solan

SWITCH MASTER OF KADABRA

"He who faced me was a yellow man — a little, wizened-up, pasty-faced old fellow with great eyes that showed the white round the entire circumference of the iris."

ATTRIBUTES

DARING	CUNNING	EMPATHY
6	8	4

MIGHT	PASSION	REASON
5	4	6

TALENTS

CUNNING OPPORTUNIST (GRADE 3)

You are always out for yourself, even when performing your sworn duties.

- **Circumstance:** When exploiting an opportunity.
- **Effect:** You may always use Cunning when acting to exploit an opportunity, such as attacking a vulnerable opponent or using knowledge of someone's secrets to coerce or influence them. If this action is successful it gains 1 additional Momentum and any damage caused is increased by +1 .

OKARIAN FENCING ATTACK (GRADE 2)

As a trained Okarian swordfighter, you are adept at creating and exploiting openings in a duel or other armed conflict.

- **Circumstance:** When attacking with sword, hooked sword, or cup shield.
- **Effect:** Attacks with Okarian fencing weapons deal +1 . After a successful attack, you may bind an opponent's weapon. Any attempts to use the bound weapon suffer a +1 difficulty. Binds last until you end the bind or the target spends 1 Momentum after a successful attack or defense.

Note: This talent is built with the advanced dueling style rules found in Chapter 7: Duels of Mars.

OKARIAN FENCING DEFENSE (GRADE 6)

You are a master at Okarian fencing, especially when using the hooked sword, second blade, and cupped shield common to your people.

- **Circumstance:** When defending against melee-based attacks.
- **Effect:** You gain a bonus d20 when defending against melee-based attacks. After making a successful defense against an attack, the defender may:

  1. Make an immediate Counterstrike against their attacker for 1 Momentum.
  2. Disarm the attacker. For 1 Momentum they may choose to end up holding the weapon themselves.

Note: This talent is built with the advanced dueling styles rules found in Chapter 7: Duels of Mars.

BACKGROUND

Though old and treacherous, by John Carter's own admission Solan was one of the most skilled and dangerous duelists the hero ever faced. An expert in Okarian-style sword fighting and a skilled political manipulator, Solan was assigned to the vital role of switch master to Kadabra's great Guardian when Carter infiltrated the city in search of his beloved Dejah Thoris.

Solan was as ambitious and greedy as he was skilled with a sword. When the First Born, Thurid, wished to escape Kadabra, Solan allowed himself to be bribed to help the man escape. However, he also fully intended to betray Thurid after he was paid, an act only avoided because he ended up meeting and dueling John Carter in one of the most difficult fights of the hero's life. This encounter shows Solan's primary character — greedy, treacherous, and yet also extremely skilled.

Unlike most Martians, Solan was old, wizened, and frail-looking. Likely one of the oldest people on the whole planet, he survived through skill and treachery. Nothing is known of Solan's early life, or even exactly how old he is. It's possible he was once a great hero or champion laid low by time, loss, and betrayal. Or maybe he was always a villain, greedy and untrustworthy. What can be assumed is that with his great skill and important position in Kadabra, whoever Solan was in his youth, he was noteworthy, and narrators running games set Barsoom's history might use a younger Solan as an important character, especially in campaigns involving the Okar.

Solan's dueling skills are defined here using the dueling style rules presented in Chapter 7: Duels of Mars. He has two talents that provide the techniques of Okarian Fencing, as well as additional techniques included to represent his overall mastery of arms.

Thurid

DATOR OF THE FIRST BORN

"I knew that he hated me, and I was sure that in his heart he envied and hated Xodar… I had become convinced that he was occupied with some manner of intrigue."

ATTRIBUTES



TALENTS

TREACHEROUS (GRADE 3)

You care little for allies or friends; all are expendable to achieve your goals.

- **Circumstance:** When dealing with Allies or underlings that can be sacrificed.
- **Effect:** Once per scene when attempting to achieve a goal, you may place an ally or underling in jeopardy to gain 3 bonus Momentum. Minions placed in jeopardy are instantly defeated or killed, though other characters may survive whatever difficulties this betrayal creates.

OPPORTUNIST (GRADE 4)

You never miss a chance to get ahead. At someone else's expense: even better.

- **Circumstance:** When an opportunity to profit from theft, deception, or betrayal arises.
- **Effect:** Once per session you can automatically escape a scene with an important object or person. In addition, you gain a bonus d20 to all actions involving betrayal, ambush, or theft.

BACKGROUND

A dator of the First Born, Thurid first crossed paths with John Carter when the pirates had taken him prisoner. In an attempt to humiliate a rival dator, Thurid becomes involved in a fight with Carter which ends in Thurid being knocked unconscious and bound with his own harness. Thurid becomes the nemesis of John Carter after that incident.

Joining forces with Matai Shang, they plotted to bring Carter low by kidnapping Princess Dejah Thoris. After a great pursuit from the south pole to the north, the end came for Thurid in a fight in which he betrayed and murdered his ally Matai Shang, only to then be murdered in return by Phaidor, daughter of Matai Shang.

Updates to Existing Characters

The following section details changes and updates to existing characters during the Prince of Helium era. Some of these changes are mechanical, while others involve a character's particular situation during this era. In many cases, these changes only represent a character at the start of the era or shortly before. In others, it depicts the character until a significant event changes them.

Dejah Thoris

Dejah is largely unchanged. The only difference is that while she believes Carter is dead she is more reserved and withdrawn. Until Carter is known to be alive again, reduce her Passion by 1. After she knows Carter is alive, her resolve returns and by the end of the era she has increased her Daring by 1.

Gahan of Gathol

Though not mentioned in the first two eras covered by ***John Carter of Mars***, it is reasonable to assume a younger Gahan either rules Gathol as jeddak or serves under his father or other relative who rules the kingdom. Such a younger Gahan would be much the same, though his Cunning would be reduced by 1 to reflect his relative inexperience. This is the same version of Gahan seen during the Dotar Sojat era.

John Carter

Carter is generally unchanged, though he has evolved his Legendary Hero talent to Grade 7 and he may now fill his Momentum pool to its limit with a conflict action. He may do this once per scene — this replaces the version of the talent which could only be used as the first conflict action.

Should anyone encounter Carter on Earth during the early part of this era, his Might would be reduced to 6 while on his home planet and he loses access to his Leaps and Bounds and Earthborn Strength talents.

Kantos Kan

Kantos has grown into an influential officer. His Daring increases by 1 and he gains the following talent.

HERO OF HELIUM (GRADE 3)
You may dig deep and perform acts of heroism, even when least expected.

- **Circumstance:** When wishing to take additional conflict actions.
- **Effect:** Once per scene, you may take an additional conflict action with a d20 bonus. You must use this action to help or defend Helium or its allies, or to attack an enemy of your nation.

Tars Tarkas

Tars has grown as a leader and friend, standing with his friends and allies through all manner of adversity. Tars updates his True Friendship talent in this era, replacing it with this version.

BONDS BEYOND BLOOD (GRADE 3)
The true bonds of friendship lead you to always be an ally to those you care about.

- **Circumstance:** When fighting alongside others.
- **Effect:** When fighting alongside someone you consider a close friend, you are always considered to be helping them, granting them 1 bonus d20 to all actions in conflict. Furthermore, once per session you may spend your conflict action and remove up to two afflictions from a close friend. This may include subordinates, but only those you know well and trust completely.

The Unknown

Some characters are not yet born or have not yet arrived on Barsoom — or both in the case of World War I veteran Ulysses Paxton. These characters will not appear during this era. They include:

- **Ulysses Paxton**
- **Tara**
- **Llana of Gathol**

The Unchanged

A few characters won't change noticeably during this era, being established and largely static in their methods and capabilities. Most notable among these is the goddess Issus, who is so ancient a few years will do nothing to alter her personality or attributes. The characters who are unchanged from their portrayal in the core book are:

- **Mors Kajak**
- **Salensus Oll**
- **Tardos Mors**

Unknown Histories

Especially during the early portion of the era, with Carter living in relative peace in Helium and later believed dead for years, answers to questions about some characters' histories are unknown. In these cases, narrators should use their best judgment. This can be a bit intimidating, especially with very important characters or in campaigns that stick closely to the canonical Barsoom of the novels. The best advice is to make reasonable decisions about a character's past actions and history, decide only as much as is needed for a particular scene, session, or adventure, and record any important facts and events to keep things consistent — you don't want to say a character spent a year imprisoned and then forget that fact when a player who does remember wants to talk to them about it.

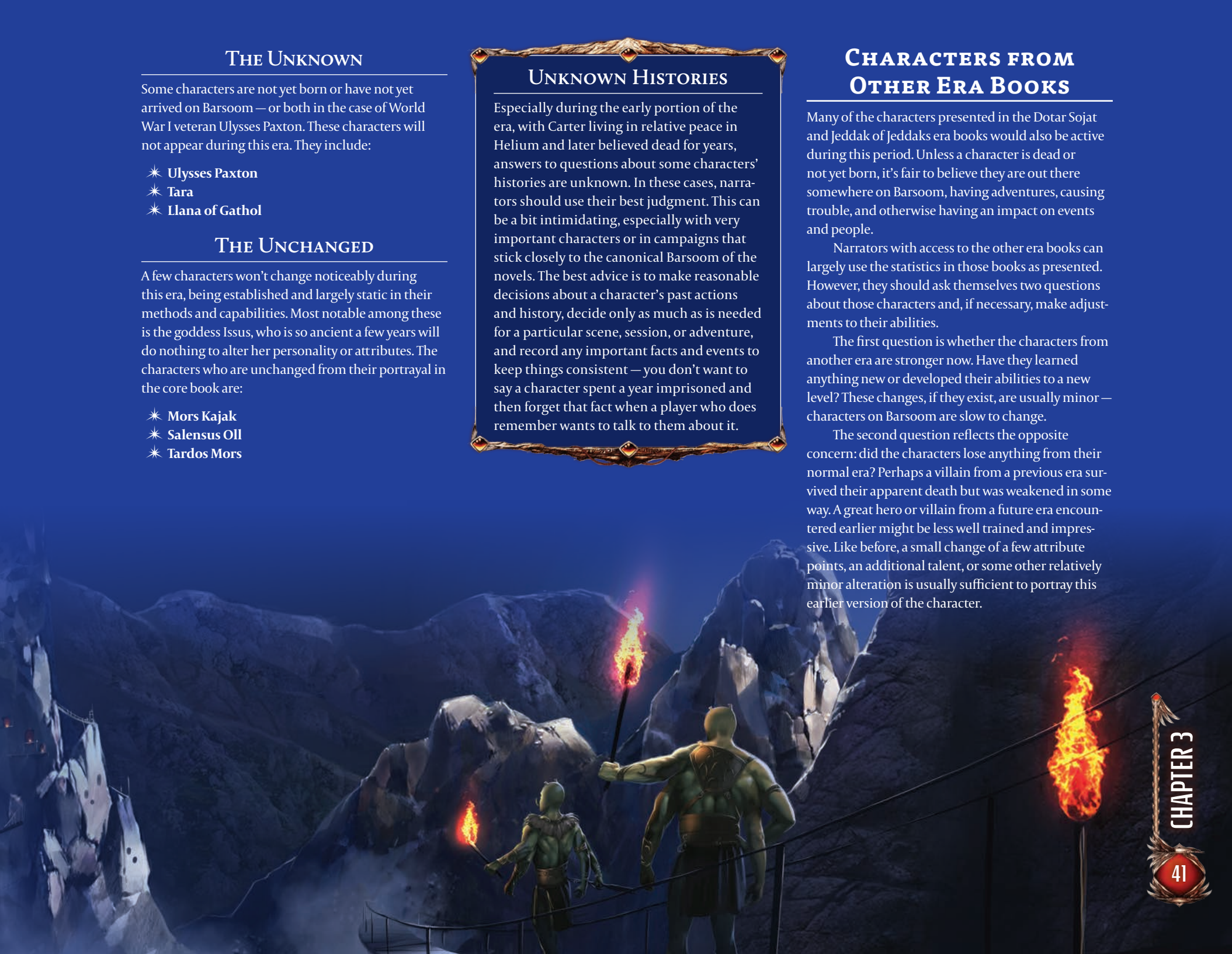
Characters from Other Era Books

Many of the characters presented in the Dotar Sojat and Jeddak of Jeddaks era books would also be active during this period. Unless a character is dead or not yet born, it's fair to believe they are out there somewhere on Barsoom, having adventures, causing trouble, and otherwise having an impact on events and people.

Narrators with access to the other era books can largely use the statistics in those books as presented. However, they should ask themselves two questions about those characters and, if necessary, make adjustments to their abilities.

The first question is whether the characters from another era are stronger now. Have they learned anything new or developed their abilities to a new level? These changes, if they exist, are usually minor — characters on Barsoom are slow to change.

The second question reflects the opposite concern: did the characters lose anything from their normal era? Perhaps a villain from a previous era survived their apparent death but was weakened in some way. A great hero or villain from a future era encountered earlier might be less well trained and impressive. Like before, a small change of a few attribute points, an additional talent, or some other relatively minor alteration is usually sufficient to portray this earlier version of the character.



MYSTERIES OF BARSOOM

The quiet of the tomb lay upon the mysterious valley of death, crouching deep in its warm nest within the sunken area at the south pole of the dying planet. In the far distance the Golden Cliffs raised their mighty barrier faces far into the starlit heavens, the precious metals and scintillating jewels that composed them sparkling in the brilliant light of Mars's two gorgeous moons.

– John Carter, *The Warlord of Mars*

Barsoom is a dying world and stagnation is prevalent in the Prince of Helium era. However, there are still many mysteries to be uncovered and strange places to be explored. The ruins of the former glorious civilization still hold treasures to be won and knowledge worth coveting. This chapter will primarily focus on the mysteries and places in the Prince of Helium era. The information should provide the narrator with adventure seeds and for storytelling specific to this era, but since that covers some two decades and locations from the north to the south pole, there is room for much that is not limited to the novels.

This chapter will introduce new technologies, powers, talents, and places, some taken directly from the novels and others inspired by the genre and Burroughs' worldview of Barsoom during the Prince of Helium era.

Strange Technology

First, we delve into the technology of the Holy Therns, the First Born, and the Okar. The isolation of these peoples has led them to retain or develop many things unknown to the red and green Martians. We will examine many of the items and equipment presented in *The Gods of Mars* and *The Warlord of Mars*. Included in this section are some speculative extensions of technology for use in the Prince of Helium era.

New Powers

Here we will examine the strange powers and abilities displayed by the inhabitants of Barsoom — again focusing on the novels *The Gods of Mars* and *The Warlord of Mars* in the Prince of Helium era. Included will be some speculation on powers, talents, and abilities not covered in the novels.

Mysterious Places

Lastly, we will look in detail at all the mysterious places visited by John Carter on his trek from the south pole to the north pole in the novels. Along the way we'll describe places not mentioned in the novels, to give narrators more options for locations to set their stories.

Not All is Canon

The majority of this chapter contains canonical material from the books. There are also, however, some speculative extensions and even wholesale inventions of the mysteries of Barsoom. The speculations are an extension of the things mentioned in the books that need some fleshing out for the narrator. The inventions are in the style of ***John Carter*** and retain the pulp genre setting of Barsoom. This additional material is for the narrator to use for adventures that can extend beyond the scope of the novels.

Keep in mind that these speculations and inventions are optional. Those narrators who wish to abide by canon only are free to use what works for their story.



Strange Technology

Thern Traps

You only have to look toward the caverns of the therns to see traps so advanced they would be considered a technological achievement. The engineering and clever design of all the chambers — with trick walls, pit traps, banth rooms, and other secret entrances and exits — are formidable obstacle. The therns are experts in manufacturing trapdoors, secret key systems, and mechanical traps of complex skill. No other Martians, other than perhaps the First Born, have mastered the technology to build such extensive and tricky structures underground.

In game terms, narrator characters and players can acquire plans for — or hire therns to construct — such trap-laden or hidden rooms for their dwellings and homes. Possession of such technology will be of particular help to those with great palaces to protect. Likewise, understanding these traps can help characters gain access to areas that otherwise would be impossible to reach.

THERN TRAPS IN GAMES

Thern traps are constructed as dangers and obstacles, but they are more dangerous and difficult to circumvent and detect. The difficulty to detect and avoid thern-designed traps is increased by 2. If the trap is considered a danger, it inflicts a bonus 1 ◆ of damage. This damage bonus doesn't apply to traps that use beasts or other characters to attack those trapped within, but attempts to escape will be increased in difficulty as mentioned above.

The Shield Rifle

The therns use the same weapons and equipment as the red Martians, consisting largely of swords and radium firearms. The only exception noted by John Carter was the use of the shield rifle. No details were provided about this device, so it falls more in the speculative sections of technology used on Barsoom.

We can surmise that given the extensive explosive damage potential of radium firearms, the shields on these guns would need to be substantial to protect the user. This would mean that they are only used on rifles, and are likely stationary.

SHIELD RIFLES IN GAMES

Shield rifles operate with the same range and damage as normal rifles. However, this kind of rifle only fires radium bullets (see the ***John Carter of Mars*** core rulebook, *Chapter 5: Weapons, Technology and Equipment, Firearm Combat, page 74*). They also provide cover from enemy fire if the weapon is properly braced and oriented. A character firing a shield rifle may use their move action for a turn to instead give all characters firing on them +1 difficulty for the task. The character may also ignore the first point of stress they receive due to the Explosive quality of a radium bullet. Despite the protection they give, shield rifles are cumbersome and difficult to maneuver in tight spaces; narrators may increase the difficulty of a character's action while they wield a shield rifle if its bulk would get in the way. Shield rifles are available as core equipment for 15xp.

Submarines

The only submarine known to operate in *The Gods of Mars* is the vessel used to transport people and prisoners from the Omean Sea to the Temple of Issus. It's little more than command room, cargo area, and engines. It has no other practical value and not much is said about it other than that it is an anomaly on Barsoom. It does, however, demonstrate that the First Born have the capability to create submersible craft.

If we were to extrapolate this technology to create raiding ships capable of both submersible and airborne operations, that could be an interesting seed for a First Born adventure plot. Imagine such craft working the deeper canals of Barsoom, raiding the red kingdoms with impunity and disappearing without a trace. This would add to the legend of the Black Pirates descending from the moon Thuria. In practicality it would extend the operations of the First Born beyond just relying on the therns as a source of plunder.

SUBMARINES IN GAMES

Submarines operate in game terms the same as airships, except they are limited to surface and underwater operations. Narrators may use either the airship rules in the ***John Carter of Mars*** core rulebook or the more detailed airship rules in the ***Dotar Sojat Era Supplmental Rulebook*** to create submarines. Submarines and airships may attack each other if in the same area, but they are not generally equipped to do so — both craft suffer +2 difficulty to all attacks against a vehicle of a different type. First Born ships that are equipped for both air and sea operations — as many of their vessels are — ignore this penalty.

Ship-to-Ship Harpoons

Since raiding and piracy are the bread and butter of the First Born, their ships are fitted with harpoons in addition to the regular large ship-to-ship batteries. The harpoon is fired from a small explosive radium charge designed to carry it and an attached line to a maximum of half a haad (about 900 feet). Once a target is impaled it cannot escape until the line is cut. This tactic is generally employed against trading cogs and other flying vessels to prevent them from escaping the First Born.

SHIP-TO-SHIP HARPOONS IN GAMES

A ship-to-ship harpoon deals only 1 ◆ of damage to a ship that it strikes, but it allows the attacker to grapple the targeted ship and pull it into Immediate range, preventing the ship from fleeing until the harpoon is dislodged. Dislodging the harpoon is a **Daring + Might** (D2) test that counts as an attack action if attempted during combat.



Grappling Hook Gun

Like the larger harpoon, the First Born have developed miniaturized personal versions of the device. Often fitted in a vambrace or as a standalone gun carried on a harness, the device fires a hook attached to about 100 ads (97 feet) of line, and is used mainly for boarding actions.

GRAPPLING HOOK GUNS IN GAMES

Using the grappling hook gun provides a bonus 1d20 with actions involving climbing, swinging, and boarding nearby vessels. A target must be within Away range to attach the grapple. Grappling hook guns are available as core equipment for 10xp.

Radio Communication

The First Born seem to be the only people who use radio communications. The rest of Barsoom has dismissed it as being useless as it is easy to intercept radio waves. John Carter notices the radio communications used between the submarine and the guard house in *The Gods of Mars*. Presumably the deep fissure at the south pole in which the First Born nation resides protects the radio waves from being eavesdropped on, thus making their use more practical. This is the only instance of radio technology used in the Prince of Helium era.

Burroughs does not tell us much about radio technology on Barsoom. There is a single line about how radio encryptions can easily be broken, leading to the conclusion that radio technology cannot be trusted and is therefore not used. On Jasoom we have the example of the Enigma machine being very successful in sending coded messages over radio. It required vast resources to break the cipher and eventually needed the invention of the computer to effectively render it obsolete.

If we can allow that the First Born have some capability to cipher their radio messages, and that their air fleet is equipped with radio communications, they would have a substantial logistical advantage over their rivals in warfare. This could be a plausible adventure seed where the codebooks or the cipher machine needs to be stolen from the First Born to counter their radio technology edge.

RADIO COMMUNICATION IN GAMES

Radio communication by itself doesn't have direct mechanical effects, but it has roleplaying and strategic uses. First Born and other characters who use radio possess a useful and secure method of communication — provided it is encrypted and protected against interception (as all First Born radio is designed). However, Earthborn or other less-sophisticated radio communications are easy to decrypt and intercept — any attempts to do so reduce any difficulties by 1.



Spy Craft Kit

The therns are probably the greatest spies on Barsoom. As evidenced in *The Gods of Mars*, at one point half the guards on the palace gates in Helium were therns in disguise. Given the nature of their power base, the therns need to maintain covert operatives in all the nations to keep their influence strong. The Holy Fathers in overt positions would also be much more effective with access to a great spy network.

Certainly, the spies would have to be masters of disguise to operate in the larger world of Barsoom, in order to not be revealed by their white skin. Covert communications would also be necessary. Here we can speculate that spies make use of radio-aerograms, photographic facsimile transmissions, or photostatic devices to keep the spy masters updated on their mission status. They may even have miniaturized or stealthy versions of these communication devices.

A great player character archetype or narrative character might be the double agent thern spy. With the disguise ability they can pass as almost any Martian race and join in on an adventure pretending to be just about anyone. It is possible that one of these kits may fall into the hands of someone other than a thern; the Okar, for example, are known to have talented espionage agents.

The spy craft kit consists of portable disguise makeup, some type of communication gear, and concealable weapons such as a hidden knife or very small caliber radium palm pistol.

SPY CRAFT KITS IN GAMES

Spy craft kits provide 1 bonus Momentum when a tool from the kit is first used in a scene. This may be anything from using a disguise to ambushing a target with a hidden blade. This bonus only works on the first action that makes use of any tool from the kit per scene, not once per action per tool. A spy craft kit may be purchased as core equipment for 10xp.

Holy Thern Headpiece

Therns are hairless, but also vain. Few venture out without a headpiece that gives them glorious artificial hair. This hair is typically golden in color and will not come off unless removed by the wearer. The hair seems totally natural and the headpiece can be used to impersonate a thern if a character can also make their skin appear pale or white. Many Caucasian Earthborns' natural skin tones are near enough to thern skin to allow them to pass as a thern with this device. Some Martians, particularly those who are spies, have access to makeup and paints that can replicate the pale skin of the therns. These headpieces can also be dyed and cut.

HOLY THERN HEADPIECE IN GAMES

Successfully disguising as a thern using the headpiece grants the wearer a bonus 1d20 when interacting with other thern characters. This item also prevents your deception from being discovered by minion-class thern characters. Optionally, a headpiece of this type can be dyed and cut, allowing it to be used as part of a disguise to hide a character's identity, granting a bonus 1d20 to any tests to keep up the deception or avoid discovery. A Holy Thern headpiece is not available as core equipment, except to characters from a thern background; in this case they cost 10xp.

Resonating Rings

Prince Talu of Marentina is in possession of a remarkable and unique stone. When pieces of the stone are chipped off, these pieces resonate when in proximity of each other at distances of up to fifty feet. These stones are often set into rings to be worn as jewelry. Other forms of adornment are also possible, such as pendants, hairpins, crowns, and even knives.

John Carter is given such a ring in *The Warlord of Mars*. It saves his life as another agent of Prince Talu is able to recognize Carter when the rings come into proximity with each other. They vibrate rapidly and create a prickling sensation in the wearer.

Adventures can be built around the resonating stones. A spy master has been found murdered, and for safety reasons all his agents were recruited and operated in isolation. All the agents have resonator rings to be able to identify each other so they don't end up working at cross purposes in the field. A hostile agent has gained access to the ring of the master spy and is secretly hunting down all the spies. It becomes an interesting game of cat and mouse for the players to figure out who the mole is. Can they trust the ring wearer? Or are they possibly distrusting someone who could be a valuable ally?

RESONATING RINGS IN GAMES

The wearer of a resonating ring is immediately aware if someone within Away range is also wearing one, though the wearer isn't necessarily able to pinpoint who it is. The wearer gains a bonus d20 to tests to discover another wearer when able to move in the direction that creates the strongest vibrations and prickling sensations. Resonating rings are available as core equipment at the narrator's discretion for 20xp.

Other Technology

During the Prince of Helium era, some larger-scale technology can be found when the First Born and the Okar are revealed. The great navies of the First Born sail through both air and water. Massive pumps send water flowing from the Sea of Omean throughout the canals of Barsoom. Devices such as the Guardian of the North demonstrate a capacity for mass destruction. In this section, we touch on those technologies and how they might be used within ***John Carter of Mars*** campaigns.

First Born Navy

The navy of the First Born is unique in that the battleships are equipped both for air and water propulsion. The Omean Sea being the only open large body of water on Mars makes this a useful design. The ships are made of carborundum aluminum, a light but extremely durable material, and fitted with air propellers that can be retracted and replaced with smaller, more powerful water propellers. This in no way affects their function as a battleship. Normal rules apply for air-to-air combat for these vessels.

The navy boasts at least one thousand large battleships and countless smaller vessels in dozen-crew size. Lastly, there are the two- or three-person fliers, these being slightly larger than the red Martian personal fliers as they are used in raiding and need space to carry off slaves. All the vessels are fitted for raiding or warfare. There are very few passenger or trade cogs plying the Omean Sea. The First Born rely exclusively on piracy and slavery to run their society. This may change in time, but during the Prince of Helium era this is the way of life.

In game terms, ships or fliers manufactured by the First Born all have the capability for sailing on water. Additionally, they are slightly larger and more powerful so they can carry away plunder. The decks and railings of the fliers are also designed to accommodate raiding more readily.

The realities of the First Born navy suggest that even when they are known and allied with Helium, they are well suited to piracy. Loyal or heroic First Born navies may become pirate hunters and elite strike forces for their allies, engaged in daring raids against dangerous foes. Traitorous or rebellious commanders or forces may become deadly and dangerous raiders, threatening trade and vulnerable settlements.

The Pumps of the Omean Sea

The Omean Sea is supplied by water that drains into it from the Sea of Korus above. Were it not for four great pumps that keep the Omean Sea from overflowing, the islands and the Temple of Issus would be flooded. The pumps drain off excess water from the Omean Sea and force it into reservoirs far north from which the red nations draw it as a source of irrigation.

The pumps are an impressive feat of civil engineering. It's unknown when these pumps were built or even if the First Born built them, given their reluctance to invent or engage in labor. Like the atmosphere plant, if these pumps were to fail it would be an end to the way of life of the First Born as they live it in the Prince of Helium era.

In play, attempts to sabotage or overload the pumps can become part of a villain's plot, or perhaps a way for characters to hinder Issus and her followers. If underground seas are found elsewhere on Barsoom, such technology could be used to create dry regions within them, allowing cultures to live on artificial islands.

Doomsday Device

A secondary function of the control panel of the Guardian of the North is activation of the doomsday device. See the ***John Carter of Mars*** core rulebook, page 132, for the full write-up. Stored in tanks beneath the city are rays of the sun that are released in a controlled manner, allowing the capital city of Kadabra to have summer-like conditions all year round. With the simple pull of a lever, the life-giving rays can be released all at once to completely destroy Kadabra.

In adventure terms, this can be played out by having a plot in which the city is held hostage by a mad noble commanding everyone to do their bidding or be destroyed. The players have to disarm the device or remove the noble to save Kadabra.

Conversely, the players might need to gain control of the doomsday device to bend Kadabra to their political ends, as was the case with John Carter in *The Warlord of Mars*.

However the doomsday device is used in terms of plot, it makes for an interesting look into the psychology of the Okar. They would rather destroy themselves than have Kadabra fall into enemy hands. Note that the Okar are not necessarily the only culture to have such devices. Narrators can craft similar ones using other means of destruction, from atomic energy to killer plagues. In fact, the doomsday device is a pulp staple for many villains and secretive or hostile cultures, making it an exceptionally appropriate element to include in ***John Carter of Mars*** campaigns.

Mysterious Places

The two novels encompassing the Prince of Helium era introduce a variety of new environs to the "location palette" of adventure on Barsoom. Many of these were of the sort thought not to exist at all on the Red Planet until John Carter made them known to the red and green Martians.

The Land Itself

In *The Gods of Mars* and *The Warlord of Mars*, John Carter discovers a series of unknown biomes and locations across the surface of Barsoom. He pursues his abducted wife from "one pole of the planet to the other" and encounters many secrets along the way. By the end of this era, these locations are common knowledge to all educated Martians, but earlier they are closely held secrets known only to their inhabitants.

Forests

"Myriad creepers hung festooned in graceful loops from tree to tree, and among them were several varieties of the Martian "man-flower," whose blooms have eyes and hands with which to see and seize the insects which form their diet."

Based on descriptions in *A Princess of Mars*, one would expect Barsoom to be entirely lacking in trees. The arid environment allows only for grasses and scrub, with nary a climbable tree to be seen.

But by the end of the Prince of Helium era, two wildly disparate forests are known. One, within the Valley Dor, is highly manicured and tightly controlled. The other surrounds the city of Kaol, a wild swampy place full of monsters. The only similarity between them, other than the presence of trees, seems to be that both are places of great danger.

With two large forests of such diversity present, one can safely assume that other forests dot the lowlands throughout Barsoom. What secrets might they hide? What forgotten civilizations, legendary beasts, and lost treasures might wait within?

Plot Seed

A scientist of Helium (or another red city) makes a discovery. The wood of the Othas tree burns hot enough for a new kind of metallurgy, allowing for weapons of unparalleled strength. He needs heroes to enter a deadly forest and harvest several tons of the wood for his ongoing research. Unfortunately, a wild tribe of Martians live in the forest: a cult dedicated to preserving the trees. They are too numerous to attack directly, but should the player characters discover and support sects within the cult...

Seas

"I could see that most un-Martian of all sights — an open sea, its blue waters shimmering beneath the brazen sun."

Before the Prince of Helium era, most Martians knew about the Lost Sea of Korus but never thought to see it in their lifetime. Had any been told that arid Barsoom held not one, but two standing oceans, they would have called the speaker a fool at best, and a heretic at worst. However, John Carter's travels reveal two broad oceans.

The Lost Sea of Korus lies at the bottom of the Valley Dor. The Sea of Omean is a secret, subterranean body of water at the south pole, reachable only by a great shaft leading up to the surface.

We from Jasoom, with our Pacific and Atlantic oceans, might view either of these Martian bodies as more of a great lake than a proper sea, but to a Martian these are vast expanses of water, beautiful and terrifying. They are especially daunting to Martians, who never learn to swim and who would consider drowning a crushingly ignoble way to die.

Another difference between these seas and those of our home planet is the marked lack of tides and large waves. For those who can swim, they are easy enough to cross... assuming the swimmer doesn't get the attention of the monstrous carnivores that haunt their depths.

Plot Seed

An Earthborn hero is approached by a wealthy merchant who says an airship full of important cargo sank in the waters of the Lost Sea of Korus. The merchant needs a strong swimmer to recover the goods, and warriors to protect the expedition from swimming monsters and raiders alike.

Polar Ice Caps

"As we came on deck I saw to my surprise that the vessel was passing over a great field of snow and ice. As far as the eye could reach in any direction naught else was visible."

The ice caps are better known than the seas of Barsoom, but just as rarely seen. They terminate with towering ice walls, virtually unscalable, blocking the progress of any who might try to journey farther on foot. Apts and other horrors roam the ice sheets and the tundra just before them, and the cold is a constant menace.

This natural inhospitability is just the first danger for explorers curious about the region, as each pole hides a dangerous secret. The south is the home of the First Born who use the ice fields as a buffer between themselves and the populations they raid. The north hides the cities of the Okar, an ancient race who fled there after being driven from the rest of Barsoom by early red and green tribes. Chains await all who survive their first encounter with either civilization.

Plot Seed

A new horror begins raiding cities near the north pole, a monster so terrible even apt hunters and zitidar trainers quail at its might and ferocity. Investigation determines these creatures are being released as parts of the northern ice cap melt. What is causing the melt-off, and how did they come to lie in stasis, waiting to be unfrozen?

Secrets Upon Secrets

Locations for ***John Carter of Mars*** adventures in the Prince of Helium era are different from those of other, especially earlier, times. Where the previous vistas and sights were simply undiscovered, these places are secret. They are the result of massive deceptions fostered by corrupted civilizations, and those features can imbue adventures of this era with tone and terror. Here are three of the most important aspects of these secret places of Barsoom.

Ancient and Wicked

With the exception of Kaol, the cities John Carter discover have existed as they are for thousands, possibly tens of thousands of years. Further, their inhabitants have descended into a level of debauchery and abasedness that would shock even the most sybaritic of Earthborn individuals. This is, as another pulp hero once said, "Civilization: ancient and wicked."

Although the behavior of the people in these places can amply sell both qualities, these spaces echo with an epochal decadence that makes one wonder if the inhabitants rotted the places, or the places corrupted the souls who live there. This shows up in the physical characteristics of these hidden parts of the world.

Dust-choked passages echo oddly with footsteps, and shadows seem to replay atrocities committed in centuries past. Galleries may still be littered with the skeletons of victims, and every district has its torture chamber and its charnel house. The art may be beautifully rendered, made from the most luxurious of substances, but it depicts scenes of utter horror.

Secret Passages, All Alike

What happens when secret places are built by secretive people, and improved upon for generations? They become a maze of hidden passages, unknown bolt-holes, whispered ways, and trapdoors. Many were made lifetimes ago, and forgotten by all who still live. Others are in current use, their secrets guarded carefully by their denizens.

Narrators should scatter secret passages and hidden doors liberally throughout the geographies of these parts of Barsoom. Every trap has a hidden exit. Every throne room a secret escape. Every jail a way out, and every treasure room a passage allowing unnoticed entry.

These passages may well be guarded by myriad traps, sentries, and beasts, but they are there for any clever enough to suss them out and brave enough to face their challenges.

Grand Technologies

At the center of most places in Prince of Helium era Barsoom are wonders of science and invention that would astound the most accomplished red Martians of the day. The therns have mastered breeding and animal husbandry. The First Born's waterworks hydrate an entire planet. In the north, Okar city streets are plied by hovercars, and their giant magnet defeats entire navies.

What wonders might you, as a narrator, put at the center of the action in your games? You can certainly stick with what's already known about Barsoom by using those described here, or by an early introduction of some of the weird science from the Jeddak of Jeddaks era. Or you can use Barsoom, other pulp, or real science of today to inspire brand-new creations of your own. Just be sure to make them more than props or window-dressing. Each should play an important role in at least a scene, if not the entire adventure or even campaign.



Locations in The Gods of Mars

The second book of the Barsoom novels takes us through a series of secret, unknown places. A complete catalogue of the dark dungeons, dank cells, and temples rotting with despair would be impossible. However, here is a detailing of the most significant points along John Carter's journey.

The Valley Dor

"I lay upon a close-cropped sward of red grass-like vegetation, and about me stretched a grove of strange and beautiful trees, covered with huge and gorgeous blossoms and filled with brilliant, voiceless birds."

The end of a journey down the River Iss is supposed to end in a paradise, and at first glance the Valley Dor appears to be exactly that. The Lost Sea of Korus gleams in the beaming sun, surrounded by a close-cropped and gentle, grassy park. The trees beyond are magnificent, surprising, and spaced like a carefully manicured garden. Surrounding it all are towering cliffs gleaming with great veins of gems and precious metals.

But the heaven is, in fact, a hell. The floor of the valley is patrolled by the terrible plant-men of Mars, directed by thern watchers to attack any who set foot in the valley. The glorious pilgrimage ends in a horrific death for most, and slavery under the harsh mastery of the Holy Therns for those who do survive.

Plot Seed

Legendary among the therns, but unheard-of by the races of the outside world, is a party of green and red Martians who reached the Valley Dor at the same time. Mighty warriors and canny tacticians, they fought their way to a defensible position and survived wave after wave of the plant-men. The position became a fortress, and the fortress a community that survived for more than one hundred years. The heroes could play a part or the entirety of this beautiful, bloody, and tragic story.

The Lost Sea of Korus

"To my left the sea extended as far as the eye could reach, before me only a vague, dim line indicated its further shore."

The only known surface sea of Barsoom, the Lost Sea of Korus lies at the far side of the Valley Dor, and is the final destination of the River Iss. Aside from the aquatic creatures known as silians, John Carter never describes or encounters what swimming things might inhabit the Lost Sea of Korus, but all depictions of other parts of the planet suggest they are not friendly. Narrators should feel free to "borrow" prehistoric predators and monsters from other games to populate these legendary waters.

Waters of this fabled sea seep further toward the pole, eventually entering the Sea of Omean. This is the water cycle of Barsoom. From the Omean, great and ancient machines pump the water into canals throughout Mars. The waters of those canals all eventually join the River Iss, which flows to the Lost Sea of Korus, to seep toward Omean once again.

Plot Seed

A group of captives of the First Born have discovered a map which indicates a series of caves leading under the ice, to open in a subterranean exit below the surface of the Lost Sea of Korus. The odyssey from their cells to the water, and the terrifying swim, is an adventure worthy of a series... or part of a hero's backstory.

The Mountains of Otz

"By day it is different. Then the corridors and chambers are filled with guards passing to and fro; slaves from the temples above come by hundreds to the granaries and storerooms. All is life then. You did not see it because I led you not in the beaten tracks, but through roundabout passages seldom used."

The Mountains of Otz separate the world of Barsoom from the domains of the therns and the First Born. They form a ring around the south pole, edifices over a mile high and gleaming with precious metals and gemstones. They are unscalable, and can only be passed by floating upon the River Iss, which enters through a stygian cavern in the face of the cliffs.

If the exterior of the mountains is imposing, the interior is nothing short of a nightmare. The entire range is honeycombed by an endless network of passages, chambers, corridors, and courts: the dungeons of the Holy Therns. There the slaves of this cannibalistic race live their lives of servitude and despair, with the corridors at night patrolled by hungry banths ready to turn captivity into death for those who attempt escape.

At the top of the Mountains of Otz lie the open-air citadels of the thern race. Here they live in luxury amid beautifully cultivated gardens and terraces, fearing only the regular raids by the First Born pirates.

Plot Seed

Pursuing a long-hated enemy, the heroes find themselves sprinting down long-abandoned tunnels in a chase that turns from a simple foot sprint to days, then weeks, of following a quarry tantalizingly close ahead. Eventually, the hunt leads to a door, which opens into a dusty but opulent audience chamber deep in the dungeons of the therns. Their enemy, and golden-locked thern guards, are waiting for them.

Land of Lost Souls

"...in the Land of Lost Souls between the Mountains of Otz and the ice barrier were many broad acres that needed no irrigation to bear rich harvests."

A rich, naturally irrigated valley of many acres set in the ice of the south pole, this area is habitable and cultivated despite its location. It runs along the bed of the River Iss, its canyon remembering the shape of the river at its ancient height. The walls are steep, but not unscalable, and on its soil gentle things grow.

The population here knows the terrible truth of the pilgrimage along the river. They escaped here, before or after being taken as slaves, and found themselves unable to leave. Both thern and First Born leave them be, as the area is neutral ground and nobody can survive crossing the ice sheet into the larger world. They have nothing worth stealing, and lack the numbers for true rebellion. They live a twilight existence, afraid to march to glorious death but unable to live the full life of warriors of Barsoom.

Plot Seed

The heroes arrive here en route to their escape from the First Born, or an attack on their city. Though it might be tempting to live in the relative safety and comfort of this valley, they have more pressing matters. They would need to motivate enough of their new compatriots to mount either an escape or an insurrection, with nothing but adventure and peril following its advent.

The South Pole of Barsoom

"We had now reached the southernmost extremity of the great ice barrier. It ended abruptly in a sheer wall thousands of feet high."

Although the passage above describes the ice sheet at the very bottom of Barsoom, the region of the south pole encompasses a variety of important geographic points. Imagine a set of concentric circles, or a target in a bulls-eye.

The outermost circle is the Mountains of Otz, a barrier to the outside world and home of the Holy Therns. Within that barrier is the beautiful Valley Dor with its clean-swept grasslands and terrible forests. Its internal border is the gleaming Lost Sea of Korus, and beyond it a shoreline close-set against the massive ice walls that begin the polar ice cap itself.

Many miles farther south from the ice wall is a single, enormous black shaft. It sinks thousands of feet into the dome-shaped cavern that houses the Sea of Omean and the citadel of the First Born.

Hideous monsters patrol every part of this legendary and terrible region, from banths in the tunnels of the therns to the plant-men in the Valley Dor, to even more terrible creatures in the dark and forgotten places. It is truly a realm of death where only the most capable and hardy of heroes can hope to survive and live free.

Plot Seed

Although the fate of the search team seeking John Carter at the north pole is well known and fully documented, presumably Helium sent a party to the opposite end of the planet. The story of that (possibly doomed) expedition has yet to be told. The player characters could participate in the expedition itself, or be sent to learn its fate.

Sea of Omean

"For quite half an hour we descended and then the shaft terminated abruptly in the dome of a mighty subterranean world. Below us rose and fell the billows of a buried sea. A phosphorescent radiance illuminated the scene. Thousands of ships dotted the bosom of the ocean. Little islands rose here and there to support the strange and colorless vegetation of this strange world."

Larger even than the Lost Sea of Korus, this body of water lies hidden in the bowels of the planet. Its surface is dotted with islands and plied by ships of the First Born, and it is home to the vast air navies that used to raid the therns and other populations of Barsoom for slaves, riches, and food. Among the islands is Shador, where the prisoners condemned beyond slavery are kept awaiting their final doom.

The dome exists in a perpetual twilight, lit by bioluminescent fungi growing in patches on its roof and walls. Despite this, the First Born guards stationed here abide by a day-and-night watch rotation, a legacy of when even the anciently subterranean people lived beneath the sky.

The sea also extends into tunnels beneath the surface of this basin. Pumps carry the waters outward to the canals which irrigate the dry ocean beds of the planet and provide food for the red cities. Other tunnels lead deep beneath the sea, to the citadel of the First Born and the Temple of Issus itself.

Plot Seed

Although belief in the omnipotence and divine power of Issus is overwhelmingly common among the First Born, it is not universal. An interesting series or campaign could be built around the quiet stirrings of a resistance on the Sea of Omean, slowly building power and alliances until the time is right, especially if multiple individuals simultaneously claimed to be new messiahs or to lead equally powerful sects within the movement.

First Born Citadel

"One may speak of scarlet sward and ivory-stemmed trees decked with brilliant purple blooms; of winding walks paved with crushed rubies, with emerald, with turquoise, even with diamonds themselves... even my eyes, for long years accustomed to the barbaric splendours of a Martian jeddak's court, were amazed at the glory of the scene."

Accessible primarily via submarine, through interminable flooded passages beneath the subterranean Sea of Omean, this city is the product of thousands of years of raids, opulence, and slave labor. Every building is a work of sumptuous art, every road strewn with jewels, every plant carefully manicured for centuries. It is a palace, but it is far from a paradise.

The slaves, taken by First Born raiders, live in constant fear and agony, condemned to die in monthly blood rituals to appease the Goddess Issus, who lives at the center of the complex in her Temple of Issus. Surrounding the temple is a garden not even John Carter could describe in full. Its beauty may be unrivaled in all of Barsoom.

Beneath the citadel are warrens of ancient and abandoned tunnels and chambers from previous generations of the First Born. None know their full extent or more than the barest hint of what secrets might lie forgotten in these dusty, sunless spaces.

Plot Seed

When Issus demanded a party of captives restore a portion of the tunnels beneath her palace, some of them escaped after a cave-in left them presumed dead. The player characters are among them when they discover secrets forgotten before even Issus came of age. They could be technologies, servant beings, even a plague, any of which could change the balance of power among the First Born. How will the heroes direct, use, or apply this newfound factor?

The Temple of the Sun

Within the Temple of Issus is a complex and cruel prison with a number of chambers equal to the number of days in the Barsoom year. Each chamber can only be opened on a given day, meaning one imprisoned inside must survive a full year before being seen again.

Sometimes, Issus throws an enemy into a room with no provisions so as to let them die of thirst with relative speed. Other times, she gives almost enough food to last a year so she can enjoy the knowledge of even worse torment. Those she hates the most, she puts in with a partner, and enough food for but a single prisoner to survive.

There is a secret passage into the Temple, where one can observe what is happening in each cell — and, if they so choose, enter to torment, capture, or release the captives therein.

Locations in The Warlord of Mars

Much like *The Gods of Mars*, the action in this third book of the series has John Carter traveling across the world, discovering heretofore unknown or intentionally hidden locales.

The Islands of the Damned

"Even now the low islands which dotted the broad stream were choked with the skeletons and half devoured carcasses of those who, through fear or a sudden awakening to the truth, had halted almost at the completion of their journey."

Just before the River Iss breaks from its underground flow through the Mountains of Otz, it widens into a slower patch set with many small islands. Over the centuries, pilgrims on their final journey rowed past here in the final stages of their journey to "paradise." Some quailed in sudden realization or intuition, and took to shore among the islands.

These damned souls are stuck here, eating only the fish they can catch or the pilgrims they can kill. They live among the bodies of the slain, in squalor and misery, until death claims them.

Further upriver, the Iss meets with various tributaries, forming a labyrinthine network of watery passages. These lead to an untold number of secret hideaways, entries, and exits... including at least one way into the citadel of the First Born.

Plot Seed

Not every being, whether red or green Martian castaway, thern rebel, or ferocious beast, is on the River Iss voluntarily. What if a group of heroes lost a fight on its banks, to have their unconscious forms thrown into her raging waters? They might awaken on the shore in a cavern, to try finding their way to the surface. Such a journey could be an adventure in itself, or simply the entry point into a long and storied campaign.

The North Pole

"For five days of cold and suffering and privation we traversed the rough and frozen way which lies at the foot of the ice-barrier. Fierce, fur-bearing creatures attacked us by daylight and by dark. Never for a moment were we safe from the sudden charge of some huge demon of the north."

A vast and towering cliff of ice encircles the north pole of Barsoom, cut only in one place: the infamous Carrion Caves. Once through the ice sheet, one finds snowy plains and craggy valleys populated by the Okar. Their cities are greenhouses, encased in domes that maintain a warm, humid environment despite the polar chill.

The capital of this region is Kadabra, an ancient city of wondrous towers and technologies. One of these technologies is the Guardian of the North, a huge spire that when electrified drags metal objects up to and including the size of battleships toward it to crash, supplying the Okar with slaves.

Plot Seed

A cabal of Okar agents, wearing the resonating rings, enters into the service of Salensus Oll to try to steal the secret of the Guardian of the North. Their jeddak believes that he can build his own, making their city the most powerful in Okar. The heroes might be that cabal, or agents of Kadabra, who learn of the plot and attempt to use it to aid their escape.

The Carrion Caves

"And ever since that long-gone day have the dead of this fabled land been carried to the Carrion Caves, that in death and decay they might serve their country and warn away invading enemies."

This series of twenty-seven connected caverns forms the only land route into the interior of the north pole, home of the Okars. In ages past, they fought off an army of attacking Martians at its mouth, and filled the spaces with the dead of that battle. They continue to place their dead and their trash there to make the caves horrific to any who might consider entry.

Nor is the hazard purely to one's senses. The rot attracts herds of apts, and the terrible beasts devour all but the most ferocious and canny of intruders. Most times, over a dozen of the fierce predators wander and hunt throughout the caverns, but once each month all will sleep in a single room with but one awake to stand watch at any given time.

Plot Seed

A dear friend of the heroes takes a token of importance with him on an expedition to the north. The only survivor returns, telling of the Caves and the friend's death there. The heroes decide to retrieve the token, which is even now in the belly of the largest apt.

The Forest Of Kaol

"Occasional hunting parties have traveled to this out-of-the-way corner of the globe, but the hostility of the natives has usually brought disaster upon them, so that even the sport of hunting the strange and savage creatures... proved insufficient lure even to the most intrepid warriors."

The city of Kaol rests in a natural depression, and moisture from the surrounding regions drains into it. This amasses enough water for a forest to grow, forming a swampy bayou extending for hundreds of miles. The cities built within it derive ample food and supplies from the plants and animals of these woods, and have little contact with the outside world; with no need for trade, and a forest thick enough to deter most invaders, they simply don't need it.

The forest, like most Barsoomian environments, is home to monsters, including hornets the size of large bulls called sith, and a variety of intelligent and carnivorous plants. A single, raised highway runs from the forest's borders to its capital city, allowing travelers to stay clear of many crawling dangers and the treacherous mud of the swamp.

Plot Seed

The jeddak of Kaol is late returning from a hunt, and the heroes fear he has come to a bad end. Worse, factions throughout Kaol's jeds would like nothing better than to use this opportunity to seize power for themselves. The heroes go on a journey through the forests, fighting monsters in the thicket and challenging conspirators within city walls. Can they find and rescue their rightful ruler before the nation splinters into civil war?



Inspired Locations

The following locations do not appear "on screen" in either of the Prince of Helium era novel, but are either implied or inspired by the descriptions in the text. They're provided here as examples for narrators to use as is, expand upon, or alter however they see fit.

The Citadel of Truth

Although word of only one escapee from the therns is common knowledge, there are too many slaves in the Mountains of Otz for all to remain their entire lives. Further, those who essay the pilgrimage down the River Iss are among the mightiest and the canniest of Martians, not likely to submit meekly to bondage even from the divine. Of course, those who escaped knew returning to their homelands was a guarantee of horrible and ignoble death.

Instead, they followed half-remembered rumors of their former lives, barely-heard whispers from the dungeons of the therns, and subtle marks in speech and stone to a city hidden at the darkest edge of a forested ravine along the course of the River Iss. There live those who know the terrible truth of the therns, but dare not attempt to spread it to their brothers and sisters. It is a remarkably peaceful place, where utterly changed green and red Martians eke out a bare existence while recovering from the shock of their discovery.

Plot Seed

Who is to say John Carter didn't know of this city when he spread the word about Issus' downfall throughout Barsoom? He may have sent an expedition to find them and enlist their aid, righting an ancient and ghastly wrong while at the same time reuniting them with their families. Perhaps the heroes of this expedition engaged in a breakneck race with an army of therns bent on razing the city before its existence could prove the heresy of Carter and Tars Tarkas.

The Temple of Ossriss

Beneath the citadel of the First Born and its terrible Temple of Issus lies level upon level of secret, abandoned passages. Entire cities lie empty and yawning beneath the feet of the decadent civilization above. In one haunted corner far beneath the most deeply-explored reaches is a temple grander, bloodier, and even more ancient than the Temple of Issus.

Issus is ancient beyond measure, but still a mortal being. Before her, the Goddess Ossriss reigned supreme in the city under the pole. When Issus betrayed and murdered the being that had been her mentor, she built a new city atop the old and waited for her subjects to forget. Murals and manuscripts in the temple prove this beyond a doubt, if only eyes could reach them to see.

Plot Seed

The secrets within the temple go beyond the fact that Issus herself has a beginning (and therefore an end). Within the knowledge held there is information about what caused the Great Drying, and how the different races of Barsoom were born. These truths, if brought before the right jeddaks, could change life on Mars forever. If brought to the wrong parties, they would result only in the bearer's horrible demise.

The Steel Gyre

Not all of the vessels in the great air battle near the end of *The Gods of Mars* crashed when they were disabled. Several hundred rose out of control to a height where their crews could not breathe. By chance, their boarding cables became entangled and now a floating island of damaged and half-destroyed warships floats in the upper atmosphere of Barsoom.

The mass is nearly a mile across, consisting of fliers of all types and from all nations. The same can be said of the bodies and equipment strewn across their decks. Though no survivors lived to tell of its existence, it will next reach the sight of civilized observers in a handful of weeks. Salvage, challenge, and mystery await those brave enough to reach and board the wreckage.

Plot Seed

A jeddak mad with grief insists that the heroes go to the Gyre and retrieve the body of his son, because his wife will not accept that their child is dead. The party arrives only to discover the derelicts have acquired new inhabitants, ferocious creatures accustomed to the thin air. They must battle these foes while conducting a room-by-room search through ships lying at all angles.

Sorrosin's Library

Sorrosin is an Okarian, far older than the oldest still living at the poles. He considers himself a scholar and a historian, and has spent half his life traveling Barsoom in disguise collecting histories, songs, and tales from every race on the planet. The other half of his life he spends in his hidden library, collating the information to discern rumor from fact, truth from gossip, and to accumulate the most complete and accurate history of Barsoom ever assembled.

The library is a tower sunken into the dirt of a wrinkle of hills about a day's journey from the north pole's ice wall. Within it are thousands of books and millions of pages of notes. When Sorrosin is absent, his tamed guard apts silently roam the courtyards and fiendish traps wait in the halls. When he is present, he accepts visitors for days' worth of conversation and in-depth interviews, before poisoning their food and feeding the bodies to his apts.

Plot Seed

A corrupted ruler has learned of the existence of the library and wishes mention of his foulest transgressions expunged from the record. The heroes are dispatched to carry out the order by the ruler, who claims the records are false. Upon their arrival, Sorrosin makes it plain that the records are absolutely true and accurate, and the heroes must then decide what to do with the disturbing knowledge. After all, loyalty and honor on Barsoom can leave heroes in difficult situations when the two conflict.

Great Graveyard

Just before the River Iss leaves its passages beneath the Mountains of Otz to spill into the Valley Dor, it makes a sudden, 90-degree bend. A shadowed corner of this leads to a cavern with a wide, slow eddy and a broad, shallow bank. Over the centuries, the current has deposited tens of thousands of corpses on this beach. Some drowned when they couldn't navigate the turn. Others died on the Islands of the Damned, and floated here.

The result is a charnel house with piles of bones taller than a zitidar, rattling in the wind from the river. It is a dark, unwholesome place where even the First Born won't go and the therns do not tarry. Monsters gnaw the bones, and a superstitious dread fills the place like a fog.

Plot Seed

As a rite of passage, therns wishing to advance in rank are sometimes sent here to recover a possession of somebody known to have died and been washed to this shore. Often, the advancement goes only to the one to return with the prize, leading to backstabbing, intrigue, and infighting alongside combat with the carrion-eaters who burrow among the dead. The heroes need to recover a possession of a beloved, lost comrade or prevent a particularly heinous thern from winning the grisly race.

New Powers

The ***John Carter of Mars*** core rulebook presents the narrator and players with most of the strange powers that are featured in the Barsoom novels. However, that does not mean those impressive and bizarre abilities are necessarily the only powers that can be found in a campaign. The worlds of Edgar Rice Burroughs and his pulp fiction contemporaries were often filled with individuals, creatures, and groups that possessed strange abilities. Some pulp heroes became famous for their powers, such as Mandrake the Magician's incredible hypnotic abilities or the Black Bat's superhuman senses.

Such abilities are not strictly found within canonical Barsoom, but Burroughs himself was more than willing to add new strange powers to his stories to further a plot. Narrators can do the same, giving characters powers that enable new plots and fuel adventures. Players wishing to give their characters such powers should discuss them with their narrator to ensure it makes sense within the campaign for a player hero to develop a particular ability. In some cases, a unique item or special training must first be acquired through play before a player hero can develop strange powers.

Brief Warnings

The Barsoom tales are largely rationalist. Things have a reason for why they exist and an explanation for how they operate. These reasons and explanations may seem quaint or fantastical by today's standards, but they are important to maintaining the feel of the setting. The answer to the "why?" and "how?" of some strange phenomena is never "a wizard did it" — unless that wizard is actually an eccentric scientist taking some fringe scientific theory and stretching it to the edge of possibility. In the end, Burroughsian "magic" always has some rational (if mind-bending) explanation behind it.

Narrators should keep this in mind when designing their own powers and approving those made by players. Coming up with implausible explanations for a character's ability to shoot flames from their eyes or transform into a beast might seem unnecessary, but in truth it keeps Barsoom grounded firmly on the side of science fiction fantasy and not simply fantasy. Without these reasons and rationalizations, the setting starts to feel subtly "off," which can affect the enjoyment of players and narrators who expect to be playing in a Burroughsian-style science fiction fantasy setting.

To assist with this idea, all the powers here come with some possible explanations for their source and method of operation. These are mostly of the 20th century pulp variety, so they may not always match up perfectly with modern science, but then neither do eighth-ray-powered airships and radium guns. These are just some possible explanations; narrators and players are encouraged to invent their own.

Also, narrators should remember that adding these powers opens up a campaign in potentially interesting but also disruptive ways. Once the player heroes encounter a character with Dream Travel, or some other fantastic power, they are aware the setting has those abilities — and that genie cannot be put back in the bottle. Some players will desire those powers for their own characters, while others may begin to view other parts of the setting as less exciting. Some powers such as flight or pyrokinesis might need to be tightly controlled or carefully explained so they fit into campaigns without transforming them too much. A winged Martian from a small tribe of undiscovered winged Martians would be a suitably pulpy addition to a campaign, whereas an outbreak of random mutations among the populace that gifts many with powerful abilities is more appropriate to Marvel Comics' *Uncanny X-Men* than ***John Carter of Mars***.

More of a Guideline than a Rule

The various tests suggested here for using a particular power are suggestions based on which attributes seem to best represent certain powers and abilities. Like all default attribute combinations, they are suggestions and guidelines, not hard-line rules. If a different combination of attributes makes sense, feel free to use them. In addition, characters with special powers may develop talents that allow them to use particular attributes in the same way they can for other actions and tests.

However, narrators and players should remember that when using attributes to defend against powers capable of attack and damage, the attributes used in defense determine what sorts of damage the target suffers. For example, allowing a psychic attack to be resisted with **Cunning + Might** means that damage taken will be in the form of Injury stress and Wound afflictions. This isn't necessarily wrong or incorrect in many circumstances — psychic combat in fiction is filled with characters bleeding from mental assault. It's simply something to consider.

Battle Sense

Experienced warriors are often said to develop a sort of special intuition when it comes to combat. They can more easily sense and adapt to the ebb and flow of battle, making fighting easier. A character with this power has developed this ability to nigh-superhuman levels, allowing them to easily track multiple foes, anticipate attacks from any angle, and quickly play out possible fight scenarios to pick optimal angles and methods of attack.

POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

- Combination of telepathic and combat training to allow the warrior to sense hostile intent and react immediately.
- Primal instincts awakened and augmented by scientific experimentation.
- Focused genius or savant mental capabilities devoted to solving combat dilemmas and conflicts as they occur.

TALENT

BATTLE SENSE (GRADE 6)

- **Circumstance:** When engaged in physical combat.
- **Effect:** You may ask one "yes or no" question of the narrator about each opponent in a fight. You also gain a bonus d20 to attack and defend against any opponent you are aware of in physical combat. This talent works for any physical attack regardless of weapon or method and includes nonlethal attacks such as attempts to grapple and disarm.



Dream Travel

Telepathic communication on Barsoom is regular between active, waking minds. However, it might be possible for a skilled or powerful telepath to enter the dreams of another. This might be done as a way to communicate or as a form of attack, sending one's "dream self" to assault the dreamer.

The idea of dream travel in many cultures carries a mystical significance, but this need not automatically be the case. Science could be the source of such powers as easily as mysticism — especially in the rationalist worlds of Edgar Rice Burroughs where "magic" is in fact advanced science or psychic powers.

POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

- Powerful telepathic abilities allowing the character to contact the sleeping mind.
- Drawing the target and themselves into a "dream plane" that allows them to interact.

TALENT

DREAM TRAVEL (GRADE 4)

- **Circumstance:** When seeking to enter or affect the dreams of another.
- **Effect:** To use this ability, the you target a sleeping person and make an **Empathy + Cunning** test. The base difficulty for this is Challenging (D2) for a sleeping character within your sight. Touching the target lowers the difficult by 1, while targets who are unseen or far away raise the difficulty by 1 or more based on how far away they are, how well you knows the target, and their location.

  Remembering an important piece of information or message from a dream requires an Average (D1) test, usually **Reason + Empathy**.

  Once inside a dream, you may attempt to attack the dreamer. Any weapons used gain the Psychic quality, replacing any other qualities it possesses.

Advanced Dream Travel

It's possible a character adept at dream manipulation could develop an advanced version of this talent that would allow them to always use certain attributes to attack or defend, do additional damage, and otherwise amplify their prowess in dream states. Such talents and talent grades are constructed the same as any other talent; they simply operate when dream traveling.

Flight

Natural or unassisted flight is out of the range of most pulp heroes, but there are exceptions. A character with this power is one of the rare individuals who can take to the air without an equilibrimotor or similar device. Flying characters have a definite advantage in maneuverability and mobility over other characters, even over the fabled leaping ability of Earthborn characters on Barsoom.

POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

- Natural wings that allow the character to fly.
- An implant that generates eighth ray energies that hold the character aloft.
- Telekinetic power manifesting as levitation and self-propulsion.

TALENT

FLIGHT (RANK 5)

- **Circumstance:** When moving through the air.
- **Effect:** You fly under your own power, moving one range of distance per action automatically unless blocked or hindered. You gain a bonus 2d20 to any tests that involve avoiding obstructions, obstacles, and attempts to hinder their movement while they are in the air.

Hyper-Attraction

Barsoom is filled with people of great beauty and charisma, but someone with this ability takes this beyond mere physical traits and charm. The character's beauty, charm, and magnetism are so strong they can overcome logic and other emotions.

This power only works on Martians, humans, and similar creatures. Beasts, synthetic life, and exceptionally alien beings are not compelled by this power.

POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

- Special pheromones that attract others.
- A form of projective empathy that spreads feelings of love, devotion, or deep friendship.
- An advanced form of sociology and psychology combined with neurolinguistics or some other method to coerce and convince others.

TALENT

HYPER-ATTRACTION (GRADE 3)

- **Circumstance:** When seeking to attract or charm others.
- **Effect:** You gain a bonus d20 on any tests where charisma or physical attractiveness would be a benefit. Further, you may attempt an **Empathy + Passion** (D2) test opposed by a target's **Daring + Reason**. Success means the target suffers a complication reflecting their infatuation with, or their feelings of friendship or devotion towards, you. This complication ends after the target has no contact with you for at least one session or the character acts hostile or otherwise negatively toward the affected person.

Advanced versions of this talent are possible, granting additional bonuses and abilities. Examples include the ability to automatically charm and enthrall minions (+1 grade per minion), the ability to inflict a social attack that has the Psychic quality through sheer force of personality (+2 grades for a 2 Psychic attack), and attraction so powerful it makes it difficult for someone to attack the character (+2 grades to use Passion to defend against any attack with bonus d20).

Hyper-Contortion

Contortionists are often viewed as both performers and oddities. The ability to bend and twist one's body in unlikely or seemingly impossible ways is entertaining for most, but can be extremely useful for adventurers who frequently find themselves confined or imprisoned. In true pulp fashion, a superhuman version of contortionism would allow for even more useful applications of this bizarre ability, such as stretching an arm out of its socket to reach an important item, or pushing yourself through seemingly impassable bonds, vents, and bars.

POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

- Physical conditioning taken to extremes through meditation and training.
- A natural mutation allowing the body to be excessively flexible and resilient.
- Some medical drug or substance that alters the body, making it malleable.

TALENT

HYPER-CONTORTION (GRADE 3)

- **Circumstance:** When trying to escape bonds or fit into very tight or small spaces.
- **Effect:** You can fit your body through any space that you can squeeze your head through, no matter how tight or uncomfortable. You can also compress yourself to fit into small spaces too uncomfortable for normal humanoids. You reduce the difficulty by 1 on any test to escape bonds and fit through tight spaces, including attempts to grapple, and gain a bonus d20 on such tests.

Hyperactive Senses

This character's regular senses — sight, hearing, smell, taste, and touch — are remarkably acute. They can feel the slight breeze from a door opening, see in near-total darkness, or track and identify others by scent. These senses can make one vulnerable to sensory overload, but most of the time they are an incredible gift. A character lacking a particular sense who possesses this power can easily compensate for much of its absence, developing a sonar-like ability when blinded or feeling vibrations through their skin if deafened.

POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

- Evolutionary mutation that makes the character the ultimate hunter or more able to avoid danger.
- Meditation techniques that allow automatic filtering of distractions so the user can focus on small, distant, or subtle sensory details.
- Surgical alteration that implants animal or mechanical parts to enhance perception.

TALENT

HYPERACTIVE SENSES (GRADE 3)

- **Circumstance:** When making sense-based tests.
- **Effect:** When making any sensory-based test, lower the difficulty of the test by 1. You may also ask any "yes or no" question about a scene, character, or situation based on sensory details, even minor ones.

Normal attacks and defenses don't use this bonus — the chaos of battle counteracts the benefit of enhanced senses. Characters with the ability to use their senses in combat would possess a more advanced version of this talent, giving them bonuses when attacking or defending in circumstances where their senses would provide great benefit. Also, more limited versions of this power could exist, providing only enhanced vision or hearing. These would be a lower grade.

Hypnosis

Hypnosis is a staple in many pulp stories. Pulp action gives the real-world practice of hypnotism a serious boost — it can be performed more easily and to greater effect than in reality. Pulp-style hypnosis lets someone alter memories, implant suggestions, and convince others they are seeing or experiencing something they are not. It's not exactly "mind control" (see ***John Carter of Mars***, Chapter 14: Secrets of Barsoom), but rather more like "mind deceiving" — though a clever hypnotist can often get a subject to act as if under their control.

POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

- Expert training in hypnosis and psychology.
- Stage magic and other performing arts usable to enthrall and influence an audience.
- Martian telepathy refined for use in subverting and altering memory and influencing actions.

TALENT

HYPNOSIS (GRADE 3)

- **Circumstance:** Hypnotizing another.
- **Effect:** Choose a subject who can see or hear you. Make an **Empathy + Reason** (D1) test opposed by the subject's **Empathy + Reason**. This is treated as a conflict action, but the target does not know they are being attacked unless you fail. Success inflicts 2 of stress with the Psychic quality. Momentum can be spent to increase damage as normal. This attack can be repeated in later turns until it fails, at which point the target realizes someone is trying to hypnotize them and they cannot be targeted with this ability again for the rest of the session.

Once a target suffers one or more afflictions from hypnosis they are hypnotized. For each Madness affliction the target suffers from Hypnosis, the user of this power may give them one command. Commands may make people see things or experience things that aren't there, such as "you are freezing cold" or "there is a terrifying apt attacking you."

Once a hypnotic command is performed, the affliction that caused it vanishes.

A hypnotic command lasts until it is performed or the hypnosis is broken. A character under hypnosis can try to break through once per scene by succeeding in an **Empathy + Reason** (D3) test. Another character may assist or use teamwork to help them, but only if they know the target is hypnotized. Breaking free from hypnotism converts the hypnotic commands into standard afflictions which may be recovered normally.

Iron Body

Whether or not the character's skin and body look any different, they are decidedly tougher and more durable than others. The character's toughened dermis and durable skeleton turn blows that cut, burn, or otherwise severely injure others into a minor annoyance.

POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

- Advanced martial arts techniques that allow for the toughening of skin and body to absorb great punishment.
- Mutation or surgical alteration that infuses a durable substance with the character's skin and bones.
- Deadened nerves reduce shock and pain from damage, lessening its effect.

TALENT

IRON BODY (GRADE 3)

- **Circumstance:** When taking Injury stress.
- **Effect:** You may ignore the first 2 Injury stress from an attack. Also, if you take no Injury stress from a primarily physical attack, such as being shot with a firearm, you can ignore any additional damage caused by qualities from the same attack, such as the Fearsome quality of firearms.



Project Pain

While most use of psychic abilities on Barsoom is passive — communication and reading of thoughts — a powerful psychic may be able to project harmful, painful energies at a target. This could be done in a number of ways, from mental assault to somehow directly inflaming a person's nerves. This form of attack would be very hard to detect or disarm, making it a favorite weapon of any who possess it. Less scrupulous individuals would no doubt use this power to torture and torment a target, placing them in sheer agony without leaving a mark on them.

POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

- Telepathically projecting feelings of pain directly into the target's mind.
- Using telekinetic manipulation, chemicals, or some other method to inflame nerve endings.
- Illusions of painful attacks or damage so real it causes real pain and trauma on a target.

TALENT

PROJECT PAIN (GRADE 4)

- **Circumstance:** When seeking to cause another pain.
- **Effect:** You gain a special form of attack that you can use to cause pain in a target. To use this power, you make an **Empathy + Cunning** (D1) test opposed by the target's **Daring + Reason**. For each range beyond Near the difficulty of this action increases by 1.

Success inflicts 3 of stress with the Psychic quality. If this attack causes an affliction, any future uses of it on the same target may be considered to have the Fearsome quality if the user desires — the ability to cause pain at a whim is terrifying to those who have suffered it before.

Pyrokinesis

Psychic powers are well known on Barsoom. However, they are primarily telepathic in nature, involving communicating with or manipulating minds. The ability to mentally excite molecules, causing an increase in temperature and spontaneous fire, is theoretically possible but otherwise unknown. Pyrokinesis as a power rests at the edge of pulp heroics and later period comic book abilities, but it is possible a strong psychic, alien visitor, or other unique and formidable individual might possess such a terrifying and destructive power.

POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

- Telekinesis centered around subconsciously moving molecules to generate heat.
- An implant or mutated organ that allows the character to collect and project heat remotely.

TALENT

PYROKINESIS (GRADE 6)

- **Circumstance:** When attacking or targeting a flammable object.
- **Effect:** You make an attack dealing 2 of stress with the Explosive quality that you may use to attack others or ignite flammable objects. This is an innate attack and cannot be disarmed, though specially crafted medical substances or other methods of keeping you from concentrating may temporarily disable the ability. Attacking a target is a conflict action using a **Reason + Passion** (D1) test. For each range beyond Near the difficulty of this action increases by 1. Igniting a flammable object also uses **Reason + Passion**, though the difficulty is based on how easy it is to ignite, melt, or burn the object. — dry straw or twigs would be Simple (D0) while wet wood would be Daunting (D3) and substances

Robotic Body

Synthetic mechanical life is a staple of pulp science fiction, though it is largely absent from the work of Edgar Rice Burroughs. He tended to favor the biological synthetic, be they Hormads or some other product of a Frankenstein-like attempt to create artificial life. When minds and brains are swapped using advanced science it is into other living bodies, not machines.

However, what holds true for Burroughs' canonical world isn't necessarily true for individual ***John Carter of Mars*** campaigns. The Robotic Body power exists for narrators and players who wish to explore the idea of a living brain or consciousness in an artificial form. This is presented not as a talent, but a template to be used in place of a character's regular racial benefits and bonuses.

POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

- A human brain transplanted into a robotic body.
- A consciousness projected into an artificial form.
- A robot created with such skill as to become self-aware.

TEMPLATE

The following template is used for characters whose brain or consciousness has been transferred into a Robotic Form. They lose their normal racial or cultural bonuses — a side effect of the trauma of becoming a mechanical life form. It costs 25xp to gain a robotic body.

Attribute Bonuses: +4 Might, -1 Empathy, -1 Passion

Robotic bodies possess the knowledge and capabilities of the mind within them, but they have certain capabilities because of their synthetic bodies — see What You Can Do. They also gain the following Talent and Flaw.

TALENT

STEEL BODY (GRADE 5)

- **Circumstance:** When taking or dealing physical damage.
- **Effect:** You ignore 2 Injury stress dealt from a successful attack and may always defend against physical damage using your Might. Any melee or thrown weapon attacks you make inflict +2 damage.

FLAW

CURSE MY METAL BODY

You are no longer fully organic and you cannot feel things the same or as strongly as living beings of mortal flesh. Once per session the narrator can present you with a complication based on your robotic form and the problems it causes. If you refuse the complication, you lose 5 Momentum. If you cannot afford the Momentum, any excess is taken as Confusion damage.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

- You don't need to eat, drink, or breathe.
- You do need to occasionally recharge your power source but otherwise do not tire.
- You resist heat, cold, radiation, and other effects beyond human norms.
- You can survive by being rebuilt or having your consciousness implanted in a new form as long as your brain or consciousness survives.
- You are capable of lifting great weights and applying large amounts of force without worrying about a fragile human form.

Past Lives

The character can tap into the knowledge and skills of previous incarnations, either from the same genetic line or connected by some other method such as reincarnation.

To properly use this power, the narrator or player controlling the character needs to at least loosely define a character's past so it can be drawn upon in play. Not every detail of a past life needs fleshing out, but enough must be known to answer realistically, "Could my past self be of help here?" Also, not every past life must be detailed when this power is taken, but once established they should be noted so they can be referenced again.

POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

- A genetic memory that allows the character to access memories of ancestors.
- A selective psychic power that allows for post-cognitive flashes along a particular bloodline.
- A consciousness reincarnated over multiple lives.

TALENT

PAST LIVES (GRADE 3)

- **Circumstance:** When invoking a past life.
- **Effect:** Once per scene you may connect a test to a past life that grants you particular insight or lends its knowledge to help the task succeed. This insight gives you a bonus d20 to this test and provides 2 bonus Momentum if successful. Alternatively, this power may be used to ask a "yes or no" question about something one of your past lives would know; this counts as the power's use for the scene.

Vampiric Drain

Vampires are a classic foe. Legends of vampiric creatures and spirits are centuries old on Jasoom, and it is likely Barsoom has some similar tales in its past. Vampires of some sort are also classic pulp antagonists, from blood-drinking fiends to strange creatures that steal life in a variety of ways. This power is designed as a catch-all ability to represent a creature who somehow drains strength and life from a victim. Narrators may wish to develop variations of this power to suit the exact flavor of vampiric threat they add to a ***John Carter*** campaign.

This power isn't really suited for player heroes. While pulp heroes can at times be surprisingly ruthless or violent by modern standards, sucking the life out of others is an ability firmly in the purview of villains and twisted abominations, not heroes.

POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS

- A classic blood-drinking vampire, a product of weird science or mutation.
- A psychic vampire that drains the mental energies from others.
- A life-sucking ability that draws the very "life force" from someone.

TALENT

VAMPIRIC DRAIN (GRADE 6)

- **Circumstance:** When attacking another in Immediate range.
- **Effect:** You gain ability to perform a special conflict action inflicting 2 of stress. This attack has either the Sharp, Fearsome, or Psychic quality — chosen when the power is taken. Whenever this attack causes an affliction in an opponent, you can remove one of your own afflictions. If the attacker has no afflictions, you may instead recover up to 5 stress. Using this power on a minion allows you to recover 1 stress per minion drained, or recover an affliction for 3 Momentum. This power only works on living beings.

Vampiric drain attacks are horrifying to witness, with victims visibly bleeding, shriveling, or otherwise diminishing as their life flows into the attacker. This is always seen as a Dishonorable attack and using it will quickly label the character as some sort of unwholesome and inhuman threat — only the truly evil and twisted would follow or aid a character with such powers.

More potent versions of this power could exist, inflicting additional damage or gaining bonuses to vampiric drain attacks. These would increase the grade cost of the power as normal.

NARRATING THE ERA

With arms outstretched toward the red eye of the great star I stood praying for a return of that strange power which twice had drawn me through the immensity of space, praying as I had prayed on a thousand nights before during the long ten years that I had waited and hoped.
– John Carter, *The Gods of Mars*

The Prince of Helium era stands out as the time during which the most change was wrought the most quickly over the face of Barsoom. Discoveries, conflicts, and alliances combined to utterly transform the society of the Red Planet, creating a circumstance which never before and never again happened on Mars.

By the end of the final two years of this period, a world-spanning religion had toppled and peace reigned between four races previously at war for generations. A new stratum of leadership was created, and given to a man who hadn't even been born on Barsoom! Applied correctly, the key themes and events of this time can give your ***John Carter of Mars*** games an epic scope and scale unique to these turbulent years.

What follows is a set of notes for narrators to help focus their Prince of Helium era games on the aspects of this time of change, upheaval, and heroism. As always, these notes are about the era as it appears in the novels by Edgar Rice Burroughs. You should use only the aspects that appeal to you and your play group, eliminating or altering anything you choose. This is *your* Barsoom, and *your* Prince of Helium era.



Common Themes and Tone

Earlier chapters have covered how the lands, technology, cultures, and inhabitants of this part of Mars' history combine to create a setting unlike any other. What connects these tissues is the *spirit* of the age, the themes and tone that bind them together. If the setting provides the lines of the pictures you paint with your game, the tone provides the color.

As with the earlier volume in the John Carter series, it's the underlying philosophies of *The Gods of Mars* and *The Warlord of Mars* that made them stand out among other stories of the pulp years, to still be popular today. One can find such themes in every book of the *John Carter* series, but a few of them stand out as especially strong and important during this time.

Secrets and discovery, the triumph of rationality, the power of friendship, and absolute optimism combine to allow John Carter and his friends to create world-changing circumstances... and to bring them to bear in events of massive scope and scale. These factors work together to put a bow of grandeur and high adventure on the story's already substantial narrative gift.

The degree to which a narrator instills games of this era with these key themes is a major part of how appropriate for the era their games will be. That's not to say it can't be fun to play an *inappropriate* game set in this era, but it in some ways misses an opportunity. If you're playing in an era during which millennia-old religions toppled like dominos, and armies of millions clashed under sky and underground, the petty duels of a princeling or a quest to avenge a single person's honor might seem pretty pale.

Below are some thoughts for narrators to consider when preparing and running sessions set in this part of Martian history, to help you infuse the stories with the aspects of the Prince of Helium era that make it unique.

Secrets and Discovery

Discovery in the Dotar Sojat era is a matter of newcomers to Barsoom (both John Carter and the reader) encountering unknown cultures, vistas, creatures, and individuals. It is an adventurous kind of discovery, full of wonder and excitement even while in the midst of great perils.

The discoveries of the Prince of Helium era are more sinister, as the secrets uncovered are the results of millennia of carefully crafted lies. Conspiracy is always close at hand on Barsoom, but such deeply believed deceptions of such broad scope are most emblematic of this era. Here we see the squalor of Mars' conspiracies, the subversion of her values, and the cunning of her most wicked rulers.

As you prepare your scenarios, look for secrets large and small to work into the plot. Vital information isn't discovered in the lab or overheard in a great hall, but found in a dusty lockbox in an abandoned room, or sussed out while eavesdropping on a clandestine meeting. The structure of adventures should be revealed layer by layer, with an ever-deep-

ening progression of esoteric knowledge confronting the heroes with ever-increasing odds.

At the table, play up what the heroes don't know. Tantalize them with secrets just outside the circle of their light. You can even vary your voice tone and body language, to lend a surreptitious air to everything you reveal. Creating a feel of things *hidden* that could prove very dangerous indeed will keep your players on edge as the suspense builds toward an ultimate, hotly anticipated reveal.

Consider an adventure where the heroes must make a raid on an enemy city. In more martial eras, it might be most appropriate for their spies to bring them plans of the city, guard rotation intelligence, and specs on the weaknesses of the city gate. The heroes would quickly analyze the information, and use it when they made their attack.

By contrast, a Prince of Helium era adventure would make gathering the information a key aspect of the plot. Only through searching forgotten archives or clandestine forays into the enemy city could they become informed enough to hatch a workable plan. Naturally, their route would not be through the front door, but via a secret portal long forgotten but known to a choice few.

The Princess is in Another Castle...

Although the trope is used repeatedly in these and other Barsoom novels (and a core component of an incredibly popular video game franchise), be wary of using secret doors and hidden escapes to rob your players of their victories too often. They should be able to achieve concrete progress at least every few game sessions, and not constantly believe their goal will again be whisked out of their reach.

Far better to give them the goal they thought they were striving towards, complete with the renown and accolades it accompanies, and then to expose a new secret leading them toward ever-greater stakes, adventure, and rewards.

Rationality

Rationality and belief in the value of science, observation, and analysis is part of every book in the Barsoom novels, but comes into its true primacy during the Prince of Helium era. Over the course of two brief years, a scientific mind topples the regimes of multiple nations by exposing the lie behind their religion.

The conflict of blind faith versus rational examination is at the core of this theme, and plays out again and again. It's spelled out most clearly in the conversation between Xodar and John Carter while imprisoned together in their cell in the Sea of Omean. Xodar had been a true believer in the omnipotence and godhood of his ruler Issus, until Carter spoke to the rational part of his spirit.

"I will say a few more words, Xodar, with no intent to wound your feelings further, but rather that you may give thought to the fact that while we live we are still more the arbiters of our own fate than is any god. Issus, you see, has not struck me dead, nor is she rescuing her faithful Xodar from the clutches of the unbeliever who defamed her fair beauty. No, Xodar, your Issus is a mortal old woman. Once out of her clutches and she cannot harm you."

After some time, Xodar responds. *"I have been thinking very hard, John Carter, of all the new ideas you gave me a few hours since. Little by little I have been piecing together the things that you said which sounded blasphemous to me then with the things I have seen in my past life and dared not even think about for fear of bringing down upon me the wrath of Issus... I am ready to cast off the ties that have bound me."*

Such an exchange, such an appeal to rationality, occurs again when John Carter tells the red Martians the truth about the therns and the Valley Dor, and still again when he is unjustly accused in the court at Kaol. It's as important to Carter's survival and success as the strength of his sword arm, and the power of his friends' loyalty.

Your games can mirror the books with a combination of attribute tests and Momentum to mark the progress of convincing a friendly but skeptical acquaintance. Once the heroes have succeeded in enough social tests, the non-player character can "unlock," wholeheartedly believing what they had previously dismissed and all the more ready to help.

Consider a social conflict where the heroes must convince a small band of mercenaries to back their cause instead of the one for which they were initially hired. They might have the options of tricking the mercenaries, or intimidating them through a show of force, or seducing their leader. But in the Prince of Helium era, the narrator might make the easiest path that of rationally, passionately setting out the facts of the situation, and how the heroes' side is the right, honorable, and intelligent path.

Religion in Barsoom

Given the identity of the villains of *The Gods of Mars* and *The Warlord of Mars*, and the nature of the global deception and conspiracy, one could be forgiven for thinking of the Prince of Helium books as anti-religious. Indeed, Burroughs himself was a self-proclaimed atheist in a time when that was uncommon.

That doesn't mean you should run an anti-religious game, however; myth and religion are core to Martian culture. Even sticking with the exact stories of the era, Issus is clearly a *false* goddess, not a flawed divine figure. However, there's plenty of room for adventures that never even touch on the sticky subject at all.



Friendship and Love

As he did in the Dotar Sojat era, John Carter makes fast friends with the iconoclasts and rebels of an entire world. Across three nations, he forges bonds that supercede centuries of tradition, religion, and patriotism. Leading those companions, he accomplishes the previously impossible. Despite his skill at arms, it is these relationships that make him truly mighty.

During the Dotar Sojat era, Carter's friendships sprang from love and tenderness, a kindness those he encountered had previously not known. This unique (to Barsoom) form of companionship stirred loyalty that would have been unlikely without it. However, the friendships he makes during the Prince of Helium era are forged from a different metal.

In this way, this factor supports and underscores the theme of dark secrets already discussed. In a world where such conspiracies reign, it will take more than pretty words and heartfelt friendship to win loyalty. It requires hard facts, and a realistic expectation of success.

Carter wins the love of Thuvia and Phaidor through rescuing both women, and he wins over Thuvan Dihn and Talu through similar service. Xodar and Kulan Tith he convinces through simple rational debate. In all these cases, it's cold fact and stark circumstance that win support and companionship.

It's a simple matter to put opportunities for this kind of alliance in the paths of your players, but sometimes it's another thing to get them to take the opportunity. Narrators can take a lesson particularly from Thuvia and Phaidor here, whose affections John Carter gained without trying to, indeed without realizing he had until those emotions became relevant.

Imagine an adventure where the heroes must rescue a group of kidnapped noncombatants. Though it may be tempting to opt for a kick-in-the-door raid where the player characters cleave a bloody path to their prize and carry them off over their shoulders, this is more in keeping with the feel of other John Carter eras.

Instead, the narrator should communicate how their adversaries are far too numerous, technologically advanced, or advantageously positioned for them to hope to make the attack alone. Early parts of the adventure could center around gaining and leveraging the relationships needed to mount a large enough expedition to succeed. Remember, even John Carter needed a million friends to rescue his love from the clutches of a goddess.

Absolute Optimism

When he discovered Dejah Thoris had been abducted by the most powerful beings on the planet and spirited away to an impregnable fortress thousands of feet below ground, John Carter hatched a plan and got to work. The plan involved millions of warriors and tens of thousands of ships, all preparing in secrecy under the watch of a hostile jeddak. But John Carter and his friends remained undaunted.

Carter said it multiple times himself throughout the books, explaining that he was not a man given to thought, but rather to action. By the time he even considered the possibility of defeat, he was already neck-deep in the attempt.

This indomitable spirit is seen again and again throughout the action of both Prince of Helium era novels. No matter the odds of success, no matter the power of the adversary, heroes of this era do not surrender to despair. Neither do the villains. It's a constant cycle of insanely unlikely villainous plot versus insanely dangerous effort to thwart it.

Of all the themes of the era, this may be the easiest to design into stories your group tells. Simply raise the stakes until they loom huge over the heroes, then provide a series of opportunities leading inexorably to successfully beating the incredible odds arrayed against them.

The challenge is maintaining that optimism with your players. If you make the challenge appear too difficult, they might themselves lose hope — or worse, lose trust in you as a fair narrator. On the other hand, if you make it appear too easy, or signpost the way to success too clearly, they won't truly appreciate the incredible feats their characters are performing.

Tone and storytelling make a difference here. Imagine Marvin from *Hitchhiker's Guide* and Valeria from *Conan the Barbarian* both saying, "A hundred guards stand between us and the treasure!" One will be optimistic. The other, not.

It can be tricky to really nail this from a campaign design standpoint. Luckily, the final theme can lend some help with that...

Massive Scope and Scale

More than any other era of Barsoom, things go big during the Prince of Helium era.

Even the landscape contributes to this sense of massive scale. Carter awakens in a forest of trees with hundred-foot *diameters*, set against cliffs literally a mile high. He is imprisoned in a cave large enough to hold an ocean, and unseats a religious regime that had been in power since Earth's Neolithic period. His pursuit of the abducted Dejah Thoris runs literally from one pole to the other, and on the way he finds a device capable of attracting *battleships* from distances of over a mile.

This scale of adventure presents an unparalleled opportunity to let players experience the kinds of derring-do that made many of us want to play RPGs in the first place. Why settle for a simple sword duel when there's a battle of millions going on at the same time? Why squabble over ascension to a single throne when the political structure of the whole world is being changed?

For narrators, this can present two problems: management and keeping the heroes large by comparison. Management relates to the fact that truly massive events and battles have more moving parts than most human beings can keep track of, and sometimes risk grinding the action to a halt under their own weight. Keeping the heroes large by comparison means making certain that a small group of individuals plays a meaningful role despite the enormity of the events around them.

Solve the management issue by treating factors outside the heroes' immediate influence as terrain, or weather: influential factors that impact the course of their actions, and the difficulty of some challenges.

For example, in a massive invasion, use Momentum and Threat to set "linchpins" of the

action, where the heroes move through the swirling melee like delvers through a megadungeon. As the battle progresses, spend Threat to indicate where things are going poorly, and award Luck when the player characters score key victories. There is no need to track every soldier or vehicle in the fight. Instead, focus the "camera" where the heroes are, and extrapolate out the impact of their successes and failures.

Keep the heroes large by making the course through the adventure key to its successful conclusion. The player characters are never in an unimportant side skirmish (and if they appear to be, it's because it had unforeseen consequences the heroes can use to their advantage). The tone and progress of whatever event they're in should change in response to their actions. Keep them center stage throughout.

Putting It All Together

Knowing the themes and style of play and executing them in your design and at the table are two different things, and no one way of doing so fits everyone's approach to play or to creativity. There's a broad spectrum of methods, falling between two opposing poles.

Starting with the themes themselves is one pole. With this method, you actually think about the themes and attributes of the era you want to showcase, then create an adventure based on what you want to emphasize. You might decide to focus on rationality and optimism, and brainstorm ideas around an uphill struggle against a religious tyrant. Starting from the themes keeps your adventures "on point," but can leave a narrower range of choices as you build your game.

On the other pole are narrators who build an entire adventure, then sprinkle in the elements that support tone like seasonings into a stew. This method leaves a far broader canvas on which to create, but is harder to fine-tune toward specific tones.

Most narrators will fall in between these two points, or alternate between both. There's no right or wrong answer – whatever works best for you is best.

Narrating the Prince of Helium Era

All eras of play in ***John Carter of Mars*** share common elements and themes that make it uniquely what it is. Similarly, the Prince of Helium era's flavor is different from that of Dotar Sojat and Jeddak of Jeddaks. This chapter looks at some of the key considerations, opportunities, and techniques narrators can use to make the most of stories they set in this era.

Why Prince of Helium?

Of all the times across the vast history of Barsoom, why choose to set stories in this narrowest of the eras? Why not opt for the sweeping prehistories of the Dotar Sojat era, or the limitless expanses of time inherent in the Jeddak of Jeddaks era?

Before the action in *The Gods of Mars* and *The Warlord of Mars*, Barsoom sat in a stagnant status quo for long millennia. Afterward, order was established and adventure was limited to solving individual crises in far-flung city-states or distant moons and worlds.

But *during* the Prince of Helium era, heroes rescue the most beautiful woman on two planets. They topple three corrupt regimes, and save the planet from the bondage and slavery of a lie universally believed. Battles of previously unimagined scope rage overhead, and a hidden sea is discovered. The world *changed utterly* in a violent chaos of death, discovery, and rebirth. Who doesn't want a piece of that action?

One advantage of narrating and storytelling in this era is that it provides more scaffolding for adventure ideas than the other eras. There is a massive, world-consuming conflict raging across Barsoom. Whether your group wants to take direct part, or experience the edges of the fight, it provides a backdrop of inspiration that can make design easier.

Of course this produces something of a disadvantage as well. With such huge events dominating the scene, it can be hard to come up with unrelated ideas that don't seem petty by comparison.

The era begins and ends around the actions of a single, named individual. Because the actions are so large, so world-changing, coming up with unique adventures for other heroes that aren't overshadowed by John Carter's exploits is equally difficult.

But the heroes of Barsoom are nothing if not keen for adventure and passionate in their pursuits. Whether they participate in the battle of three navies over the gardens of the therns, or engage in their own story half the world away, the Prince of Helium era provides plenty of adventure, opportunity, context, and color.

How Times Must Change

The Barsoom at the beginning of the Prince of Helium era and that same planet at its end are physically identical but culturally so different as to defy belief. Those changes are the result of the actions of a single man, and the crowning capstone of Captain John Carter of Virginia's long career of adventuring on Barsoom.

But what if you want your heroes to be at the center of all that change, and the recipients of Barsoom's greatest honor? You could simply run the action in the book itself, starring John Carter, Tars Tarkas, Xodar, and the rest as player characters, but what if you want to wreak your own changes?

The good news here is this is *your* Barsoom to do with as you like. Perhaps John Carter never returned to Earth, and your heroes are a band who met each other while in combat with the plant men in the Valley Dor. Their adventures could closely mirror John Carter's while leaving room for surprises and new characters.

Alternatively, your campaign could bring about the same changes from an entirely different quarter. What if a group of therns and First Born had an epiphany and brought the corrupted system down, to begin anew? Or a plague killed the plant-men and their masters, leaving hordes of suddenly freed slaves to return to their homes? The result would leave the Jeddak of Jeddaks era largely unchanged, with the journey there from the Dotar Sojat era very different indeed.

Or maybe John Carter's account isn't as honest as one might hope, and the player characters are the only people on Barsoom working to stop his tyranny, perhaps even by subtly manipulating the course of history in adventures just out of the novels' spotlight.

An Era in Three Parts

The Prince of Helium era covers a period of 21 years, spanning a ten-year period at the end of A Princess of Mars through to John Carter being crowned Jeddak of Jeddaks at the end of *The Warlord of Mars*. This time can be divided into three parts, each based on Carter's activities during that time and how they impacted Barsoom as a whole.

John Carter Triumphant

The first nine years cover the time between Helium's conquering of Zodanga and John Carter's being transported off Mars after repairing the atmosphere plant and saving Barsoom. Carter mentions this decade in passing, but reveals few details about it.

"For nine years I served in the councils and fought in the armies of Helium as a prince of the house of Tardos Mors. The people seemed never to tire of heaping honors upon me, and no day passed that did not bring some new proof of their love for my princess, the incomparable Dejah Thoris."

That's all we know. Presumably, John Carter and his friends fought for the welfare and might of Helium, bringing it to unrivaled primacy among the red cities of Mars. Presumably, his acts of valor and fighting spirit during those wars brought him ever-greater renown across the planet. It's likely the same can be said of his close companions Kantos Kan and Tars Tarkas. But the slate is wide open for narrators to imagine the details for campaigns starring the mighty Virginian and his allies.

This period is ripe for storytelling that doesn't involve John Carter at all. The face of Barsoom was beginning to change under the Jasoomian's influence, and adventures across its surface can reflect that change. Heroes could become enlightened by the story and example of John Carter, and work to bring their countrymen to accept Helium's influence... or they could fight against the change with traditionalistic fervor. Or they could simply carry out the dangerous and exciting lives that Martians had since long before Carter's arrival, sharing the planet with him but never crossing his path or influence.

One other thing known about this period is that Dejah Thoris and John Carter conceived a child. Their egg lay protected on the roof of their home for five years, but had not hatched by the end of this time. Villains or misguided patriots might want to threaten or destroy that precious life, and great adventure could be had in foiling such a plot.

This time comes to an end when the atmosphere plant is damaged and John Carter flies to rescue the entire planet by remembering the secret of unlocking its doors. He enters the plant, but is not seen to leave on the face of Mars, in fact being mysteriously transported back to Earth without warning or a chance to say goodbye.

John Carter Missing

John Carter remains stranded on Earth for a full decade, and of this time even less is known. Whether or not our faithful narrator ever learned of the dangers and adventures of that decade, he tells us very little of them.

We do know that Helium, led by Dejah Thoris, her father, and her grandfather, searched the planet for their prince, or even a rumor of his fate. This fact simply screams for adventure: parties of Heliumites eager for a chance to prove their mettle, roving the face of Barsoom and braving every danger in search of a man who simply isn't there. It's the kind of quest legends are made of, especially if foes of Helium plant false rumors in order to lure hunters into traps or sow discord in the courts to weaken the regime.

There are the final great expeditions in search of John Carter. One went north, led by the jeddak of Helium himself, to ultimately be captured in the cities of the Okar. What happened between their departure and that moment is never recorded, and most likely fraught with danger. It's also safe to assume another expedition went to the south, and its story is completely untold.

We also know that, with John Carter missing, power struggles began to emerge in Helium. Zat Arras developed romantic feelings for Dejah Thoris, and maneuvered himself into a position to press his advances. Such maneuvering must have

involved treachery and espionage within the twin cities, of the sort that could inspire great stories.

Finally, Carthoris, the son of John Carter, hatched early during this period. By the time he meets his father in the prisons of the First Born, he has already grown into an accomplished warrior with a reputation of his own. The exploits of this youth and his friends could form an entire campaign, ending with his capture shortly before his father returns to Barsoom. Alternatively, one can imagine the team of bodyguards charged with his safety during his youthful years would have an adventurous, if aggravating, time of things.

Around this time we also have tantalizing rumors about the careers of Tars Tarkas and Kantos Kan, the final pacification of Zodanga, Thuvia's capture, the war against the Warhoons, whatever happened to Sarkoja, and the events surrounding Tars Tarkas' final pilgrimage down the River Iss.

Beyond the canvas on which John Carter painted his personal portrait of Barsoom, an entire world of adventure still spun wildly through space. As we know from stories in the Jeddak of Jeddaks era, dozens of cities continued on with very little influence or even news of the Jasoomian jed and his influence. The Holy Therns, First Born, and Okarians certainly continued their regimes much as they always had, but with heroic members of their civilizations who might make for excellent centers of a story.

John Carter Returns

This final period of the Prince of Helium era covers the two years between Carter's sudden appearance in the Valley Dor and his crowning as Jeddak of Jeddaks, *the Warlord of Mars*. As with his first year on Barsoom, a surprising amount of change was wrought considering the short span of time.

In the first year, John Carter and his allies toppled a religious conspiracy and unseated two ancient empires, utterly transforming Barsoom. In the second year, his pursuit of Dejah Thoris reveals and unseats yet another ancient empire, bringing all of Barsoom under the influence of Helium and himself to the position of ruler of that world. Narrators have plenty of space to create stories either adjacent to this drama, or far away from it.

Adjacent to John Carter's exploits are the events and adventures unfolding just "off screen." We have therns losing slaves and loved ones to First Born raiders — some of them must have been willing to go as far as Carter had in search of his own wife. We have political intrigue unfolding in Helium, and an ongoing war between the Tharks and the Warhoons. We have Tars Tarkas' adventures with Thuvia that end with his capture and imprisonment, court intrigue in Okar, and power vacuums left every time Carter slays a person with some degree of power. Each and every one of these, and dozens more, could be expanded into a series or entire campaign of play.

Adventures on Jasoom

What exactly did John Carter get up to while stranded back on his home world? It seems unlikely that a man such as he spent the entire decade moping in a rocking chair on the banks of the Hudson River and showing up for occasional Christmas dinners at his sister's house.

Carter was on Earth from 1876 to 1886, during which time the Indian Wars were raging across the western United States, and all manner of adventure was to be had on the other continents of the world. One could easily imagine Carter's time with Tars Tarkas softening his feelings toward Native Americans, and a series of adventures where he joined them in their doomed and tragic fight.

With that adventure or another, it takes little modification of the ***John Carter of Mars*** rules to pursue the Virginian Captain along whatever exploits he engaged upon during his time on Earth.



Adventures in Prince of Helium

The ***John Carter of Mars*** core rulebook describes adventure design at three different levels: episodes, serials, and campaigns. Episodes describe a single scenario, and are resolved in one or two sessions. Serials are a linked set of episodes telling a longer story, and may take months or a year's worth of games to resolve. Campaigns are a set of serials that follow the the lifelong exploits of the heroes of the tale.

For the Prince of Helium era, different considerations, tones, and themes are more or less appropriate and helpful at different levels of design.

Prince of Helium Episodes

The core of a thoroughly Prince of Helium episode should begin with a secret. The actual adventure could require the heroes to uncover the secret ("Where has Matai Shang taken Dejah Thoris?"). It could unveil a noteworthy secret to the heroes, and expect them to deal with the repercussions ("The Valley of Dor is a lie."). Or it could task the player characters to keep certain knowledge secret ("Agents of Talu are in the court of Salensus Oll.").

Whatever the specifics, the secret forms the beating heart of the episode. Add to that muscle with bone made from the themes of rationality, love, and friendship. These themes will provide the tools the heroes need to accomplish their goals, whatever they may be.

Optimism and massive scope are a little more difficult to make part of episode design, in both cases because of the limitations of a short scenario. With only a session or two of play to work with, it's difficult to add the story beats necessary to create real despair that would counterpoint and emphasize the optimism of the player characters. Likewise, the action in a single episode is hard to escalate all the way to scenes like the invasion of Kadabra or the sky battle in *The Gods of Mars*.

For one-off episodes, the solution is fairly simple. Start with the volume set at 8 or 9, then "turn things up to eleven" in short order. Don't begin with simple concerns. Begin with high stakes and big goings-on, then make it all even bigger, more frightening, and less likely to end in a win.

This is trickier for episodes intended to belong in a series, since it raises the question of where the narrator can go from there. On the other hand it's less urgent in those cases. You can let the stakes, scope, despair, and scale build over several episodes until you reach a climax.

Prince of Helium Serials

A series of episodes may be the easiest type of adventure to design for the Prince of Helium era. The themes and stories set during these years lend themselves to this kind of structure more than others. In fact, the action in *The Gods of Mars* and *The Warlord of Mars* could be viewed as three series experienced sequentially, each with their own climactic ending.

Most considerations for creating an episode change but little when designing a series. It's a matter of expanding the components onto a larger canvas. There are two chief ways of accomplishing this.

One way is to take each of the themes and components you've selected and expand them to something that fills multiple stories. The dark secret at the heart of one episode requires multiple adventures to uncover, or has ramifications beyond a single expedition. Rational examination requires not just consideration, but adventures to gather additional information and evidence. Friendships and alliances are forged not in a single encounter, but over multiple conversations and battles.

Another way is to introduce multiple themes, having the heroes progress from one to another. Your first episode is about one secret, then the second is about another secret naturally and logically connected to the first. Each episode includes a successful application of rationality to solve an immediate problem, and each introduces new characters or factions to befriend and make part of the cause. Ideally, these multiple factors would flow from one to the next. The first secret might point to a deeper and greater mystery, which itself then suggests that further knowledge is just around the bend.

Both methods have their advantages and disadvantages, and most narrators choose to mix and match. A series might cover the ramifications of just one secret, but introduce new friends and opportunities for rational investigation with each new episode. Or it might follow the accumulation of allies as the heroes uncover a bevy of unrelated (or apparently unrelated) mysteries.

Scope and optimism are natural for a series in the era. Simply "pile on" a little extra with each subsequent episode. If the first involves the fate of a jed, the second involves the fate of a city. The third is over the fate of a nation, and the sixth saves all of Barsoom. Early episodes cover skirmishes between rival factions, and the final climax involves armies from a dozen cities. Just ratchet it all up one episode at a time.

Prince of Helium Campaigns

A campaign is to a series what a series is to an episode, covering multiple arcs in an ongoing lifetime of adventure, and potentially several years of real-world time. Maintaining tension and interest over that span of time can stretch the skills of any narrator, but the payoffs can be equally powerful. The key is to be certain you maximize the engagement of each theme and factor important to the campaign.

Each campaign can and should include whatever themes, stories, ideas, characters, and other elements you desire. However, campaigns set in the Prince of Helium era miss opportunities if they don't specifically capitalize on the themes that make this era what it is.

In most ways you can do this by making the same changes for the campaign as you did when you expanded episodic ideas into series ideas. However, it's more important to add variety by making sure you have multiple secrets, challenges, and opportunities to show optimism.

One good technique for this is to have five or six prime elements: adversaries, conspiracies, personal challenges, important non-player characters, and the like. Have each serial focus on just two or three of them, with all the threads leading up to a climax that involves every single element in as big a way as possible.

The action of *The Gods of Mars* follows John Carter as he topples two corrupt theocracies, unknown to most and considered omnipotent by those who did know of them. How might one cobble together such an adventure? Taking the episode-series-campaign structure suggested in the core rules, here's one potential way.

First, you could divide the entire campaign into three series. *Serial One* would cover John Carter's arrival and imprisonment with the therns through to his escape from the First Born. *Serial Two* would explore the events up to and including the invasion of the First Born Citadel, ending with the cliffhanger at the end of *The Gods of Mars*. The final serial would follow John Carter's pursuit of his kidnapped love, ending with his final victory and crowning as Jeddak of Jeddaks.

Here's how each series might break down.

SERIAL ONE

- **Episode One** starts with Carter's arrival and meeting with Tars Tarkas, following through to their emergence in the gardens of the therns.
- **Episode Two** would focus on the battle with the First Born pirates, and take the heroes from the gardens through the beginnings of their imprisonment at the south pole. It would end just before the escape attempt begins. Narrators willing to "split the party" could follow both story arcs, or keep the entire party together throughout.
- **Episode Three** finishes strong, with the harrowing escape from the First Born (and possibly the Warhoons), ending with the triumphant meeting with a Heliumite fleet and a big cliffhanger as the entire party is charged with blasphemy.

SERIAL TWO

- **Episode One** covers the trial in detail, perhaps including political maneuvering to get friends on the tribunal, and ending with the climactic debate about the Pedestal of Truth.
- **Episode Two** would include all of the clandestine preparations for invasion, including more than a little violence in the shadows as informants are discovered and silenced. Player characters imprisoned by Zat Arras might be given control of a non-player character for this episode. After their release, the episode finishes with the great fighting force setting off for battle.
- **Episode Three** covers the war in its entirety, following the heroes as they command different vessels through the fierce fighting, to the Sea of Omean and ultimately to the Temple of Issus itself. It would end as the "camera" zooms in to their individual exploits as each enters the city in whatever way is most appropriate.
- **Episode Four** follows the trail of each player character as they fight through the city to rescue Dejah Thoris and secure final victory. It ends with Dejah Thoris, Thuvia, and Phaidor trapped in the Temple of the Sun, no matter how much Threat the narrator has to spend to make it happen.

SERIAL THREE

- **Preface**. Before Episode One begins in earnest, the narrator may wish to run a session of cut scenes or short adventures to cover the chaos, action, and challenge of those first six months after the invasion. There are entire nations to restructure, hold-outs to capture, and rescue attempts to be made. A group could even expand this into an entire serial to take place between Two and Three.
- **Episode One** here would include following Thurid and Matai Shang through the tunnels and into the Temple of the Sun, reaching the cliffhanger of their escape with their prisoners. The narrator would end it with a series of attribute tests to navigate the hall of mirrors labyrinth, with greater success creating meaningful progress in the later pursuit.
- **Episode Two** consists of the chase, from the exit of the hall of mirrors, through the hidden tower, and finally to the forests of Kaol. Once in the forest, the heroes would make their way through the wooded swamp until the episode ends with them at the walls of the capital.
- **Episode Three** would take place inside Kaol, beginning with the assault by the green Martians, following through joining the palace guard and sparring with Thurid and Matai Shang, as well as the discovery that the villains have again absconded with their captives.
- **Episode Four** covers the journey to the north pole and through the Carrion Caves, all the way to meeting Talu and getting ready for the expedition to Kadabra. It could include a cool training montage where the heroes hilariously interact with the differences between the Okar and their nations of birth.
- **Episode Five** includes the infiltration of Salensus Oll's court, the discovery and capture of the heroes, their escape, and the beginning of the final battle.
- **Episode Six** is one huge fight, the climax of *The Warlord of Mars* where the heroes fight small battles in the context of the siege of Kadabra. All the bad guys get their due. All the heroes get their reward. The world is saved and changed forever, huzzah!

Prince of Helium Episodic Campaign

Another way of structuring a campaign, especially for play groups who can't meet as often as they'd like, is to make each episode just a plot point in the broader story. In such a play group, each session would include only the heroes run by the players able to attend the game, and would incorporate a complete storyline. They would focus on "linchpin" moments in the action, with much narrative storytelling in between.

Using the campaign framework of the Prince of Helium novels, such a campaign might consist of only twelve sessions (one a month for a year).

- **Session One** is the arrival of all player characters in the Valley Dor by various means of entry, and a running battle from the valley floor into the trap chamber in the cliffs of the therns.
- **Session Two** picks up action in the storeroom, as the heroes sneak their way through and out of the tunnels in the Mountains of Otz, ending with the beginning of the First Born pirate raid.
- **Session Three** is a running battle through the pirate raid, including attempts at escape and final capture by Xodar and the First Born.
- **Session Four** is the escape from the First Born city. This could begin during the slave revolt, or on the prison island immediately afterward, running until the heroes have escaped.
- **Session Five** opens with John Carter's trial for heresy, and runs through to his imprisonment. It may or may not skip over the interim period where he plots with his friends to raise an army.
- **Session Six** covers the action from Carter's release to the end of the air battle over the Mountains of Otz.
- **Session Seven** involves the action from entering the shaft above the Sea of Omean to the final confrontation in the Temple of the Sun.
- **Session Eight** covers the climax of *The Gods of Mars*, with the battle through fire and flood, the defeat of Issus, and Dejah Thoris' final imprisonment.
- **Session Nine** is the pursuit of Thurid, Matai Shang, and their captives from the Temple of the Sun to Kaol, and the court intrigue ultimately leading to their escape northward.
- **Session Ten** is fighting through the Carrion Caves and meeting Talu.
- **Session Eleven** is the action within the court of Salensus Oll, from first applying for work to being discovered and thrown into jail.
- **Session Twelve** becomes a series of four to five vital fights at various points in Kadabra, possibly involving different heroes, each of which contributes to a final tally of victory or defeat in the largest siege.

Between each session would be substantial narrative storytelling. For example, between sessions eleven and twelve the time spanning imprisonment, escape along the rope, and the discovery of the final plot points would simply be told as a story, with action picking up *in media res* as the first fight commences. Similarly, the action between sessions three and four is easily dispatched with three or four minutes of exposition at the beginning of the fourth game.

Alternatively, a narrator could handle these in-between moments via email or even text, calling for a handful of attribute tests from each player, and using the results to determine the course of the narrative, intermediary action.



Adventure Seeds

What follows is a collection of ideas for adventures set within various ages of the Prince of Helium era. Each takes into account and demonstrates the principles outlined earlier in this chapter,

Expedition of Lost Souls

The Valley of Lost Souls is populated by Martians living a twilight life, unwilling to follow the River Iss to its ultimate destination but unable to cross the ice sheets to freedom or to risk the death that awaits heretics who return from heaven. What would happen if a charismatic leader washed ashore here? Would they lead these refugees out of the valley, across monster-haunted wastes, risking capture by the First Born and therns, and execution?

CHARACTERS

- Several **Ancient Martians** too old to contribute physically, but wise beyond measure and essential for the journey.
- A **Disguised Thern** monitoring the valley, whom the heroes may expose before he can bring news to his masters.
- A **Religious Zealot** who will not allow the blasphemy of returning from the River Iss, opposing the heroes at first verbally and ultimately with violence.

VARIATIONS

- A narrator could reverse this concept, with a single escapee bringing word to friendly ears, and the heroes mounting an expedition to free those trapped in the Valley.
- The idea of escape brings forward the racial and political rivalries the Valley's inhabitants had set aside. Before they can organize an escape, the heroes must stop (or at least win) the blood conflict those rivalries are heading toward.
- Instead of escape, the charismatic newcomer might instead convince the entire population to complete their pilgrimage *en masse*. Their numbers on arrival might be great enough to survive the initial fights, and *then* escape.

Conspirators No More

Agents of the Holy Therns, operating in a red city far from the Valley Dor, hear rumors of catastrophic attacks and a coming shift in the power structure on Barsoom. They decide to turn coat and grab as much power as possible for themselves, but must contend with thern spies who remain loyal, and the suspicion of those around them as the blasphemous secret becomes known. The player characters are a group of jeds devoted to their city, working to keep it from falling apart as their ruler goes mad when faced with the truth, and multiple factions threaten to tear it apart.

CHARACTERS

- A **Sneaking Double-Agent** who professes to serve the heroes, but betrays them in small ways throughout the adventure until a final, overwhelming treason.
- A team of **Royal Spymasters** tasked with finding and apprehending the conspirators.
- A **Powerful Jed Warrior**, feared by all, who refuses to believe the truth and instantly challenges all blasphemers to combat.

VARIATIONS

- Perhaps the player characters could be these agents, desperately trying to navigate a social and political labyrinth where the dead ends are literal. Can they survive and thrive as the source or their status and power falls apart?
- What if the rumor is premature and the agents strike early, before the truth is fully known? How will they recover from showing their hands and exposing themselves as heretics against a still-dearly-held doctrine?
- The agents could be turned against their masters, supplying the jeddak of their city with information about the thern conspiracies, playing a dangerous but ultimately rewarding game.

The Hot-Headed Princeling

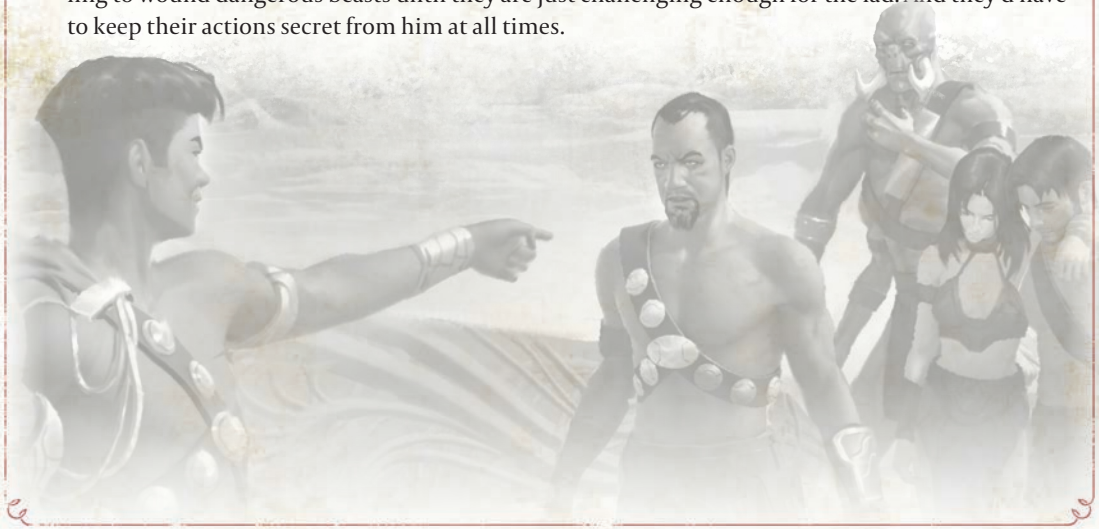
With his father missing, young Carthoris spent a year or two as a difficult and strong-willed teenager, always getting into scrapes and adventures, barely escaping with his life. Although Kantos Kan and Tars Tarkas simply shake their heads and remark how much the lad resembles his father, Dejah Thoris worries mightily. She and Mors Kajak hire a team of bodyguards (the heroes) to keep the young man from getting himself killed before he fully develops into a fighter as capable as his father. As Carthoris grows, they must balance their duty to keep him alive against his natural desire and need to meet challenges on his own, and of course they must foil multiple assassination and abduction attempts by John Carter's enemies and rivals.

CHARACTERS

- A **Headstrong Princess** in love with Carthoris who is constantly egging him into fights, escape attempts, and similar foolishness.
- A **Scheming Jed**, who may or may not be Zat Arras, offering favors to the boy and his mother, whose cost is unclear.
- **Several Eager Young Warriors** who travel with Carthoris and sow more chaos than protection.
- **Three Thark Warriors** who follow Carthoris' exploits from a short distance, watching their jeddak's nephew and available to save the day when needed.

VARIATIONS

- The heroes could be Carthoris' friends, following where Carthoris leads and constantly getting him out of one scrape or another. If using this variation, the narrator should be careful to make the heroes the center of this story, not the non-player character Carthoris.
- A small group of stealthy warriors could be tasked with shadowing and leading Carthoris to keep all of his adventures "on level." They would spot dangerous assassins and do away with them, while allowing incompetents through for Carthoris to defeat on his own, and range ahead of the princeling to wound dangerous beasts until they are just challenging enough for the lad. And they'd have to keep their actions secret from him at all times.



Magnetic Personality

In the workshops and labs of Okar, many mad scientists work to expand on the technologies of their race. In one distant city, Lalo the Fatherless has discovered a way to increase the power of Kadabra's Guardian of the North thousandfold or more, giving it the capacity to draw in airships from hundreds of miles in every direction. Wiser heads realize the calamity this would bring, and send the crazed genius away but he is resolute, and has hired a group of warriors to sneak him into the control room so he can install his "improvements" and activate his doomsday weapon. The heroes either get wind of the plot and move to stop it on their own, or are tasked with the mission by their jed.

CHARACTERS

- **Lalo the Fatherless**, a mad Okar genius unaware of the havoc he is about to wreak.
- A team of **Mercenary Warriors** guarding Lalo and helping him execute his plot.
- An **Influential Researcher** who initially brought Lalo's plot to the attention of the heroes.

VARIATIONS

- The player characters could be Lalo's mercenary warriors, true believers in the value of his invention who, in the course of the adventure, realize the damage about to be unleashed. Can they stop the disaster without betraying their leader?

A Religious Romance

When the truth about the Valley Dor and Issus reach a remote red Martian city, the news has disastrous impact on Vela and Res Tak, two young lovers promised to be married. Vela's father immediately believes the truth, supporting the messengers who bring it and calling for change. Res Tak's family remains staunchly traditional and calls for the execution of Vela's father and all other heretics. The conflict splits the city among reformers, believers, and a third faction that cares little for such matters and simply wants to profit from the chaos. The heroes are friends of Vela and Res Tak, and act to bring a peace that saves the city and allows their friends to wed.

CHARACTERS

- A **Red Martian Warlord** who tries to lead a coup while the city is divided.
- Multiple **Enraged and Pious Warriors**, eager to put to death any heretics they can capture.
- A **Conflicted Jeddak** whose indecision costs lives with every day that passes.

VARIATIONS

- Instead of playing the friends of the two lovers, the player characters could be members of the city's court, working with words and well-placed daggers to steer the city to a new, safe equilibrium.

The Glorious Dead

The changes wrought during the Dotar Sojat era did not appeal to every being on Mars. Though some chose to just bear with the changes, and others plotted against John Carter and his friends, many Martians instead chose to take their pilgrimage on the River Iss rather than live on a Barsoom that no longer meshed with what they held dear. The heroes are tasked with pursuing them into the still-deadly Valley Dor and convincing as many as possible of these potentially valuable allies to return.

CHARACTERS

- A **Zodangan Naval Officer** who chafed under Heliumite rule and chose death to living with the shame of defeat, having survived when his friends perished.
- Twin **Fierce Thark Brothers** whose cavalier attitude about death is surprising even among Martians, and who are constantly imperiling the entire group.
- A **Forlorn Lover** whose wife took the pilgrimage one year earlier, who is always searching for signs they might reunite.

VARIATIONS

- What if Sarkoja was a member of this party? How might her hatefulness, agenda, and clandestine ways impact the success or failure of the adventure?
- Narrators might combine this concept with the Expedition of Lost Souls on page 73, allowing the party to swell their numbers as the journey continues.
- When the party reaches the Valley Dor, they might split into factions. Some would immediately recognize and rail against the betrayal. Others would accept their fate stoically. Still others would believe they all deserved the punishment, and actively work against those fighting for their lives and freedom.

The First of Many

It is said only one being has ever escaped the therns prior to John Carter, Tars Tarkas, and Thuvia's escape, in a story only alluded to in the text of The Gods of Mars. That story is untrue. It was in fact a group of mighty warriors who set out, and each survivor ultimately went to their own city alone. A great adventure could follow their initial capture, suffering at the hands of the therns, preparation for escape, and final bid for freedom. Whether or not it ends there, or continues to their tragic end (or ends with them leading a revolution and changing Barsoom in a plotline different from the books) is up to you.

CHARACTERS

- Several **Former Jeds**, also slaves of the therns, who accompany the escapee in his flight. Once free from immediate danger, their differing opinions of the right course of action could introduce additional conflict.
- A **Gentle Thern** who is appalled by the acts of his countrymen, who provides the heroes with aid and succor.
- A **Sly Traitor** who works with the heroes, only to inform on them and turn coat at the worst possible moment.

VARIATIONS

- Much like John Carter's adventure, the flight of the escapee might happen in the middle of a First Born raid, and end with capture by servants of Issus. Escapeing before actually reaching their citadel would be a harrowing adventure of its own.
- A party of therns or their more martially-minded slaves might be set on the trail of the escapees, hunting them across the planet.
- The adventure could begin later, starting with the escapee's arrival in their home city, the trial, and their attempts to escape execution.



The Gangsters of Mars

Unlike the First Born and the therns, the Okarans live in splendor but with more finite resources, some of which are contested by various mafia-like criminal enterprises throughout their cities. In Kadabra itself, a young gang (the player characters) uses criminal methods to fight the oppression of Salensus Oll. Chases on the floating vehicles that so impressed John Carter, fistfights in dimly lit rooming houses, and bribes to the authorities will all be part of the journey as the heroic outlaws dramatically succeed or die in glory.

CHARACTERS

- Several **Warriors** and **Toughs**, the members of rival gangs and the primary adversaries of the player characters.
- A **Dedicated Jed** tasked with investigation and punishment of crime in Kadabra, who works against the heroes but may ally with them once he discovers their true motives.
- A group of **Vicious Criminals**, the rank-and-file of the heroes' gang, willing to take lives and give their own for the organization, some unknowing about the greater good their masters serve.
- A **Brutal, Terrifying Assassin** who works for the highest bidder, acting both as ally and threat at various times.

VARIATIONS

- A single episode (rather than the series or campaign this implies) could focus on a single heist, with the heroes stealing a token or technology Salensus Oll desperately covets.
- Consider what "crime" might look like among other Martian races. It might be similar in the cities of the red Martians, but green Martians would consider most mafia-like tactics simply business as usual. "Crime" among the First Born might look more like a mission of mercy.

The Flower of Divinity

Among their decadent and leisurely pleasures, the therns have a great fondness for breeding bizarre and beautiful flowers not dissimilar to the orchids of Jasoom. This pursuit, like all thern pastimes, is incredibly competitive and decadent. At an annual competition, each court of the Holy Therns compares the prize specimens from their gardens. The winners enjoy their superiority, while the losers suffer social stigma and punish those under them for the loss. The heroes play servants and hirelings operating behind the scenes, doing their best to win, or sabotage, this year's competition.

CHARACTERS

- A **Preening Sycophant** who says the nicest things about every flower made by his superiors, but works against them all when he believes he's unseen.
- A group of **Jealous Rivals** who know their flowers are inferior, but try using influence, espionage, and bribery to still win the contest.
- Several **Talented Servants** who happen to excel at horticulture and botany, whose services and ownership are hotly contested. They are traded like star professional athletes on Earth, often in exchange for vast holdings.

VARIATIONS

- Assassination is not an unheard-of way to win this contest. Heroes could play the assassins sent to kill rivals and their talented slaves, or the security forces tasked with keeping both alive. Similarly, sabotage (assassination of the flowers themselves) is a common tactic, with the player characters on the offensive or defensive end (or both) of that situation.
- This detail suggests a broader context of competition, rivalry, and general shenanigans between the elite among the therns. A series or entire campaign could follow this drama, with the player characters as either the aristocrats themselves or members of their staff.

Random Tables for Era Events

If you need a little guidance or extra inspiration when creating exciting events for adventures in your game, the following tables can help. Use them wholesale, or take the broadest strokes and expand them to form the beginnings of a story you make uniquely your own.

Regional Events

Regional events occur once every month or so, or at the beginning of an adventure to set it in motion.

D20	WORLD EVENT
01	Turncoat
02–04	The Pirates of Barsoom
05–06	Hunters Return
07–08	A Great Expedition
09–10	Rumors of Finding
11–12	An Enemy Returns
11	Civil War
13	Great Disaster
14–15	A City Dies
16–17	Rampage
18	Festival Day
19–20	Roll Twice and Combine

TURNCOAT

A once-loyal agent of a secret sect sees changes in the winds of the world and approaches some parties with knowledge and promises of influence. What the player characters do with this person and their newfound knowledge is up to them, but could result in the beginning of a world-spanning adventure to either stop or hasten the coming changes. While this clandestine shake-up is in motion, Threat expenditures to increase flow of information toward player character enemies cost 1 less than normal.

THE PIRATES OF BARSOOM

A party of First Born pirates arrives in the area. They might be from Omean, or a splinter group that broke away before or after John Carter brought the nation to heel. They menace the area for several weeks. While they are active, any Threat spent to bring minions into a battle with First Born generates 2 additional minions.

HUNTERS RETURN

Once thought lost, a party of hunters returns to their city. Their numbers have dwindled significantly, and the survivors are torn and haunted. They bring reports of tantalizing discoveries: an unheard-of beast, a lost city, an ancient technology, or something similar. The news spurs others to investigate. Whether that's the heroes themselves, allies they care about, or a full invasion force is up to the narrator. For a season or two, any activities in the region of the discovery buy twice the trouble for any point of Threat spent, reflecting the chaos descending on the region.

A GREAT EXPEDITION

The Prince of Helium era was one of great processions and campaigns. Helium's search for John Carter brought two rulers, thousands of ships, and countless men to the north pole. John Carter's campaigns against the First Born and the Okar brought even more resources to bear. For whatever reason the narrator desires, a local jeddak is organizing such an expedition. Whether or not the heroes choose to join it, the preparations alone have a powerful impact on the immediate area.

RUMORS OF FINDING

Word reaches powerful ears of a newly discovered secret, technology, or conspiracy. The responses to it shake up nearby balances of power as jeddaks and those who would be jeddaks race to understand and possess the find. Activities in the area incur double normal Threat or gain double normal Momentum, depending on how they interact with the chaotic competition.

CIVIL WAR

The changes in power at the end of the Dotar Sojat era, and throughout the Prince of Helium era, were not universally greeted with enthusiasm. These conflicts deepened resentments within royal courts, and led some disenfranchised jeds to plot against their rulers and one another. Any actions the heroes take here that involve political maneuvering incur 1 greater Threat than normal. The narrator should use the extra threat to introduce complications directly related to the context of civil war.

GREAT DISASTER

Something goes terribly wrong with the weather, science, landscape, weapons, or people of the area. This may be the inadvertent impact of the great civil upheavals of the time, or something totally unrelated. An entire city or region is devastated, and any travel within the area is at +1 difficulty. Hazards in the area likewise inflict +1 [CD] damage. The impact of the disaster will disappear after several months, leaving only signs of the initial damage.

A CITY DIES

Through warfare or catastrophe, a once-occupied city is abandoned and its inhabitants scattered to find new homes, perhaps even new cities or hordes. Any Threat or Momentum spent to bring cohorts or reinforcements into a scene brings twice as many as normal, reflecting the increased number of mercenaries at large.

RAMPAGE

Unknown forces cause a stampede of ferocious wild creatures like apts, banths, or wild calots to run across the countryside in a devastating horde. Some key cities are, naturally, in their apparent path. Besides the obvious hooks for adventure and danger, the presence of such a large group of predators plays havoc with the natural ecosystem. Finding food requires an attribute test, and Threat spent to increase the difficulty of any encounter with natural beasts yields 2 extra minions while the rampage is nearby.

FESTIVAL DAY

A celebration of one kind or another is in full swing, bringing visitors to cities and spreading general goodwill. Opportunities to purchase specialized equipment cost less than normal as the markets swell. Further, narrators may wish to reduce the Difficulty of social tests relying on goodwill, as the celebration puts everybody in a good mood.



World Events

Events like this happen perhaps two or three times in a lifetime, and are spoken of decades afterward. The events in *The Gods of Mars* and *The Warlord of Mars* definitely qualify as world events. Because of their long-reaching scope, none of them have immediate mechanical impact like some regional events. Instead use them to inspire series and campaigns, and to add detail or "color commentary" to scenes that take place while the event is ongoing. Similarly, the scale and timeframe of these events mean they might not directly impact a campaign, but rather increase risk and provide context for the core action.

D20	WORLD EVENT
01–03	Succession War
04–05	Doomsday Device
06	Flood
07–08	A Terrible Blight
09–10	Impact!
11	The Great Undoing
12–13	Uplift
14–15	Alien Arrival
16–17	Final March
18–19	Regional Calamity, roll on Regional Event table
20	Roll Twice and Combine

SUCCESSION WAR

The jeddak of a great city dies without an heir, and his jeds are in full-scale civil war for the throne. Vassal and allied cities choose sides, and meet in terrible battle. Enemy cities back a jed likely to lead weakly, or likely to remain their ally afterward. Potentially, the city's enemies could use the opportunity to mount an invasion and eradicate the population completely.

DOOMSDAY DEVICE

A terrible, destructive ancient technology is discovered or reinvented, resulting in widespread panic as those in the know struggle to suppress word of the device. Others, of course, attempt to follow the rumors to their source. Rumors swell of different locations and different natures of its mode of destruction.

FLOOD

Unprecedented in history, the Sea of Omean's pumps begin working faster than the flow of water refills the ocean floor. The land around canals overflows, ruining crops. Some of the ocean basins begin to accumulate lakes at their lowest points. More importantly, Mars begins to once again lose water as it evaporates into space.

A TERRIBLE BLIGHT

Crops across the world die before giving fruit, resulting in depleting stores and worried scholars. Although starvation won't be imminent until the next growing season, fear of it happening again puts wheels in motion across Barsoom. The planet boils with expeditions to find the cause, the cure, or ways to turn the situation to a jed's advantage.

IMPACT!

A medium-sized meteor or asteroid strikes Barsoom, causing great stirrings across the world. The impact might have destroyed a city or trade route, or brought with it alien invaders, or simply caused a shift in some religious sects and resulted in a holy war. Even far distant from the point of impact, cities could send expeditions to gather pieces of the meteor for scientific research, or the crafting of jewelry or new weapons.

THE GREAT UNDOING

There is a reason nothing significant changed over the tens of thousands of years prior to John Carter's arrival. Every twenty centuries or so, something happens that ruins over half of Barsoom civilization. Cities fall. Leaders die. Technologies fail. Even the histories go thin about this time. A series of disasters and reduced birth rate suggest to some scholars that another such Undoing is beginning. Can anything be done?

UPLIFT

A species previously considered unintelligent, like the calot or the plant-men, suddenly either achieves sentience or is discovered to have long had some sort of intellect. Do they carry on their lot, filling the lowest rung in the hierarchy of intelligent species on Mars? Or do they fight, as John Carter led his compatriots to do?

ALIEN ARRIVAL

Another offworlder arrives somewhere on Barsoom, wreaking changes at a scale similar to that of John Carter. Where they land, and where they are from, or how many arrive at once, will determine the nature and scope of these changes. More interesting, how will they interact with Carter? Is it possible they know the man?

FINAL MARCH

When a tribe or city of Martians is utterly defeated, sometimes the survivors choose to march as one to their ultimate doom. They take their weapons and beasts of burden, gather in lines, face a direction and begin to walk. They continue walking, eating only what they can find, fighting whatever stands in their path, until the last of their numbers dies. A tribe has decided to do exactly that, possibly in response to the events of the era. What happens to those in their path, and what is done with what they left behind, are both seeds for high adventure.



SUPPORTING CHARACTERS

Each carTardos Mors would believe me. Of that I was positive. And that he would have the courage of his convictions my knowledge of his character assured me. Dejah Thoris would believe me. Not a doubt as to that entered my head. Then there were a thousand of my red and green warrior friends whom I knew would face eternal damnation gladly for my sake. Like Tars Tarkas, where I led they would follow.

– John Carter, *The Gods of Mars*

Sometimes during adventures in ***John Carter of Mars***, player heroes may find themselves separated. One or more heroes may be fighting for their lives in the swamps of Toonool while another is seeking the aid of a nearby jeddak or fighting far above in a pitched airship battle. Sometimes narrators can easily switch between these scenes, keeping everyone involved and making dramatic cuts and jumps between the action at various places. Other times this is more difficult and runs the risk of players sitting around while others are engaged in play.

In addition, sometimes the heroes need to call on help from outside their normal spheres. A team of soldiers and scouts might need a scientist to assist them on an important mission or require the aid of an ally well versed in diplomacy, medicine, or any number of other disciplines. Other times, an adventure presents a character who just logically seems to be involved with the group for a time. That wayward prince the heroes rescued last scene is unlikely to leave the party in the midst of danger, not only would it be dishonorable to abandon his rescuers, but it also makes little narrative sense. The characters that Carter helps or rescues in the novels tend to end up following him for at least a portion of his adventure as an ally to lend aid. Keeping narrator characters around in a similar fashion after the players have helped or interacted with them gives them the chance to build relationships and gain allies.

All of the described scenarios might benefit from the addition of supporting characters, which may be controlled by a player in place of or in addition to their normal character to assist the group and enrich play. This chapter provides rules and guidelines for creating, running, and enhancing such characters. It will also discuss the concept of dynastic and troupe play, two new ways to run campaigns that make use of multiple characters.

Adding a Supporting Character

Supporting characters are added to play in four ways. Three of these are in the control of the players, while a fourth is the province of the narrator. These options are:

Allies

A player whose character has an ally that could be helpful in a situation may spend 3 Momentum to call upon that ally for the scene. The player's character doesn't need to be present in a scene to do this, but they must have some way of contacting their ally and asking them to lend assistance. The ally joins the scene as a supporting character. Specific or general allies can both be used to add a supporting character, in the latter case adding a particular supporting character who is a member of the general group. Note that it must be plausible for an ally to join the scene and arrive to assist the heroes. Otherwise the narrator may veto summoning the supporting character or charge additional Momentum to reflect the unlikely circumstances. This character is favorably disposed to their ally regardless of who plays them for the scene.

Example: *Zala Zors, a noble of Helium and a talented envoy, has an ally among the Tharks in the form of Inzana, an aged and cunning green Martian woman. During an excursion deep into Thark territory, Zala is lost and captured and her fellow heroes are seeking to locate and find her. Zala spends 3 Momentum to call on Inzana, explaining that she told her friend if anything happened to her to please assist her companions in any way she can. The narrator accepts this explanation and Inzana joins the scene as a supporting character. As Zala is currently absent, her player naturally assumes control of Inzana for the scene.*

Subordinates

A player whose character has an appropriate title can spend 3 Momentum to call on a supporting character from among their underlings, troops, entourage, or other subordinates. Using this ability creates a particular subordinate who arrives to lend assistance and expertise as needed. The player's character doesn't need to be present in a scene to do this, but they must have some way of contacting their subordinate and commanding them to lend assistance. This character will defer to their superior during the scene and work to support them primarily, regardless of who plays them while they are present. A player using this option must realistically be able to call upon or use their author-

ity to summon aid. Otherwise the narrator may veto the use of this option or charge additional Momentum to reflect the unlikely circumstances which allow the hero to find help in a strange or isolated situation.

Example: *Xaidor Malas is a famed First Born airship pirate and dator commanding her own ship. During an adventure she must seek information from a smuggler contact in Zodanga while other player heroes are tending to another matter. As Xaidor doesn't really trust her contact, she wishes to bring along some backup. She spends 3 Momentum to summon a member of her crew to assist here. The narrator deems this completely reasonable, and Xaidor's quartermaster joins the scene. As Xaidor is already present, her player gives command of the quartermaster to another player.*

Fortunate Help

If a title or ally doesn't provide a way to secure help, the players can rely on good old-fashioned providence. Any character can spend 1 Luck point to call upon the services and assistance of a nearby supporting character who is favorably disposed to help the heroes. A player's character doesn't need to be present for this to occur. In fact, a player may spend a Luck point to summon a character they then play for the scene. Unlike titles and allies, supporting characters summoned in this fashion don't need to be plausible or explained; it must simply be possible that someone arrives to help. The narrator may veto particular supporting characters if they seem impossible, but they must provide a reasonable alternative.

Example: *With their heroes currently prisoners of the Torquas horde with little idea of how to escape or even exactly where they are, one of the players in Matt's game spends a Luck point to create a supporting character to assist them. The player suggests one of the Torquas may be sympathetic and wish to help the heroes escape, but Matt notes the heroes haven't really interacted with their captors enough yet to make a strong enough impression to convince one to betray their people. Instead he suggests a fellow prisoner, a longtime inhabitant of the cell they share, may know a way out and be willing to help them escape if they take her with them. The players like this idea and the prisoner is added as a supporting character. As all the players are present, the player who spent the Luck point will also control the character, though they may pass control to another player if they wish.*

Narrator Support

During adventures or at certain points in the campaign, a narrator may offer a particular supporting character for use by the players. This costs the players nothing, but they have no real input on the specific character available. This is almost always done to represent a character present during an adventure for some larger purpose or plot point which the narrator doesn't mind or prefers to have the players control. Narrator-offered supporting characters stick around as long as the narrator desires, though players may opt to keep them around by spending additional Momentum as described later in this section.

Example: *While on a desperate mission to the Carrion Caves to locate and return a lost Kaolian noble — or recover their body — the narrator decides the heroes could use some help. Since they lack any experience with the arctic environment and have yet to encounter the beasts and dangers of that region, he creates a guide in the form of a tough but aging Okar willing to assist them in exchange for their help hunting and defeating a great apt that dwells nearby. The players accept the guide's help and he becomes a supporting character for the adventure. The players take turns playing the guide based on who has the least to do in a scene.*

Keeping Them Around

A supporting character usually only joins the heroes for a scene before departing or again fading into the background. However, for an additional 2 Momentum, their presence can be extended for another scene. Narrators may also allow a supporting character to remain for free if it makes sense or there is no reasonable way for them to exit.

Example: *After visiting her smuggler contact in Zodanga, Xaidor Malas now needs to go see an arms dealer who may have additional information. Not wanting to surrender her backup and not yet ready to return to the rest of the group, Xaidor's player spends 2 more Momentum to keep her quartermaster close for another scene.*

Threat may be spent in place of Momentum to keep a character around for more scenes. However, doing so introduces a complication caused by their continued presence (see *Using Threat to Call Support*).

Defining the Character

Rules for creating supporting characters are presented shortly, though before they can be created, they must be defined and the question of who gets to define and create the character must be answered.

By default, the player who spends player resources to summon a supporting character gets to define them. If a character is a dwar of Helium and needs a skilled padwar pilot to assist the group, they spend Momentum and briefly describe the character being introduced.

In practice, things are rarely so cut and dried. Narrators may veto or alter details about a supporting character before they appear in order to fit a scene or series of events. Other players are encouraged to offer suggestions and advice. This process shouldn't take up too much time at the table, but everyone should feel welcome to participate if they are so inclined. Done properly this can speed up the creation of supporting characters that the players are invested in.

Example: *Kale Singh, a character in Jack's game, wishes to secure assistance while lost in the wilds. His player spends a Luck point and suggests that an influential noble or officer traveling from a nearby city may need some assistance, and that once aided the noble can offer to lead Kale to his home. Kale's player would like the character to be able to hold their own in a fight but is otherwise open to suggestions. Another player suggests Kale could meet a young but capable noblewoman who reminds Singh of someone from his past on Earth. A*

different player suggests a red Martian with the name Shova Thon. Kale's player agrees to these suggestions, saying the newly created Shova Thon reminds the Earth-born warrior of his younger sister, Hafa.

Remember when creating supporting characters to avoid characters who render player heroes redundant or obsolete, or those with personality traits or background elements that are offensive or upsetting. If a supporting character won't be a positive addition to a scene then leave them out of it.

Using Threat to Call Support

Players can always spend Threat in place of Momentum to pay for a supporting character. This allows players short on Momentum to still get help, but it comes with a cost. Supporting characters purchased with Threat come into the scene along with some complication that must be dealt with. This complication is either a result of the character's arrival or attached to their background or nature. This doesn't mean the supporting character is an enemy, hostile, or untrustworthy — they just brought a small bit of interesting misfortune with them in addition to their assistance.

Example: *The Okar spy Volan Von is trapped in Manator, his cover identity blown. Von's player decides he really needs some help getting out of the city, but he is low on Momentum and Luck. Desperate, Von's player uses 3 Threat to pay for summoning a supporting character to assist him based on his rank as a dwar in his people's espionage corps. He decides the Okar have an agent in Manator who can assist him in escaping. However, as he purchased this assistance with Threat, the supporting character arrives to help Von along with a complication. The narrator decides that while Volan Von's fellow spy can indeed smuggle him out of the city, he has been followed by the city guards. Before Von and his new companion can escape, they must first deal with the new problem…*

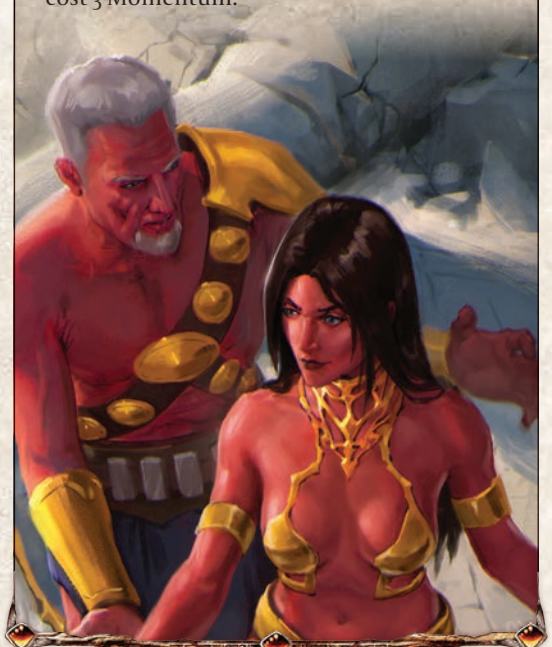
Complications aren't always immediate or obvious in this situation, but they are inevitable. A supporting character may be involved in the scene for some time before the problems their arrival caused are apparent.

Who Controls the Character?

As detailed in the examples in this section, the specifics on exactly who controls a supporting character are largely situational. A player who summons his character's ally doesn't need to play that supporting character. In fact, if their character is present and another player's is absent in a scene? They shouldn't play it, instead passing it to the other player. If multiple players lack characters in a scene then whoever spends the Momentum can select who gets to play the new arrival.

Supporting Characters Based on Other Accolades

Groups using rules that add additional accolades to play, such as the Deeds and Achievements rules in the ***Dotar Sojat Era Supplemental Rulebook***, can spend Momentum to create supporting characters based on these accolades as well. These additions must make sense in the context of play and cost 3 Momentum.



Optional Rule: Buying Support for Other Characters

Using this optional rule, the choice of who spends to bring in a character can also be left fluid. If desired, any player may spend Momentum to summon a supporting character in the form of an ally or subordinate of any other character. This allows a character short on Momentum, but who has important allies or resources, to draw upon them through the charity and assistance of another character's player.

In this case, the player who spends the Momentum suggests the type of supporting character and decides who controls them, but the character whose accolades are being used as the basis for summoning support can veto this if desired. Thus you can't force someone to call on help, but you can assist them if they wish.

Example: *As Xaidor Malas and her quartermaster rush to meet the arms merchant in Zodanga, one of the players decides it would be fun to add another character to the scene. She spends 3 Momentum to summon an additional member of Xaidor's crew for added backup if things get rough — a gunner's mate with keen eye and quick trigger. Xaidor's player has no objection to this, but suggests the character be relatively new to the crew, as she just had to replace several members after the climactic final battle of a recent adventure. The player spending the Momentum agrees, and decides to make their gunner's mate a rookie pirate with a lot of promise but a tendency toward rash action. Everyone agrees this character will make an interesting addition as Xaidor enters the arms dealer's den.*

As always, players shouldn't be pushy or uncooperative when creating supporting characters, and this goes double for characters created using another player's character as a justification for their inclusion. When in doubt, defer to the player who spent the time to develop the allies and titles used to call on the supporting character.

Creating Supporting Characters

Supporting characters all use a basic template and some simple modifiers when they first appear. This allows them to be quickly created and introduced into play. Characters who return in future adventures will grow and evolve using a process described later in this chapter. These recurring characters may even eventually become full player characters, available to replace a departing player hero or as a character for a new player.

When they first appear, supporting characters are created in four steps by selecting an option for three categories, combining the results and calculating stress and other abilities. These steps are:

- Select a basic template
- Select a race or culture
- Select an archetype
- Put on finishing touches (basic equipment, starting accolades, stress tracks, etc.).

These steps are described in greater detail in the next sections.



STEP ONE: Select the Basic Template

To create a supporting character, first select a template. This is a core set of attributes that defines the general sort of supporting character appearing.

CAPABLE

While all supporting characters are good at what they do, capable characters are defined by their skill, training, or talent. They are often skilled and disciplined fighters or professionals, though a gifted rookie could also fit this description.

Attributes: Daring or Reason at 5. Might or Passion at 3. All other attributes at 4.

Sample Characters: Pilots, officers, physicians, and crafters.

CHARISMATIC

Charismatic characters tend to prefer charm and socialization to fighting. They are often skilled in the ways of courtly intrigues and socializing, though some just possess the natural charm that makes them more personable than the average person.

Attributes: Cunning or Passion at 5. Might or Reason at 3. All other attributes at 4.

Sample Characters: Nobles, courtiers, merchants, and local leaders.

LOYAL BEAST

Loyal beast supporting characters are special. They may be surprisingly smart, capable, sneaky, or even oddly charismatic, but they are defined chiefly by their animal nature and devotion. These characters skip the next step of creation; their template also serves as their race and culture selection. Alternatively, you can use the beasts found in the ***John Carter of Mars*** core rulebook, *Chapter 13: Beasts of Barsoom*.

Attributes: Might, Cunning, Passion, or Daring: pick one at 7 and two at 5. Reason or Empathy at 3. All other attributes at 4.

Sample Characters: Calots, banths, thoats, and certain Earthborn or alien creatures transported to Barsoom.

SMART

Smart characters value logic and reason, both in themselves and others. They are usually experts in one or more fields of study, though some are just naturally bright and insightful individuals.

Attributes: Cunning or Reason at 5. Daring or Might at 3. All other attributes at 4.

Sample Characters: Scientists, scholars, advisors, strategists, and technicians.

SNEAKY

Sneaky characters prefer stealth, deception, and other misdirection. This doesn't mean they're necessarily untrustworthy towards their allies; they are just trained in espionage, infiltration, and covert actions, or possess a natural knack for operating in the shadows.

Attributes: Cunning or Empathy at 5. Passion or Daring at 3. All other attributes at 4.

Sample Characters: Spies, thieves, assassins, covert military operatives, and tricksters.

STEADFAST

While most supporting characters are loyal, these characters are defined by it. They may not always be the most skilled or dangerous characters, but they will never abandon their duties, principles, or companions.

Attributes: Passion or Empathy at 5. Reason or Cunning at 3. All other attributes at 4.

Sample Characters: Servants, long-time friends, henchmen, family members, and grateful citizens.

TOUGH

Tough characters are ready for a fight. They are usually trained soldiers or combatants, though some simply possess natural tenacity and a gift for physical conflicts.

Attributes: Daring or Might at 5. Reason or Empathy at 3. All other attributes at 4.

Sample Characters: Panthans, guards, soldiers, warriors of a horde or tribe, gladiators, and bodyguards.

Example: *Lauren wants to create a supporting character for a scene to assist Jason's character in escaping from a white Martian jeddak's dungeon. She spends 1 Luck and decides the character should be a trapped airship officer and minor noblewoman from Ptarth who was captured while on a long-distance reconnaissance flight. She looks over the templates provided and decides Capable makes the most sense for an officer with a noble background. She chooses to take Daring at 5 and Might at 3, creating a physically slight but agile and courageous young flier.*

Creating New Templates

The six templates presented here cover most supporting characters players will call on during their adventures. However, narrators and players can create their own templates using the same formula applied here. Simply follow these steps.

- Pick a concept for the template. This should be a single word that defines a common character type. The best template names imply both personal strengths and common ways to approach problems.
- Pick two strong attributes, one of which begins at 5 when the template is selected.
- Pick two weak attributes, one of which begins at 3 when the template is selected.
- Set all other attributes to 4.
- Provide some sample character types that fall into this template.

That's all you need to do. Once those steps are completed you can add your customized template to those available during play.



STEP TWO: Select Character Race or Culture

Like a player character, the modifiers for race or culture are applied to the basic template. This increases certain attributes and, in the case of some characters, adds a talent. Additional but undefined talent ranks, such as those provided to Earthborn characters, are not added at this time.

For ease of reference, the race and cultural modifiers are summarized in this chapter, but more complete details and descriptions are found in their entries in the core rulebook.

EARTHBORN

The character hails from Jasoom. Note that this option is provided for those rare occurrences it may be of use, as in general Earthborn characters are *far* too unusual or unique to be supporting characters.

Attribute Bonuses: Add +3 to Might, +1 to any two other attributes, and -1 from any other remaining attribute. Add the Leaps and Bounds talent from the Earthborn character creation options in the core rulebook.

FIRST BORN

Descended directly from the first beings on Mars, this proud and often arrogant race frequents the Omean sea and the city of Kamtol. Many are also raiders and pirates.

Attribute Bonuses: Subtract -1 from Empathy. Add +2 to Cunning and +1 to Daring. Add 1 to two of the following: Might, Passion, or Reason.

GREEN MARTIAN

Hailing from one of the green Martian hordes, these characters possess the towering four-armed form of their people.

Attribute Bonuses: Subtract -1 from Empathy or Reason. Add +2 to Might. Add +1 each to two of the following: Cunning, Daring, or Passion. Add the Four-Armed for War talent from the green Martian character creation options in the core rulebook.

MIXED HERITAGE

This character hails from two cultures, possessing traits inherited from both parents. These characters are typically raised in one of their parents' cultures, through some are outcasts. Note that like Earthborn characters, mixed heritage characters are often too unusual to be supporting characters. However, the children of existing player heroes, their allies, and other important characters who would be of mixed heritage may present the occasional exception.

Attribute Bonuses: Characters of mixed Martian heritage use the red Martian bonuses. Characters with Earthborn heritage use their Martian parent's bonuses, but substitute one of the bonuses for Might if they do not otherwise have a Might bonus and add the Leaps and Bounds Talent.

OKAR

Yellow-skinned Martians from the arctic north. The Okar are rare outside their northern homelands.

Attribute Bonuses: Add +1 each to Cunning and Daring. Then add +1 each to two of the following: Empathy, Might, or Reason.

RED MARTIAN

The character hails from one of the many red Martian cities, nations, or settlements across Barsoom.

Attribute Bonuses: Add +2 to one of the following attributes: Daring, Empathy, Passion, or Reason. Add +1 to any two others.

WHITE MARTIANS

Ancient peoples from Barsoom's past, the white Martians survive in smaller groups and enclaves such as the Holy Therns and Orovars. Many possess strange technology and powers.

Attribute Bonuses: Subtract -1 from Empathy. Add +2 to two of the following attributes: Cunning, Daring, or Reason.

Example: *As she's already decided her character is from Ptarth, there is no reason to not be a red Martian, the dominant race of that kingdom. Applying the red Martian attribute bonuses, she increases her Daring to 7 and then ups her Passion and Reason both by 1.*



Red Martians are by far the most common race found on Barsoom, and so they are also the most common culture for supporting characters. Other characters are most often found either when a player character has an accolade that relates to them and calls for their aid, or when player heroes are in their territory.

Also, while it is possible, it is generally advised to avoid taking an attribute to below 3 during creation. Such characters will find themselves strongly limited and very vulnerable in any situation where that attribute comes into play. A 3 in an attribute is more than sufficient to denote a deficiency; save 2 and below for those who are truly lacking in any notable aptitude in that area.

Supporting Characters from Other Cultures and Races

The options presented in this section are for the most common and noteworthy options for supporting characters, including all those available to player heroes in the core rule book. Players and narrators wishing to create supporting characters from more unusual races or even races created specifically for their own campaigns may do so by simply applying the racial attribute bonuses to the character's template. Race and cultural modifiers from other era books, such as the more exotic races found in the ***Jeddak of Jeddaks Era Supplemental Rulebook***, can also be used here.

If a narrator takes their adventures to truly unusual and exciting places, they may even allow supporting characters to develop from unusual scientific discoveries or grand adventures beyond Barsoom. These situations are far from the norm, but if you wish to add clockwork automatons or an enclave of alien outcasts to your version of Barsoom, go for it.

STEP THREE:
Select an Archetype

Now select an archetype for the supporting character. The archetypes are listed in the ***John Carter of Mars*** core rulebook, *Chapter 2: Creating Your Adventurer*. Pick the archetype that most suits the character. This applies two attribute bonuses and a grade 1 talent. Unlike player or narrator characters, supporting characters only get +1 for each of their archetype attributes. For ease of use you can select the talent provided, but if desired a similar grade 1 talent may be created.

Example: *Lauren has already decided that the supporting character is an airship officer, so she picks that archetype from the core rulebook. This gives the supporting character a +1 to both Daring and Reason, instead of the +2 that a normal player character would receive, and the supporting character also gains the Airship Pilot talent.*

In place of the archetypes in the core rulebook, a loyal beast supporting character instead gains the talents of a creature of its type. This results in slightly lower attributes, but potentially more natural abilities.

STEP FOUR:
Finishing Touches

With those steps completed the character is nearly ready for play. Next, assign some basic equipment and whatever accolades make sense for a character to have. As a guideline, an appropriate title that fits the character concept is usually sufficient for accolades — supporting characters *are* allies far more often than they *have* them.

Then calculate the character's stress and menace. All supporting characters begin as monster-class characters. Their stress is equal to the highest and lowest attributes combined, and they possess menace equal to their lowest trait divided by 2, rounding up.

Example: *As Lauren's supporting character is an airship pilot, she gives them the title of dwar, representing the character's captaincy of an airship. The character's stress is equal to 12 (Might 8 + Empathy 4) and the character's menace rating is equal to 2 (lowest attribute of 4 ÷2).*

Gaining Experience and Renown

Supporting characters don't gain experience and renown. They generally don't stick around long enough to earn it, and advancement is for player heroes, not other characters. However, if a supporting character is brought back over numerous sessions of a campaign, they do advance and evolve in ways described shortly.

Recurring Characters

When a player brings in a supporting character they have two options: they may bring in a new character to assist them and be played by one of the players in the group, or they may reintroduce a previously created character. Both have their advantages.

New characters can be more easily tailored to the needs of the scene. Need an airship mechanic? Spend Momentum or Luck and create one. Need an emissary for your noble to join a scene you're not in? Pay the price and make one up. However, as useful as this is, these characters always come in with the basic statistics derived from their template, culture or race, and archetype. They don't get stronger, tougher, or smarter.

That's what recurring characters are for. A previously introduced supporting character gains abilities each time they appear, at least until they are roughly equivalent to a starting player hero. Each session a supporting character appears in and makes some significant contribution to earns them an advance. An advance can be spent on the following.

- Increase an attribute by 1 (repeatable a maximum of 3 times).
- Increase one of the attributes under the character's archetype by 1 (repeatable a maximum of twice, once for each attribute).
- Add 1 grade of talent (repeatable up to 4 times).
- Turn from a monster-class to villain-class character. This costs 2 advances (you can save up).
- Gain a flaw.
- Gain 2 renown which may be spent on allies or title. This may only be selected if the character has less than 10 renown (including titles or allies) already and may only increase their total to 10 renown.
- Add one piece of core equipment.

Advances are applied at the end of a session where the character appears. The player who played the character and the one who paid for their appearance both get input into what an advance is used for (assuming two players were involved). In the case of a disagreement, the narrator decides which advance makes the most sense given the character's actions during the session.

Note that advances can be saved. This is necessary to move from a monster to villain-class character or add talents of grade greater than 1. Once all these advances are finished, the character stops gaining advances — but that's not the end of their growth. A supporting character that appears twice in the same game session may gain a second advance, but only if the session covers an exceptional amount of time or involves multiple adventures.

Beast supporting characters advance in much the same way, with two exceptions: they do not gain accolades or core equipment. They might gain renown as a general sense of how well known they are, but generally they don't spend it on anything unless some forward-thinking kingdom develops some sort of honorary rank for beasts who serve alongside their soldiers and officials. Further, they can only take talents that are possible given their species and nature — a calot might develop potential talents for tracking, combat, or even emotional support, but it will never be a scientist.

Supporting Characters and Momentum

Supporting characters start with 1 Momentum and no Luck points. The player who is controlling the supporting character can opt to add 2 Threat to the Threat pool when they first appear to give the character another 2 Momentum to start. This reflects a character who comes in ready for action, but whose presence has somehow made things more dangerous or complicated.

Optional Rule: Featured Characters

Once a character has returned often enough to use up all their advances, the players are undoubtedly fond of them. There's no question they want to keep them around and enjoy their assistance and company. In such cases narrators may wish to use this optional rule and promote the character to a featured character. A featured character is part of a the regular "cast" of a campaign, similar to the "also starring" characters on a television show. They can be added to play more easily and grow beyond supporting characters in capability, albeit generally slower than a player hero.

Featured characters can be added to a scene for 3 Momentum, though their inclusion must still make sense. Furthermore, every three sessions they appear in they gain one of the following.

- Increase an attribute by 1 (repeatable a maximum of 2 times).
- Add 5 renown worth of accolades.
- Add 2 grades of talent.

There is also one final option for a featured character. Any player, including new players, may take a featured character as their own character. This can occur because another character retires or dies, or if the campaign has players possessing multiple player heroes. Featured characters are an excellent option for games that regularly have guest or temporary players.



Supporting Character Generator

The following tables allow for the quick creation of a supporting character. These may be used by rolling a d20 and consulting (and combining) the results of each table, or simply by picking appropriate components from the options provided. Options that are more commonly encountered as supporting characters in Barsoom or pulp stories appear on these tables with increased frequency.

DIE	TRAIT
01–03	Capable
04–06	Charismatic
07–08	Loyal Beast. *Skip Culture or Species and Archetype, instead using rules for Loyal Beasts.*
09–11	Smart
12–14	Sneaky
15–17	Steadfast
18–20	Tough

DIE	CULTURE OR SPECIES
01–02	First Born
03–06	Green Martian
07–09	Okar
10-17	Red Martian
18	White Martian
19	Unusual or campaign-specific culture or species (Kaldanes, Skeleton Men, etc.) or reroll.
20	Mixed Heritage: *roll twice more and combine results, rerolling green Martian and duplicate results. If Mixed Heritage is rolled again, reroll or instead select Earthborn (meaning one of the character's parents is from Earth).*

Narrators are not required or even necessarily encouraged to allow Earthborn supporting characters. However, the option is provided on the table as a highly improbable result. Ignore it if desired. Players using these tables to create a supporting character should confirm with their narrators if Earthborn characters or those with mixed Earthborn heritage are allowable supporting characters.

DIE	ARCHETYPE
01–02	Airship Officer
03	Assassin
04	Beastmaster
05	Duelist
06–07	Envoy
08	Explorer
09	Fugitive
10	Gladiator
11–12	Guide
13	Healer
14	Panthan
15	Rogue
16–17	Scientist
18–19	Soldier
20	Spy

Note that hooks and motivations are only intended to be the way that supporting characters first enter the narrative. An Okar soldier might follow the group because he is smitten with one of the player heroes, lending his experience and his sword as he tries to impress and romance the subject of his affection. However, once the character enters play, all bets are off. They may become attracted to another hero, befriend one or more members of the group, or be inspired to join a noble cause the heroes are pursuing.

DIE	HOOK OR MOTIVATION
01	*Fellow prisoner or fugitive who helps the heroes out of necessity, gratitude, or shared adversity.*
02	*Lost or abandoned, they need help returning to their people and will aid or follow the heroes until this occurs.*
03	*Willing to hire on for payment or promise of payment. A mercenary, but a dependable one.*
04	*Romantically interested in one of the heroes or their companions, they agree to lend assistance in order to explore the possibility of a relationship.*
05	*Personal or professional rival of one of the adventure's or campaign's antagonists. The character has decided that the enemy of their enemy may be a friend and offers their aid.*
06	*Personal or professional rival of one of the heroes or their allies. The character hopes that assisting the heroes is a way to prove their superiority to them.*
07	*A previously faceless or unknown minion-class character the heroes saved or spared in the past. They have followed the heroes in hopes of repaying their debt or proving themselves worthy of their company or patronage.*
08	*Impressed by the heroes' displays of skill or virtue, they wish to associate with such people and assist them for altruistic, personal, or political reasons — or perhaps a combination of all three.*
09	*A secret enemy who aids the heroes hoping to eventually cause their downfall themselves or betray them. Possesses a weakness, soft spot, code of honor, or some other personality trait that makes it likely they will eventually evolve into a true friend and companion.*
10	*Seeking aid for some future mission or endeavor they are sure the heroes can assist them with, they offer their services and companionship. They might not tell the heroes of their future plans initially, hoping first to obligate them to assist.*

DIE	HOOK OR MOTIVATION
11	*On a mission of revenge, they seek information or the identity of someone involved with this mission and will trade their assistance for it. The heroes possess this information already — even if they aren't aware of it.*
12	*A subordinate of the heroes or an ally, they arrived or were sent to render assistance.*
13	*Part of another expedition or mission, they cross paths with the heroes and can be recruited to help, provided their goals align or the heroes agree to help them with their own goals.*
14	*Honor bound to assist the heroes due to some past service. This may or may not be something the heroes were aware of or did knowingly, but it matters deeply to them and they must repay the debt.*
15	*Hired or recruited by an unknown party to assist the heroes. They do not know the identity of their employer, only that they provided them with ample information to locate the heroes and sufficient compensation to make it worthwhile.*
16	*Received a message, distress call, or even a vision that brought them to the same location as the heroes. This call may or may not be related to the events of the current adventure, but they are willing to help the heroes regardless.*
17	*A target of some great or dangerous foe, they hope the heroes can protect and assist them if they make themselves useful companions and friends through their assistance.*
18	*A influential or important person traveling in disguise, they are mostly helping the heroes to hide and keep up appearances, though they may quickly become attached to their new companions.*
19–20	*Complex Hook or Motivation. Roll twice and combine the results.*

When rolling for personality traits, roll at least twice to create a more interesting and complex character. Seemingly contradictory results can be ignored or justified in some way — double identity, a psychological flaw that makes the character act that way in certain situations, or some similar reason. Common personality traits for Barsoomian characters and pulp adventurers occur more frequently on this table.

After these results are determined, simply add some appropriate equipment, calculate stress and menace ratings, and the character is ready to play.

DIE	PERSONALITY TRAIT
01–02	Brave
03	Self-Sacrificing
04	Vengeful
05-06	Romantic
07	Intensely Honorable
08	Generous
09	Ruthless
10	Arrogant
11	Proud
12–13	Stubborn
14	Inquisitive
15	Suspicious
16	Frequently Joking
17	Hedonistic
18	Trusting
19	Roll again and apply the reverse of the trait (Vengeful become Forgiving, Proud becomes Humble, etc.)
20	Complex Personality. Roll twice.

Sample Supporting Characters

The following section uses the rules for supporting characters to create several ready-made examples. These can be grabbed and used immediately in a game, making them handy for groups who want to use the supporting characters rules but are pressed for time or ideas. These characters can be altered and tweaked as needed, changing names, background, and other details.

Certain accolades such as Named Warrior and Ranked Panthan are found in other sourcebooks for ***John Carter of Mars***. If the narrator does not possess these books, they can exchange the title for something similar.

Bors Jiva

TOUGH THARK FUGITIVE

ATTRIBUTES

DARING	CUNNING	EMPATHY
5	5	3

MIGHT	PASSION	REASON
7	6	3

STRESS	MENACE
10	2

TALENTS

FOUR-ARMED FOR WAR (GRADE 1)

Your warlike, combative culture and four arms give you an edge in combat, allowing you to attack with multiple weapons or steady your rifle with ease.

- **Circumstance:** When attacking with melee weapons or using a rifle.
- **Effect:** When you generate Momentum while attacking with a melee weapon or rifle, gain an extra Momentum.

NO CHAINS CAN HOLD ME (GRADE 1)

Able foes may capture you, but holding you is another matter. You are adept at escaping from all manner of prisons, bonds, and confinement.

- **Circumstance:** When attempting to escape from captivity.
- **Effect:** Roll a bonus d20 with any action based on escaping from imprisonment or restraints.

ACCOLADES

- Feared Named Warrior (3 renown)

EQUIPMENT

- Makeshift knife (1 £ Sharp)

BACKGROUND

Bors is a named Thark warrior known for his ferocity in battle and unwillingness to back down from a challenge. His rash nature, however, has landed him as a captive in the same situation in which a player hero now finds themselves. If they promise to take him with them when they escape, he believes he knows a way to avoid detection and escape the area.

Phorek Thane

CAPABLE WHITE MARTIAN PANTHAN

ATTRIBUTES



BACKGROUND

Unlike many of his people among the therns or the isolationist Orovar, Phorek is more at home among red Martians or Okar than his own kind. Born into the Holy Therns years ago, he left after a dispute with a superior left his continued existence among his people in question. Since then, Phorek has put his combat skills and intelligence to use as a hired soldier, working for any who can meet his price. He is more than willing to lend aid to pay a debt or for the right price. Like many of his kind, Phorek possesses a certain cold cruelty, though he is loyal to employer and friend alike. Unlike many therns, Phorek does not wear a wig, instead covering his hairless scalp with an expensive scarf.

TALENTS

WHO DARES WINS (GRADE 1)

Striking swiftly and fiercely will often compensate for small numbers or other tactical disadvantages. You learned long ago to hit hard and fast, and put foes down without hesitation.

- **Circumstance:** When using a sword.
- **Effect:** Inflict an additional 1 ◆ of damage and add 1 to the total damage rolled on successful attacks with a sword.

ACCOLADES

- Ranked Panthan (Dwar) (4 renown)

EQUIPMENT

- Harness, sword (2 ◆ Sharp)
- Dagger (1 ◆ Sharp)
- Pistol (2 ◆ Explosive)

Dhina Haxis

STEADFAST RED MARTIAN SCIENTIST

ATTRIBUTES



BACKGROUND

Encountered as a bonded servant in the palace of a tyrannical jeddak, Dhina Haxis was once a promising scientist in Helium before her capture during an expedition to a nearby dead city. Since her capture, she has paid close attention to the comings and goings at the palace, looking for the right individuals to help her execute her plan to escape. Once freed, she is a font of useful scientific knowledge, especially for those fortunate enough to win her loyalty and affection.

TALENTS

WEALTH OF KNOWLEDGE (GRADE 1)

You possess a wealth of scientific knowledge, both theoretical and practical.

- **Circumstance:** When researching a scientific phenomenon or device.
- **Effect:** You may reroll any single failed die in a science-related Reason test.

ACCOLADES

- Guild Member (Scientist cabal in Helium) (2 renown)

EQUIPMENT

- Harness, dagger (1 £ Sharp)

Pooklam

LOYAL BEAST (CALOT)

ATTRIBUTES



TALENTS

UNBEATEN SPEED

- **Effect:** The calot can move faster than any other Martian beast. If in a direct race with another animal, it will win that race unless tricked in some fashion.

TRACKER

- **Effect:** Reduce difficulties of all tests to follow and detect prey by 1. All such tests also receive a bonus d20.

VICIOUS BITE

- **Effect:** Deal 2 £ basic damage when they bite.

SHAKE IT OFF

- **Effect:** If a calot is dispatched it can roll 1 £, on an effect it isn't harmed and spends a Conflict action shaking off the damage.

ACCOLADES

- None

EQUIPMENT

- None

BACKGROUND

The loyal, lovable, if somewhat adorably ugly calot. Few beasts on Barsoom can match its speed, tenacity, and devotion. The calot Pooklam is an exceptional example of these beastly virtues, attaching itself to a prospective master or mistress and then proceeding to follow them to the abandonment of all else. Even if left to its own devices or temporarily lost, Pooklam eventually finds its people again. Pooklam's exact origins are unknown; it was found wandering in or near a settlement one day before the player heroes befriended it with affection or food. However, several old scars on the calot's hindquarters and back suggest it has led a difficult existence before now.

Bel Degan

SMART FIRST BORN DUELIST

ATTRIBUTES



TALENTS

CUNNING BLADEWORK (GRADE 1)

Your mind is your greatest weapon, but your sword comes in a close second.

- **Circumstance:** When fighting with a sword.
- **Effect:** You can always choose to use Cunning on attack or defense when fighting with a sword.

ACCOLADES:

- Dator (10 renown)

EQUIPMENT

- Jeweled harness, sword and short sword (2 £ Sharp each)
- Dagger (1 £ Sharp)
- Pistol (2 £ Fearsome)

BACKGROUND

One of the deadliest swordsmen in Kamtol, and possibly also the smartest, Bel Degan is a well-read and sophisticated First Born who earned his rank of dator through a mix of battle prowess and superior strategy. He is always seeking a new challenge, something that occasionally gets him into trouble. He is more than willing to aid talented swordfighters in exchange for a chance to study their skills and perhaps the right to duel them at some future date. When not skewering opponents, he sometimes tries his hand at poetry, but finds he lacks the sensitivity and emotional depth to truly excel beyond crafting technically adept but hollow pieces.

Korva Wen

CHARISMATIC OKAR HEALER

ATTRIBUTES



TALENTS

SHOW ME WHERE IT HURTS (GRADE 1)

Your healing arts are wondrous, capable of quickly and efficiently healing wounds using Martian science.

- **Circumstance:** When healing a character with Wound afflictions.
- **Effect:** Your treatment tests for Wounds afflictions are Average (D1) instead of the normal Challenging (D2). Also, any Momentum costs to remove additional afflictions are reduced by 1 Momentum.

ACCOLADES

- Guildswoman (Guild of Okar Healers and Physicians) (2 renown)

EQUIPMENT

- Harness
- Healer's tools and salves
- Journal full of medical notes and case studies.

BACKGROUND

Due to her warm demeanor and stunning appearance, many foolish individuals ignore Korva Wen's amazing talent for healing, quick wit, and thirst for knowledge. Kind and inquisitive, she is always eager to help those in need, and just as willing to seek out new methods of healing, be they new inventions or ancient medicines thought long lost. Though she prefers not to carry weapons or engage in combat, she is no coward and will defend herself and her patients if necessary, usually by brandishing some formidable-looking surgical tool or whatever other improvised weapon she finds nearby.

Ki-Ah Roal, The Red Witch

TOUGH RED MARTIAN GLADIATOR

ATTRIBUTES



TALENTS

ARE YOU NOT ENTERTAINED (GRADE 1)

You can read the crowd, making them love you with well-placed taunts or sword strokes alike.

- **Circumstance:** When fighting in front of a crowd or audience.
- **Effect:** You may spend 1 Momentum during a fight to sway a crowd or audience of onlookers to your side. The exact effects of this vary with each situation, but they should cheer you on, attempt to aid you, briefly distract your opponent, or otherwise act favorably.

ACCOLADES

- Princess, former jed (10 renown)

EQUIPMENT

- Harness
- Sword (2 £ Sharp)
- Hatchet (2 £ Sharp)
- Dagger (1 £ Sharp)

BACKGROUND

A former jed of her city and heir to her kingdom, Ki-Ah Roal's reign lasted only as long as it took her enemies and rivals to eliminate her predecessor's allies and depose her. Sold ignobly into slavery and reported as dead to her people, Ki-Ah now fights for the amusement of her captors in the arena. A trained fighter, she has also learned how to wow the crowd, using her flair for the dramatic to stay popular and alive even with her occasional loss. Though she has stayed alive to date, she knows it's only a matter of time before she falls. Before this happens, she intends to escape, secure allies, and reclaim her position. She is more than willing to lend aid to powerful and capable allies who can assist her in her quest, though one day she will ask their assistance in return.

Tull Vadis

SNEAKY RED MARTIAN AIRSHIP OFFICER

ATTRIBUTES



TALENTS

EXPERT NAVIGATOR (GRADE 1)

You are a skilled navigator and pathfinder.

- **Circumstance:** When navigating or planning journeys.
- **Effect:** Roll a bonus d20 to all tests relating to navigation, planning journeys, and plotting trajectories.

ACCOLADES

- Padwar (2 renown)

EQUIPMENT

- Harness
- Compass and navigation tools
- Sword (2 £ Sharp)
- Dagger (1 £ Sharp)
- Pistol (2 £ Fearsome)
- Carbine (2 £ Fearsome)

BACKGROUND

Known to be a a bit of a troublemaker, Tull Vadis is nevertheless one of the more talented young navigators in his navy. He's also brave enough to undertake special missions and smart enough to know when to call for help or serve as backup for more experienced and skilled individuals. Tull's easy-going nature and sense of humor make him quite likable, but his disregard for strict discipline and regulations make it unlikely he will rise much higher in the ranks without some great accomplishments or very powerful friends.

Ukova

SNEAKY GREEN MARTIAN BEASTMASTER

ATTRIBUTES



TALENTS

CALL OF THE WILD (GRADE 1)

Lesser beasts heed your call. They bend to your will and follow your commands.

- **Circumstance:** Commanding or controlling an animal.
- **Effect:** You may automatically control the actions of 1 minion beast for the rest of the scene. You may control additional minion-class beasts for 2 Momentum per additional beast. If attempting to use this talent on an exceptionally loyal beast bonded to another, you may only control the beast for one turn.

FOUR-ARMED FOR WAR (GRADE 1)

Your warlike, combative culture and four arms give you an edge in combat, allowing you to attack with multiple weapons or steady your rifle with ease.

- **Circumstance:** When attacking with melee weapons or using a rifle.
- **Effect:** When you generate Momentum while attacking with a melee weapon or rifle, gain an extra Momentum.

ACCOLADES

- None

EQUIPMENT

- Harness
- Knife (1 £ Sharp)
- Rifle (2 £ Fearsome)

BACKGROUND

A green Martian woman serving under a particularly violent Warhoon chieftan, Ukova learned long ago that being subtle and sly was her path to prosperity and survival among the horde. Bristling at her superior's casual brutality, she feels more at home among the thoats and calots of the horde than her own people. For the right opportunity, Ukova would leave the horde, or assist in overthrowing its leadership.

Ara Moll

STEADFAST OKAR GUIDE

ATTRIBUTES



TALENTS

SURVIVING THE FROZEN WASTES (GRADE 1)

You are skilled at surviving in the frozen wastes of your homeland.

- **Circumstance:** When traveling in frozen or arctic climates.
- **Effect:** You reduce all terrain- and environment-based difficulties in arctic climates by 1. You also may automatically find food and shelter for yourself in the arctic. For 1 Momentum, you may find food and shelter for an additional person.

ACCOLADES

- Guildswoman (Okar guild of hunters and guides) (2 renown)

EQUIPMENT

- Harness
- Cold weather cloak and gear
- Spear (2 £ Sharp)
- Sword (2 £ Sharp)
- Hatchet (2 £ Sharp)
- Rifle (2 £ Fearsome)
- Ropes and climbing gear

BACKGROUND

Young but well-versed in the art of survival and pathfinding, Ara Moll works out of Kadabra as a guide for expeditions and explorers seeking passage through the arctic north. In recent years she operated with a partner, her sister Ora. However, Ora was lost on a disastrous expedition and Ara blames the noble who hired them both for her sister's demise — he shoved Ora in the path of a charging apt to save his own skin. Unable to take revenge on so powerful an enemy herself, Ara tries unsuccessfully to forget and waits for any chance to settle the score. Her appearance is somewhat marred; a scar runs down her face, neck, and much of her torso — a gift from the apt that killed her sister.

Rek the Spider

STEADFAST RED MARTIAN ASSASSIN

ATTRIBUTES



TALENTS

TWO-FISTED FIGHTING (GRADE 1)

You are adept at using two weapons at once in battle.

- **Circumstance:** When wielding one weapon in each hand.
- **Effect:** When wielding one weapon in each hand and able to attack a target, you deal 1 bonus of damage. If the secondary weapon is of a different type than your primary weapon, use the quality (Sharp, Fearsome, etc.) of your off-hand weapon when this extra damage die is rolled.

ACCOLADES

- Master (Assassins' Guild) (5 renown)

EQUIPMENT

- Harness
- Two short swords (2 £ Sharp)
- Two daggers (2 £ Sharp)
- Two pistols (2 £ Fearsome)

BACKGROUND

Rek is a high-ranking member of the Assassins' Guild who favors contracts on those he feels are deserving of death due to their wickedness or abuse of power. He leaves his mark, a spider-shaped brand, on his victims. This habit, combined with a fast two-handed style of combat, has earned him his nickname. Despite his sense of honor, Rek doesn't always have the best judgment and has been tricked into targeting people who are undeserving of his attentions. If convinced he has been deceived by a client, he may change sides and assist those he was sent to kill. Rek keeps a lush apartment in Zodanga, but can be found anywhere his jobs take him.

Zav-On Yar

SMART RED MARTIAN EXPLORER

ATTRIBUTES



TALENTS

FIND THE WAY (GRADE 1)

You can find safe paths and hidden places with ease. You are also more likely to bypass and survive hazards like dangerous terrain, ancient traps, and other deadly obstacles.

- **Circumstance:** When travelling in wastes, ruins, and wilderness areas.
- **Effect:** When facing an environmental danger (falls, traps, etc.), you roll 1 less combat dice than normal.

ACCOLADES

- Master (Helium Explorer's Society) (3 renown)
- Padwar (2 renown)

EQUIPMENT

- Harness
- Survival gear
- Sword (2 £ Sharp)
- Long knife (2 £ Sharp)
- Hatchet (2 £ Sharp)
- Rifle (2 £ Fearsome)
- Ropes and climbing gear
- Journal full of notes and maps

BACKGROUND

Zav-On Yar is a renowned, if aging, explorer from Lesser Helium. Over his long life he has funded and led numerous expeditions into dangerous and unknown territories, usually with some degree of success. Most of his trips bring back some artifact or piece of historical information that is interesting but of relatively minor significance. As a result, he is always chasing the new "big discovery," and even at his advanced age he pushes himself into stranger and more dangerous situations in hopes of making such a find. An esteemed member of a guild of explorers in Helium, and a retired member of Helium's scout corps, he is often invited to important social gatherings when not away on one of his frequent expeditions.

Somo Vid

STEADFAST RED MARTIAN SOLDIER

ATTRIBUTES



TALENTS

BATTLE VALOR (GRADE 1)

You are a true warrior and steadfast soldier, at home in the chaos and carnage of war, always willing to meet your fate with sword and pistol in hand.

- **Circumstance:** When suffering Fear stress in combat.
- **Effect:** You may ignore the first 2 points of damage to your Fear stress track taken during combat. You suffer Fear stress after this during a combat scene or from other situations normally.

ACCOLADES

- Padwar (2 renown)

EQUIPMENT

- Harness
- Sword (2 £ Sharp)
- Short sword (2 £ Sharp)
- Daggers (2 £ Sharp)
- Pistol (2 £ Fearsome)

BACKGROUND

Inexperienced but valiant and devoted, Somo Vid is a young padwar in the palace guard of a great red Martian kingdom. He is devoted to his people, to the point of being blind to any flaws in his leaders or superiors. This makes Somo a bit gullible, but if deceived or shown he is inadvertently supporting the wrong cause or leader, he will pledge his life to setting things right. Somo's family is well regarded in the capital and his father, Vid Orun, was a respected teedwar in the royal navy before his death some years ago.

Sellorna Oma

CHARISMATIC OKAR ENVOY

ATTRIBUTES



TALENTS

PASSIONATE ORATOR (GRADE 1)

Your unwavering loyalty and love for your people moves others to aid you. Even when dealing with the sworn enemies of your nation, culture, or group, you can often gain concessions or create opportunities with your words.

- **Circumstance:** When speaking to convince an audience.
- **Effect:** You may reroll the result of any failed die roll in a Passion-based attempt to convince or charm others.

ACCOLADES

- Princess (10 renown)

EQUIPMENT

- Harness
- Impressive regalia (2 £ Psychic, for social-based conflicts only)
- Sword (2 £ Sharp)
- Okaran hooked sword (2 £ Sharp)
- Buckler shield

Note: *Characters not used to fighting Okaran swordfighters face a +1 difficulty when first facing Sellorna Oma in melee conflict.*

BACKGROUND

A princess of the royal family of Illall in the Okar nation, Sellorna Oma has been charged with seeking allies for her isolated city in the far north, especially those who can ensure her family's rule is not disrupted by the Okar lords in the capital of Kadabra. However, while on a mission south to seek aid and allies, her party was raided and most were killed or captured. Now alone in uncertain territory, the princess needs friends and assistance, though she can repay such assistance with her skills and connections. She is a skilled stateswoman and well-versed in combat, especially with her people's straight sword, hooked sword, and buckler combination style of fencing.

Tang-Tor

CHARISMATIC FIRST BORN ROGUE

ATTRIBUTES



TALENTS

RAKE AT THE MOUTH OF ISS (GRADE 1)

You are able to con or charm the jewels off a princess and slip the sword from a guardsman's sheath before he realizes what is happening. Your approach may be subtle or direct but, either way, it tends to be effective.

- **Circumstance:** When stealing from others.
- **Effect:** When attempting to steal or acquire an object by subterfuge or stealth, you may reroll one failed die.

ACCOLADES

- Padwar (currently a deserter believed dead) (2 renown)

EQUIPMENT

- None when encountered; typically carries swords, daggers, pistols, and other weapons and gear

BACKGROUND

Found languishing in a cell or awaiting execution, Tang-Tor was once a loyal servant of the goddess Issus and raider for the First Born. Well, he was a servant at least — loyalty to a mad cannibal god-queen didn't sit well with him. Injured and left behind on a raid one day, Tang-Tor simply neglected to return to his people and struck out on his own. Through deception and subterfuge, he made a decent living until one of his schemes went awry and he got caught. Now he needs a way out and help escaping from his impending doom. Perhaps not the most reliable of allies, Tang-Tor is nevertheless neither evil nor corrupt — he's simply used to taking the easiest way to profit and success.

Zita-La

SMART MIXED HERITAGE (OKAR-FIRST BORN) SPY

ATTRIBUTES

DARING	CUNNING	EMPATHY
4	5	5

MIGHT	PASSION	REASON
4	4	8

STRESS	MENACE
12	2

TALENTS

BRILLIANT DECEPTION (GRADE 1 TALENT)

You are able to stay one step ahead at all times, outthinking opponents and making them easy to deceive.

- **Circumstance:** When seeking to deceive or misdirect another.
- **Effect:** You may choose to use Reason when deceiving others, lying, or pretending to be someone you are not.

ACCOLADES

- Chieftess (equivalent to daughter of a dator) (8 renown)

EQUIPMENT

- Harness
- Dagger (2 £ Sharp)
- Pistol (2 £)
- Uses any other gear common to whatever her current disguise or cover story is

BACKGROUND

Some say Zita-La was born to be a spy, a child of a First Born dator in Kamtol and his Okar lover and consort. Zita-La's mother was also believed to have white Martian ancestry. This combined heritage blended to mimic the appearance and skin coloration of the red Martians — a race who evolved from those three peoples. Though somewhat darker-skinned than most red Martians, Zita-La is capable of posing as one with little difficulty, an ability which was utilized by her dator father, who used his daughter as a covert agent. Zita-La spies on rival cities, foreign dignitaries, and other important groups and people for her father and his allies. In addition to her unique heritage and training, Zita-La is utterly brilliant and idealistic and a closet romantic — she could easily use her skills to help a hero who is sufficiently moral or attractive, preferably both.

And the Oscar Goes To...

Supporting characters can be fun, memorable, and incredibly useful. However, narrators and players should always remember they are supporting characters. They aren't the stars of the adventure or campaign. But that doesn't mean they won't sometimes steal a scene.

A well-played, useful supporting character can easily dominate a particular moment. Need a friendly scientist when none of the player heroes fit the bill? Then the supporting character that is created to overcome this problem will perform well and memorably in that moment. Even though a they lack the talents and attribute totals of a player hero, for a focused action they can often do quite well, especially if they have earned some advances by showing up in past scenes and sessions.

In most games this is fine, even desirable. After all, they are a character being controlled by a player. It's not like the narrator is forcing the players to spectate in their own game or simply telling them a story they can't change. But narrators and players should take care that supporting characters remain occasional standouts and stars. If they are regularly outshining the player heroes, it may be time to talk to the players about it and discuss how best your group wishes to moderate the frequency in which supporting characters are used to avoid this problem.



Troupe Play

Troupe play is a concept where players have not just one character, but several. The term is borrowed from theater, where an acting troupe may often rotate or play different roles depending on the exact performance. In troupe play players create multiple characters, either all at once or over the course of the campaign. Then they play these different characters as appropriate for a session or adventure. This approach allows players to experience different perspectives and play styles easily, though it does carry some risk of diluting attachment to a particular character — something many gamers enjoy.The general advice on troupe play for narrators is to consider it as a useful and enjoyable approach, but don't force it. If players want to play one character, let them. On the other hand, if the idea of a multi-character campaign with interwoven arcs and plots appeals to them, it's worth trying.



Styles of Troupe Play

There are three main modes of troupe play. The first is the simplest and most direct. Players make two or more characters using the default character creation rules for ***John Carter of Mars*** and play them when desired.

Example: *Lauren wants to run a simple troupe, with rotating characters but no other customization or limitations. She tells her players to each create three characters for the campaign and have at least one of them ready for play during the first adventure. Some players make all three characters at once, while a couple wait to make one or more characters until they see how the first adventure goes, but regardless of this choice the group is ready to play.*

The second mode involves players creating a group of heroes with each fitting a particular role for part of the campaign. This is useful when the narrator plans for an interlocking campaign with distinct groups of player heroes usually meant to be used together.

Example: *Jack is running a multi-part campaign with characters starting as three distinct groups of heroes: Thark warriors and any potential captives, members of the Helium air scouts, and a group of First Born raiders who have broken away from Issus. Eventually circumstances will occur to allow these characters to more freely mix and match, but for now he informs the players to make sure they at least have their Thark and captive characters ready, as that will be the first part of the campaign.*

The third option is a tiered troupe, with each player having a more powerful main character and one or more secondary characters. This is generally applied to have one or two players using their main characters during an adventure that stars or features them, while everyone else plays secondary and support roles. It's useful if players and narrators wish to emulate the stories of Burroughs, which often feature one or two main characters with important but distinctly lesser heroes appearing as well.

Example: *Matt wants to run a very Burroughsian-style campaign with each adventure focusing on a main hero or two and the other players playing foils, support, sidekicks, and other companions. He tells his players to each make a "main hero suitable to star in their own pulp story" and "two secondary heroes that would make great sidekicks or companions in another story." The players make their main and secondary heroes and now Matt is ready for his first adventure, a rousing tale of romance and war featuring an Okar princess and an Earthborn athlete stranded on Barsoom as the main characters, with a red Martian fugitive prince and his scientist uncle as supporting characters in the story.*

Main characters and secondary characters can be created by giving main characters a few more talents and attribute points at creation — often just a few attributes and talents are enough to make the character feel a bit more important and competent.

Selecting Characters

At the start of every adventure, and at any point where the narrator deems it possible or useful for players to switch characters, each player selects a character from their troupe to use. This is most easily done at the start of a game session, but if a session includes enough time or location jumps, it may make sense to allow or at times even require the players to change characters.

Example: *Matt is running an adventure centered around a besieged red Martian outpost where some of the player heroes are stationed. During the adventure the player heroes are attacked, severely injured, and taken prisoner with little hope of rescue. Though this result was unexpected, Jack quickly adapts by jumping the action ahead two weeks and having the players change characters. Now the group is playing characters sent to investigate the outpost after contact with it was lost. For the rest of the adventure, or at least until something else major or unexpected happens, the players will investigate their own characters' attack and abduction.*

Changing characters need not be universal. Two players might change characters at a point during play while two others continue to play their current characters. Later one of these characters may depart for a time as their player brings in another, and at that same time perhaps one of the first heroes to depart returns. This can become a bit confusing if there are too many characters per player or play-

ers swap heroes too frequently. Narrators should balance the fun and drama of playing a large cast of characters with keeping character rotation manageable.

Tiered troupes must take additional care when rotating and selecting characters. Narrators should make sure every player gets ample time to play their primary hero. Making a schedule, or plotting out games in advance which state when each player is playing their primary hero, may be useful here, assuming the group does not naturally rotate and alternate without this structure.

Methods of Troupe Advancement

There are two ways to advance characters in a troupe. In the first, characters earn separate renown and experience and advance as individuals. In the second, experience is pooled for all the characters under a player's control, and they may spend experience on any character they wish. This option allows a player to concentrate on altering or improving a particular character they feel is important to grow quickly in some way, but it runs the risk of leaving their other characters behind, which can result in unbalanced situations and other problems. Fortunately, as even starting ***John Carter of Mars*** characters are quite capable, this is less of a problem than it is in some other games, but it is still worth thinking about. Narrators can abate this problem somewhat by assigning a minimum amount of experience that must be spent on each character individually.

Example: *In Lauren's game she has decided to use troupe play and shared experience, but wants to avoid the problem of players using all their experience on only one character and ignoring the rest. She sets a rule that each character a player has must receive at least 2 experience each time they are actively used — any excess can be spent on any character. This allows for pooled experience, but ensures no one character gets all the advancement.*

In both cases, renown should be assigned individually to each character. Renown is based on character deeds and actions in the world and cannot be shifted easily.

Troupe Play and Supporting Characters

Troupe play and supporting characters mesh well, but it is worth noting that supporting characters belong to the troupe, not an individual player in it. That said, it is often the case that one or two players will regularly take on the role of a particular supporting character, which may eventually lead to a player taking over the character (see sidebar).

Optional Rule: Troupe Play and Featured Characters

If you are using the optional rules for featured characters, you can use them easily with troupe play. Like supporting characters, featured characters belong to the whole troupe and not one player. However, if desired, a player who has room in their rotating stable of characters may adopt the featured character as one of their own. In this case, it becomes a standard player hero under that player's control.



Momentum and Troupe Play

Momentum is pooled for all the characters in a troupe. This is done both because it's easiest and because Momentum, while generated by character action, is a player resource. Players don't need to "burn through" saved Momentum before switching to another character if it makes sense or it's time to do so.

Complications and Troupe Play

Complications are usually attached to characters and their actions, but once they occur they tend to affect the whole scene. A scene-based complication doesn't go away because the character who caused is no longer in the sense.

Example: *Lauren's airship officer accidentally broke the heroes' airship while defusing a bomb a saboteur smuggled aboard — a complication stemming from her actions. Later in the adventure, Lauren's unlucky airship officer is replaced by another character as her active character for the rest of the adventure. However, until someone fixes it, the airship remains broken.*

A complication that makes things harder for a particular character wouldn't remain when another character comes in to replace them, at least not on the new character. However, it may cause problems for the original character when they return.

Example: *Darren's soldier managed to acquire a complication in the form of offending a fellow officer while resolving a particularly thorny situation at the end of last session. This session, Darren is playing another character, but when he returns to playing his soldier, the other officer will still be offended until some sort of resolution or reconciliation is made.*

Narrators should judge each complication on a case-by-case basis and keep track of lasting complications and who is affected by them. As this can be a daunting task at times, players can be tasked with tracking their own complications. Index cards or notes are very useful for keeping track of complications that stick around for some time or remain in effect during a scene.

Concerns and Caveats of Troupe Play

Troupe play can be an enjoyable way for a game to build and maintain a large and interesting cast of characters. It can keep an extended campaign fresh by allowing players to easily try new character concepts or change things up when desired. There are, however, a few concerns that should be addressed. In most cases these should be discussed by the players and narrator before play begins, communicating any potential problems early so as best to avoid them later.

This section covers the main concerns, broken down for players and narrators to consider and watch out for.



For the Players

These are the common issues with troupe style that players should be aware of.

- Remember that not all your characters share the same knowledge and experiences. Just because your red Martian soldier knows the visiting jed is a traitor doesn't mean your Okar scientist is aware of the same thing.
- Likewise, keep your talents, accolades, and other player resources straight and separate. You don't want to get into the middle of an airship battle your character initiated only to remember "Oh yeah, my *other* character is the ace pilot…"
- Avoid using the same character all the time. The point of troupe play is to have a range of characters and play experiences. If you don't like playing your other characters, discuss this with your narrator and the other players and try to find a compromise that works for everyone.
- If you share experience across multiple characters, resist the urge to drop all your experience on one single "super character." It might seem fun when playing that character, but as characters rotate and the campaign advances this can easily become frustrating for you and others.
- Keep notes or records for your characters separate. It will help you and everyone else if it becomes important to reference them later.
- Don't be afraid to let other players occasionally take the spotlight when you're playing support or secondary characters. You'll have your chance to shine as well — and if you don't feel this is happening, talk to your group.

For the Narrator

These are the common issues with troupe play for narrators to consider.

- Take the time to track where each character is in the campaign, not just each player. The players should help you with this, but don't confuse the adventures and experiences of individual characters or you risk confusing or derailing your campaign.
- Build challenges suitable to the heroes you have in the group. If you really want a particular player hero played at a particular time? Ask their player. You don't need to give anything away, but most players will respond well to, "I think it would be a good idea if you bring _____ on this adventure."
- Encourage players to play different characters by presenting challenges and situations they all can handle. If all your adventures require players to bring their most powerful character to succeed, that's all they will ever want to do.
- Keep notes for different characters, plots, groups, and parts of the campaign separate and organized. This avoids confusion when switching between locations or characters.
- If running games that focus on certain characters, make sure you rotate focus later to different players' characters. If your adventures always focus on the same heroes, players not using those characters will feel left out.

Ultimately these concerns are covered by being thoughtful, keeping organized, and communicating with others. When in doubt, those three practices will fix most problems.

Dynastic Play

One of the advantages of having a setting where characters live for hundreds if not a thousand years (barring calamity) is the ability to craft campaigns spanning years, decades, or even centuries. Of course, even if player heroes remain alive all this time, some may retire or at least give up active adventuring. This is especially true for characters who end up ruling a city or nation or settle down to raise a large family. Even John Carter isn't the hero of every tale of Barsoom once he has children and spends more time in Helium, though he never truly retires. To assist in such extended campaigns, a narrator can use the concept of dynastic play. In this style of play, sizable chunks of time pass between adventures and player heroes are often succeeded, accompanied, and even surpassed by protégés and descendants. Taken to extremes, this style moves well beyond the normal timeline of the Barsoom novels — an ambitious narrator could craft a campaign that takes heroes and their successors centuries if not millennia into the future.

How Dynastic Play Works

In most ways, dynastic play is the same as other campaigns. Heroes go on adventures, gain renown and experience, fall in love, conquer kingdoms, slay deadly beasts, and otherwise do all the valiant heroics common to the Barsoom novels and similar tales.

Downtime between adventures is longer; months or years may pass between sessions, done away with by a brief mention. During these periods, players and narrators should note whatever changes they wish to see in the setting. Narrators tell the players how many changes they can attempt to implement during this downtime by assigning them one or more chances to alter the status quo through their actions. These chances are called developments.

Developments

These are actions that realistically could be performed by the players and their allies using any resources at hand. Developments are essentially new facts or situations that exist in the setting after they are created. They can be personal developments, political developments, or some other form of growth, expansion, or change to the status quo.

Developments don't directly affect characters' statistics. They can't create talents or raise attributes. They don't even add new titles or create new allies — all that must be accomplished through active play. However, developments do change the reality of the campaign, and in so doing often alter the difficulties for various tests, make resources easier or harder to acquire, and generally change the world where the characters live.

Example: *Jack is running a dynastic game of* **John Carter of Mars** *that takes place over decades on Barsoom. After the last adventure, Jack states that two in-game years will pass before the next big campaign arc the players will begin next session. As that's a nice chunk of time, he also informs his players they have two developments they can attempt during that time — roughly one for each year.*

To make a development, the narrator must first inform the players they have the time and resources available to do so. This usually occurs between normal adventures and campaign arcs, often as an additional reward for the peace and prosperity the heroes have earned through some great effort. The narrator selects a number of developments each player hero may attempt and then asks them what they wish to spend their time and energy doing. There are three types of developments.



Option One: Automatic

These developments just happen. They involve roleplaying out the events and the desire to have them occur. An automatic development is anything for which the narrator and players see no reason why it should not happen. If a character has a development and two years downtime and wants to have a child, and they already have or can find a mate? It just happens. If a jeddak of a city wishes to increase trade with an amiable neighbor along well-protected trade routes? It likely just happens. Automatic developments can be quite important or relatively minor, but they are always things that meet with little to no resistance.

Example: *During their two years of downtime, Kale Singh's player decides he wants to spend one of his developments having a kid. His character is already married to a red Martian noblewoman and Jack sees no reason the child cannot be conceived and begin incubating during that time. This development is automatic and both Singh's player and Jack make note of it.*

Option Two: Difficult

These developments may or may not happen. They involve special effort and careful attention. If a jeddak wishes to repair relations with a former ally, they might succeed. Then again things might stay the same or get worse. Difficult developments require a test using attributes determined by the narrator to best reflect what the character is trying to accomplish and how. Difficult developments are usually Challenging (D2), but they can be more or less difficult based on what is being attempted and the resources the character has at their disposal.

Example: *Zala Zors' player wishes to use one of her developments to create a team of scientists in Helium to study the atmosphere plant in more detail. She doesn't want to unlock its secrets or build a new one, but she feels that since the factory has failed in recent history, it's important to know more about how it works. Jack figures finding, inspiring, and selecting the right team of scientists is a Challenging (D2) test which uses Zala's* ***Passion + Reason****. If she succeeds she'll have her science team and they will have begun their research. Both Singh's player and Jack make note of it.*

Option Three: Opposed

These developments are, simply put, ones that someone else does not want. They might be automatic or difficult under other circumstances, but because of other parties they will lead to a conflict. To succeed in an opposed development, the character must beat their opponent in an opposed test. The attributes used for the test are determined by the narrator based on the situation and tactics used.

Example: *Maria Henderson, as a former aviatrix on Earth, wishes to convince an allied nation's navy to create a series of winged fighters for use in the nation's defense. These craft would combine Earth avionics and eighth ray technology for superior maneuverability and combat potential, at least in theory. Unfortunately, the science advisor and one of the influential teedwars in the nation's navy think the idea is ridiculous. To convince them to try, Maria needs to beat the better of her two rivals in a debate using her* ***Passion + Reason****. If she wins she will convince the jeddak and his naval officers to give her plan a try.*



Projects

In the case of complex or long-term developments, narrators may rule that multiple developments must be used to accomplish the ultimate goal. These multi-development works are called projects. A project is broken up into phases, each requiring its own development. In the case of difficult developments that occur across multiple phases, each phase may require its own tests, or attribute challenges may be used in place of tests to create a challenge that when completed finishes the project. In some cases, one phase of a project may be automatic, while another phase may be opposed or difficult.

Characters can combine their developments to co-operate on projects. In this way great works can be accomplished. While generally developments do not lead to gains in experience or renown, narrators may decide that a large project roleplayed and planned in an entertaining way may grant renown or experience to the participants. However, in most cases the reward for completing a project is the project itself.

Example: *Volan Van wishes to convince his superiors in Kadabra to set up better diplomatic relations with Helium and its allies. Jack, as narrator, decides that this is a two-phase project. The first development is automatic: Kadabra will totally agree to better avenues of communication, even if only to better spy upon these rival kingdoms. However, for the second phase Van must convince the leaders of Kadabra that it's worth it to earnestly and honestly pursue these endeavors. Jack rules this is an opposed test, with Van trying to out-argue and persuade hardliners in his country with his* ***Cunning + Passion****. As the Okar tend towards suspicion and xenophobia at times, Jack informs Van's player this test will have a difficulty of 2, while the leader of his hardliner opponents will be opposing him with a* ***Cunning + Reason*** *(D1) test. Success is still possible, but it is far from certain…*

Partially completed projects that fail or are abandoned sometimes have side-effects; complications rolled during tests might also create new problems. A group or nation is less likely to embrace a project that failed spectacularly in the past, no matter how good an idea it seemed. On the other hand, partially completed projects that are rejuvenated or resumed are easier to finish, as some phases are already complete.

Option One: Attributes and Talents

The first option simply allows the character who is the legacy of another to take one talent and one attribute from their predecessor and add them to their character. This is done after character creation and reflects the lessons, training, and heritage passed on to them.

Example: *Jon has an aging red Martian dwar, Zom Bran, he has played for much of the campaign. He now wishes to retire the character, and he decides he wants to play his character's son, Gram Zom, a heroic young padwar. Jon creates Gram Zom as a starting player hero and then replaces one of his attributes and adds a talent from his father's statistics. Gram gains his father's Might of 7 and Fierce as a Banth talent, a grade 4 talent which lets him deal additional damage and ignore the first affliction he takes in battle. While Gram is largely a starting hero, he is noticeably enhanced by the lessons and heritage of his father.*

Option Two: Experience

The second option gives a legacy character a chunk of experience to spend on their character at the end of character creation. This is a fraction of the total experience earned by the predecessor at the point the legacy character is created. This percentage is up to the narrator to determine, but one quarter is the default. Thus, a character who earned 120 Experience during their adventures would give 30 experience to their legacy (25% of 120).

Example: *Priscilla wishes to create a character who is the student and protégé of Cicero's character, Star Ton, who after a long campaign is now jed of a prominent city-state. Cicero's character over the course of the campaign has accumulated an impressive 180 experience. Jack, the narrator, rules that Star Ton can pass a quarter of that on to any legacy character: 45 experience. Priscilla makes her character using the default rules, but then has 45 experience to spend before play. As Star Ton is a skilled scientist and warrior, she uses the experience to increase her Reason by 1 and then buys two talents, one relating to scientific training and the other to combat.*

If desired, narrators can insist a portion of the gifted experience be used to acquire talents or advance attributes that are somehow connected to their predecessor. Thus the son of a great duelist might need to spend at least some of their gifted experience on a talent related to dueling or melee combat.



Using Developments and Projects in Play

By themselves, developments and projects are often strategically valuable but rather dry distractions. However, if combined with adventures, roleplaying, and active play they can help create situations that are memorable and enjoyable. A character's great push to improve their nation may anger a rival kingdom. A character's child may become a target for kidnapping or political manipulation should they become too powerful. The possibilities are endless.

Example: *Through tenacity and no small amount of luck, Volan Van has convinced Kadabra to earnestly and actively improve diplomatic relations with Helium and other nations. Unfortunately, in doing so he alienated and undermined a cabal of hardline spies, soldiers, and other influential warmakers within the Okar nation. As narrator, Jack prepares an upcoming adventure where Van and his allies will uncover and face a brutal coup attempt in the Okar capital, something they can only stop through a series of heroic adventures!*

Remember that developments are a way for players to push and prod the setting and campaign during long downtimes and between grand adventures. If that doesn't appeal to the players or narrator? Don't do it; instead make whatever changes between games make sense and get back to adventuring.

Also, players and narrators should remember that when it comes to important projects or developments, there is always the option to succeed at a cost. Narrators should remind players of this if they forget, because the costs provide amazing roleplaying opportunities and ideas for future adventures. To undertake great projects and make lasting or large-scale changes often requires great sacrifice, especially if things go wrong.

Example: *After a vile cult releases an ancient plague on the kingdoms of Barsoom, the heroes seek to wipe out all vestiges of the disease and immunize the planet against a future outbreak. The heroes discover it is possible to make a serum to immunize all species on the planet and use the atmosphere factory to spread the cure across Barsoom. Unfortunately, tests to make the serum fail. The players inquire about succeeding at a cost and the narrator informs the players that in its current state the cure will only work properly if a mixture of the plague and cure is injected into a host, using their body to gestate a cure but killing the host in the process. Before anyone can stop him, one of the heroes flees to the atmosphere factory and injects himself with the mixture of plague and cure. As his body begins to stiffen and crumble, the healing dust from their friend's body begins to spread through the air, stopping the plague forever.*

Not every cost need cause the death of a character or similar end, but such results are more common in dynastic play — after all, there are other heroes to rise up and honor the legacy of the fallen.

Legacy

Eventually in dynastic play, characters pass on, retire, or simply spend less time adventuring and leave more active pursuits to their offspring and protégés. This is one of the chief advantages of dynastic play — the feeling of building a legacy of heroic deeds. However, this can be off-putting for some players, who are reluctant to simply set aside an experienced character with ample talents, higher attributes, and lots of accolades in favor of starting over with a new character. To abate this feeling, narrators can introduce rules for legacy.

Legacy allows a character to pass along one or more parts of their character to a successor or descendant without the new character having to pay the cost normally associated with it. This makes starting characters who are part of a legacy more powerful and experienced. This also encourages players to tie their new characters into an existing legacy. This doesn't need to be the legacy for a player's own character — it is possible to make the descendant or protégé of another player's hero. In fact, this can provide some interesting situations, with one player portraying a parent while their friend plays the character's child, or two players adventuring for a time as master and apprentice.

Legacies can be handled in one of two ways. Narrators and players should pick the version that words best for their games and use this consistently.

Gifts

In addition to mechanical benefits, legacy characters can receive gifts and accolades from predecessors.

A predecessor may elect to give their legacy a piece of core equipment as well, though if the item is unique they will logically lose possession of it. They may arrange a title or ask an ally to assist their legacy character. To reflect this, a character may pay for a legacy's title or ally out of their own unspent renown. They keep their renown total, but the benefits pass on to their legacy. Of course, betraying or dishonoring your predecessor runs the risk of losing such gifts.

Example: *Jon's character Zom Bran decides to give his son, Gram Zom, a sword given to him by his jeddak for heroism in battle. He also uses 5 unspent renown he has collected to ask a friend and ally of his, a Thark chieftain, to look out for his son on his adventures. Gram Zom gains the sword and the ally, though Zom Bran keeps the overall renown for the ally — it was his glory and fame that made it possible, after all.*

Legacy, Death, and Dynasties

Heroes can eventually die, even in settings like Barsoom where they tend to live a very long time and survive incredible perils with alarming frequency. Death can be random, heroic, tragic, senseless, or predictable. However, in ***John Carter of Mars***, the death of a player hero or other important character should always be one thing: significant.

The demise of a player hero in the game always matters. Always. Even a seemingly random or senseless death serves to remind everyone of the mortality of even the greatest people. In dynastic campaigns death is particularly noteworthy. It signals not only a great loss and an end to a heroic life, but it also passes the torch. When an elder or experienced character passes, the new heroes who take up their position, responsibilities, and causes must rise to fill the void. The primary way this occurs is through the use of the legacy system to create direct protégés and descendants, but any character may decide to honor the fallen through their actions and future accomplishments.

Example: *During Jack's campaign, Jason's hero Nuran*



Rol, a former Okar spy who has risen to rule a city as its jed, perishes valiantly while preventing an invasion of Skeleton Men from Jupiter. Next session another player creates Rol's daughter as a player hero and one of the other players, selected to rule the city after Rol, has a great monument erected to honor Nuran Rol's courage and sacrifice.

In some cases the torch passes back to an older character. The death of a young hero may bring their predecessor out of retirement. This is a great way to get some closure on an unexpected or tragic departure and keep the campaign moving forward. This returned hero might remain active after they help deal with the immediate loss, or they may pass the torch yet again to another legacy character.

Example: *When Gram Zom is captured and believed dead during a particularly harrowing adventure, Jon brings his character Zom Bran, Gram's father, out of retirement to investigate his son's death, first to avenge him and later to locate him and free him from captivity.*

Mechanically, death rarely occurs by accident in ***John Carter of Mars***. Heroes tend to black out, rather than perish, when defeated. This means that unlike some other tabletop roleplaying games, players have increased control over when their characters make a final exit. Often this is tied to some great cost or last blaze of glory, but it can also be the denouement of a major arc of the campaign.

Example: *At the end of a long campaign arc and before the timeline jumps ahead twenty years for Jack's grand dynastic campaign, two great heroes meet their ends. One perishes stopping a doomsday machine that threatens all of Barsoom — the cost for successfully destroying the machine and ending the threat. The other hero, an aging scientist who has seen many adventures, is retired by their player and passes away peacefully in the years between adventures. Both heroes leave legacy characters to carry on for them as the campaign moves forth.*

Whenever death does occur in a campaign among the player heroes and their significant allies and foes, narrators and players should appreciate and enjoy it. After all, it's a game and an opportunity for entertainment — no one is really dying. This means that unlike so many situations in real life, everyone can appreciate and enjoy the story opportunities and experiences this loss provides.

DUELS OF MARS

"We may at least die fighting and as great warriors should, John Carter," he replied.
– Tars Tarkas, *The Gods of Mars*

Duels are an important if deadly part of Martian culture. The Martian duel takes many forms, though they all tend to follow the same rules to the same ends. Adherence to these rules is nigh-absolute — to do otherwise is to lose face and honor, and to invite revenge and persecution

Outside of the traditional Martian duel, one-on-one conflict with deadly stakes is commonplace in pulp adventures. Some of these duels are formalized, others informal. In all cases the stakes are high and the conflict dramatic and personal. These conflicts can be simple or complex in form — from wrestling a foe on the edge of a great cliff, to duels of wits where the loser is poisoned, blown up, or otherwise done away with.

This chapter discusses Martian dueling culture, including a discussion of combat styles and techniques common on Barsoom and its neighboring Jasoom. Optional rules for running duels in more depth are also included.



Customs and History

Barsoomian dueling is pragmatic and deadly. While later periods of Jasoomian history adopted less lethal dueling practices to settle matters of honor, the Barsoomians favor deadly contests that ideally only emerge from the most severe of transgressions and vendettas. In practice, lethal dueling is one of the many things that prematurely ends the lives of many .

The validity of the duel as a tool for dispatching a rival or enemy is widely recognized. Provided the duel is recognized and fair, there are no official or legal repercussions for killing during a duel across the various cultures and nations of Barsoom. However, whatever sanctity the duel is given does not supersede other customs and beliefs. For example, killing the spouse of your lover in a duel may be recognized as legal, but it does not remove the custom barring someone from marrying the killer of their spouse. Similarly, a duel does nothing to protect someone from personal vendettas — someone who kills a foe in a duel may quickly find their fallen enemy's friends, lover, or relatives coming after them. It is also seen as selfish — though generally admissible — for characters of the same army or nation to duel during an active conflict such as a war or disaster.

Challenges to Leadership

Duels are a traditional and widely accepted method of challenging leadership. If a leader cannot defend their position, they can easily lose it. Despite this, it's not as simple as a jed, jeddak, or other leader losing a duel and thus their position.

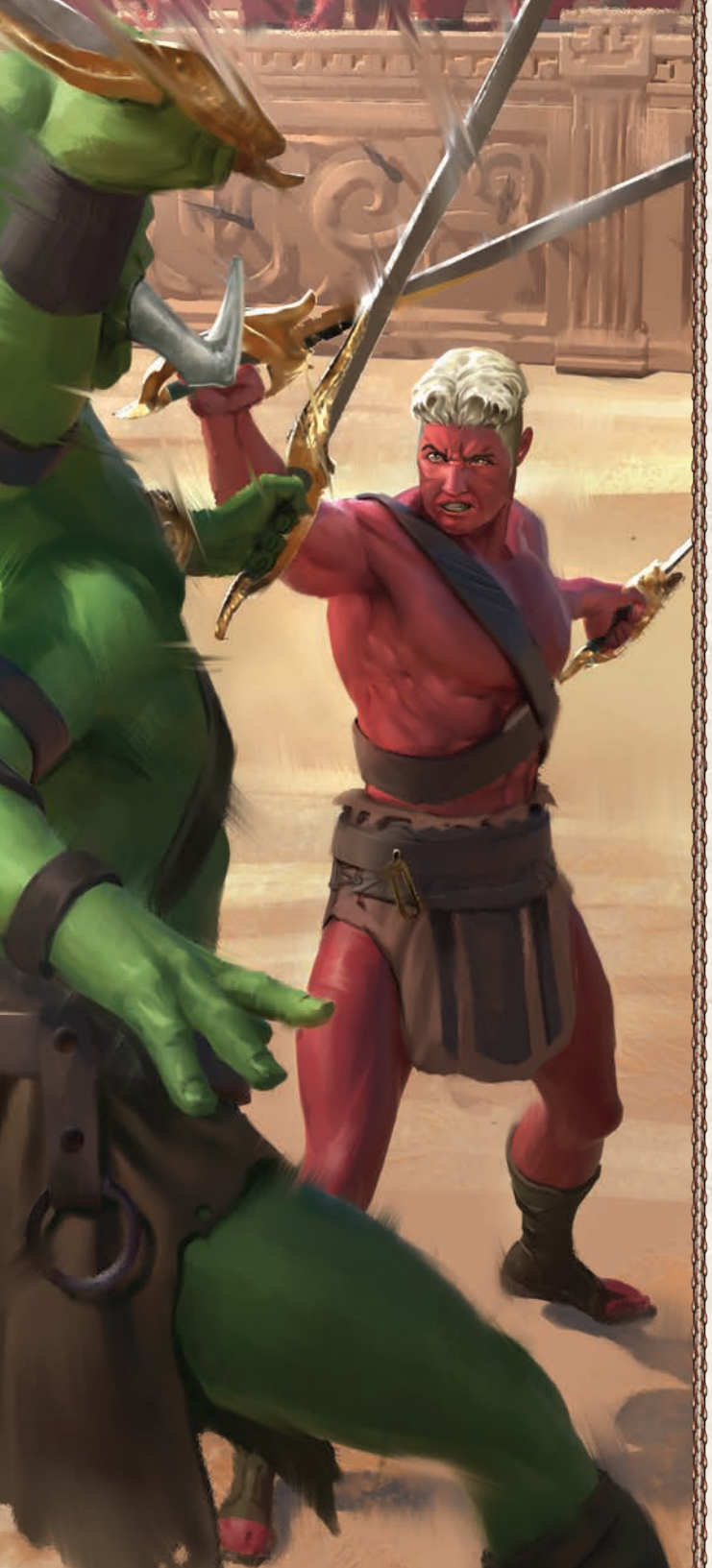
Those challenging a leader must have some standing to do so. An outsider cannot show up at the gates of a city, challenge the jeddak, win, and take over. Such a system would destabilize even the most freeform ruling structures on Barsoom. In most cases, a ruler can be challenged by their heirs, direct subordinates, or leaders of powerful factions in their city or nation. In some structures, such as the green Martian hordes, any warrior can challenge their superiors, working up the line to jeddak of the horde if they are fierce, skilled, and fortunate.

Other characters may sometimes be allowed to serve as a champion during leadership challenges, provided they are serving a valid successor. A spouse or family member of the challenger can champion them in a duel if desired, thus placing their loved one in power. There is a danger here — people may view the champion as the true power and ruler, thinking the new leader weak without them.

Gladiatorial Duels

Duels are a common form of gladiatorial entertainment, with popular duelists facing each other in arenas across Barsoom. These duels are often between slaves or captives expected to fight and die for the entertainment of the crowd, though some champions battle freely for prizes, praise, and adulation.

Not all gladiatorial contests are duels; many are grand melees or battles against beasts or multiple foes. However, favored and popular fighters are often paired against each other in a duel. These battles are often the main event in larger gladiatorial contests.



Choice of Weapons

In a standard Barsoomian duel, the challenged party is allowed to pick the weapons used. In most cases, multiple weapons are allowed, with duelists carrying a longsword, short sword, dagger, and other weapons freely into the duel. However, it is considered dishonorable to use a superior weapon against an opponent — giving any weapon used in this fashion the Dishonorable quality. In Barsoomian duels the hierarchy of weapons is as follows.

- Rifles and larger firearms are superior to pistols.
- Pistols are superior to lances and spears.
- Lances and spears are superior to longswords and other long blades.
- Longswords and other long weapons are superior to shorter blades.
- Short swords and hatchets are superior to daggers and knives.
- Daggers and knives are superior to unarmed combat.

A character facing a foe with a particular weapon is expected to use the same or lesser weapon. Using a lesser weapon is considered a bold insult, a display of supreme confidence, or a foolish vanity depending on the skill of the user and result of the duel. Many duelists pick weapons they are exceptionally skilled with whenever possible. This is expected and viewed as a sensible tactic. If for some reason a weapon is determined to be broken, flawed, or otherwise unusable, then the duelist will be allowed to arm themselves with a functioning weapon.

Despite these generally strict customs, the Barsoomians are a pragmatic people. There is no shame in dispatching a foe who refuses to use a superior weapon, such as a warrior who has the option of using a sword and insists on facing his foe with a dagger. Nor is it dishonorable to kill a foe whose weapon was knocked aside or disarmed as part of a duel. In fact, allowing a foe to rearm themselves during a duel is seen as both exceptionally honorable and possibly foolish — there is no shame in finishing a foe not skilled and careful enough to hang on to their sword in a fight.

These various rules and customs only apply to duels. In a war or grand melee against multiple opponents, the rules of combat are more liberal. A warrior who faces combatants with equal weapons during such battles will no doubt gain a reputation for great honor and courage, but it's not required. Narrators should use their discretion when they think Barsoomian customs about weapon use come into play, remembering that Mars is a place that values honor *and* practicality.

Atypical Duels

When Barsoomians, and most Jasoomians, refer to dueling, they typically mean a physical contest between two combatants. Usually duels are presumed to be fought between armed combatants in an open space, though unarmed battles are far from unknown. However, a duel can be fought in a number of ways. As long as there is a ritualized conflict which carries real stakes and consequences, it could properly be called a duel.

Narrators and players are encouraged to use the dueling rules provided here to come up with memorable and unusual conflicts. Duels may be fought using strange methods, weapons, or environments. Some examples of unusual duels include:

- A game of jetan where the loser agrees to drink a fatal poison, or where the board itself is rigged to deliver a fatal shock to the loser.
- A duel on a narrow platform or wire with the goal of knocking your opponent off.
- A battle of wits using an explosive, poison, or deadly beast. Failing to deduce the proper way to avoid this hazard results in one party doing themselves in.
- A battle of insults and jibes that continues until one party is unable to produce a proper response.

Dueling Rules

In ***John Carter of Mars***, the term duel is used to describe any one-on-one conflict between two similarly armed characters that results in an agreed-upon outcome. This may be a sword or knife duel, a shootout, or even a deadly battle of wits. These rules model the way most dramatic media presents such duels — an entertaining back and forth with no decisive act or blow until the end when the victor decisively bests their foes.



Two Constants of the Duel

There are two constants in every duel covered under these rules: duels are always between two participants, and they are always dangerous.

Two Participants

A duel is always between two characters. No other characters are to act or interfere. To do so is dishonorable. If another character forces themselves into a duel by attacking one or both participants, the duel immediately ends without resolution. Unscrupulous individuals may try to circumvent this rule by cheating (see *Cheating in Duels*).

For a classic example of the transition between duels and normal combats, look at Alexandre Dumas' *The Three Musketeers* — a swashbuckling predecessor and definite inspiration to Burroughs' work. In the early chapters of the novel, the hero D'Artagnan gets into three duels with the titular heroes, agreeing to duel one after the other as a matter of honor despite deeply admiring the Musketeers as heroes and seeking to join them. However, as D'Artagnan begins to duel Athos, one of the Musketeers, the Cardinal's Guard shows up and tries to arrest them all. A fight quickly breaks out with the Musketeers and D'Artagnan on one side and the Cardinal's Guard on the other. In game terms, Athos challenges D'Artagnan, he accepts, and the two begin a duel. However, once the Cardinal's Guard shows up and joins the fray, the duel ends prematurely. At this point it doesn't matter that Athos and D'Artagnan were opponents in the now-ended duel — they are free to team up and fight their true enemy. This example not only spells out how duels differ from other battles; it is also a great example of how narrator-driven events can disrupt a duel and lead to interesting plot developments.

In a rare instance where multiple parties wish to duel each other, the narrator should break the battle up into individual duels. Once two fighters move to team up on a single opponent, the conflict is no longer a duel but a regular melee.

Duels Are Dangerous

Even if a duel isn't to the death, it's dangerous. The two participants are trying to harm and possibly maim or kill each other. To represent this, all damage during a duel inflicts a bonus 2 .

This element of the duel is mechanically one of the most significant parts of the dueling rules. It makes duels move quickly, keeping them exciting and dramatic with successful attacks which are serious and noteworthy. Even duels of wits or wills inflict more damage of the appropriate type.

Because duels are so dangerous, minions are never involved in a duel. A duel between a character and a minion is run as a simple conflict, one which usually ends with the minion being defeated quickly.

Declaring a Duel

To use the mechanics for dueling, a duel must be declared between two participants. Declaring a duel can be spontaneous and informal or a drawn-out formal affair with seconds, witnesses, and various negotiations about time, place, and armaments.

To properly declare a duel, two things must happen.

- The person declaring the duel must identify and challenge another character.
- The other character must accept the duel.

Challenges and acceptance can be explicit or implicit. A formal challenge or acceptance with a flowery speech is an acceptance, but so is a silent nod and drawing one's sword. A challenge may even involve other characters present; informing one's companions, "This foe is mine," and approaching them weapon in hand is a challenge as sure as any other.

REFUSING A DUEL

A character may refuse a duel. However, this often creates other problems — refusing a duel adds 2 to the Threat pool. In addition, Barsoom is a world that values courage and honor highly. A character must

generally have a good reason to refuse a duel or they risk sacrificing renown awards and damaging their reputation with allies and other important characters. Good reasons to refuse a duel include:

- A character is too injured to properly fight a duel. This includes a challenged character refusing to fight a hot-headed but wounded challenger.
- The challenger is clearly outclassed. The disparity must be so great it would diminish the challenged to defeat them, such as an adult refusing to duel a child.
- There is an active war or other large-scale conflict and both participants are important to the same side in that conflict — dueling officers and nobles can undermine a nation.
- Some external factor makes the duel inherently unfair. One cannot use blackmail, torture, or other immoral action to force a duel.

In many cases refusing a duel is more accurately seen as postponing it. An officer might refuse to duel a peer during war, but after the war if they have not made amends, the duel may occur.

Example: *The villainous Odwar Um Noval is challenged by the child of a family he murdered. Um Noval is a skilled duelist and a full-grown adult. The child is underaged and wounded. Um Noval accepts and quickly kills the child. While technically within his rights to accept then challenge and kill the child, his victory is seen as cruel, callous, and vile. Uneven or unjust duels make for great motivators and roleplaying opportunities. The outclassed innocent due to be slaughtered by a cruel challenger unless a champion is found to aid them is a staple of many adventure stories, as is the foil whose fate hangs on the result of a great duel.*

Terms of the Duel

Each duel abides by predetermined terms that define the encounter. There is one term that must be decided on: how the duel ends. Other terms are optional. Like declaring a duel, these terms can be formal or informal, simple or complex.

Ending the Duel

Before a duel begins, a few things must be determined. First is the way the duel ends. Duels can end in a number of ways.

- **First Blood.** When the first affliction is suffered by a duelist, usually a Wounds affliction. This is exceptionally rare on Barsoom, where people regard such conflicts as trivial and disruptive.
- **Unconsciousness.** The first character to black out loses the duel. Afterwards both sides are usually attended by healers to help ensure their survival.
- **Death.** The first character to black out is killed. This is the most common duel in Barsoom and the stakes are high.

Duels to the death circumvent the normal rules of damage and dying. Instead the dying character gets to narrate their end, maybe make a short speech, and then expire dramatically. Duels fought to a serious wound can also circumvent the normal damage rules. Scars, maiming, and other serious injuries can be the result. Such damage usually comes in the form of a Flaw added to or replacing an existing one.

Example: *Kale Singh is dueling a treacherous thern warrior on the edge of a cliff. The duel began with a solemn nod, drawing of blades, and promise of no quarter asked or given — a clear sign the duel will end in death. When Kale finally inflicts enough damage on his foe for them to black out, he and the narrator briefly describe Kale burying his blade deep in the thern's guts right before the warrior gasps, stumbles, and falls from the cliff to his end. Despite blacking out not necessarily being fatal in many cases, it is in such a deadly duel.*

The ability to kill a target, bypassing blacking out and other rules for damage, is the most serious aspect of the dueling rules. It should not be used lightly. Narrators concerned that this makes their games too lethal should allow player heroes to barely survive a lethal duel by spending a Luck point. Such characters will need assistance to recover from their near-death experience; otherwise they risk succumbing to their wounds or being killed by hostile forces while in their weakened state.

Beast Duels

Fans of Edgar Rice Burroughs will note that the one-on-one conflict of human versus beast is a common battle in his stories. Burroughs' character of Tarzan is famous for such battles, but many of the author's heroes have gone toe-to-claw with a fierce beast before.

At the narrator's discretion, a beast may be a participant in a duel. Such duels are necessarily informal, with the beast issuing a challenge by appearing, ready to fight, and the challenged character accepting by directing all witnessing that they will handle this fight alone.

Beast duels are handled like any other, except the beast always seeks to kill their opponent. Their primal instincts and the reality of life in the wild allows no other end.

Sparing a Foe

A character who wins a duel may decide they will not end the duel as planned. The most common way this occurs is for a character to decide to spare a foe during a duel to the death, though a character may change the end of a duel to any reasonable and plausible result.

Sparing a foe is a major event for both characters. A foe spared from death may be shamed, grateful, enraged, or relieved depending on their relationship with their opponent and their personality. The spared character may feel indebted to their savior or resent them. They may become a great ally or an even more motivated enemy. Characters who spare dangerous foes may be seen as valiant and heroic or foolish, depending on the opponent. They may also be seen as weak; certain cultures and many villains view mercy as a weakness.

Example: *First Born raider Xaidor Malas is challenged to a duel by her treacherous second mate, Gell*

Gorn. The duel is to the death and Xaidor easily bests her overly ambitious crewmember. She decides to spare Gell but kicks him off her crew. The narrator notes this event and plans to have Gell Gorn return to bother Xaidor again.

Being spared in a duel tends to result in either relief or resentment from the spared characters and their allies. A saved character may express gratitude. They may also view this as a grave insult suggesting they are unworthy of an honorable death. The defeated character's friends and loved ones likely have their own opinions and reactions to both the spared character and the character who spared them.

Characters relieved to be spared may pledge service or provide favors to the character who beat them. Characters who resent being spared may plot revenge, work against the character in the future, or seek an ally or champion able to defeat the character who humiliated them. Particularly treacherous characters might even act relieved and grateful only to betray their "savior" later. Whatever the results, there should be consequences for sparing someone in a deadly duel.

Other Terms

Other terms can be set when the duel begins. These are specific rules that cause the duel to end if violated. Terms can be nearly anything the participants agree upon. Here are some example terms.

- Any use of a weapon superior to your opponent's automatically gains the Dishonorable quality. This term is common to nearly all duels on Barsoom involving physical combat. Note that superior doesn't mean having a better quality of your opponent's weapon, such as better quality sword but a weapon outside of your opponent's weapons category, such as using a firearm against someone armed with a sword, or a longsword against someone armed only with a dagger.
- Duelists will be chained together.
- Each side will have a third party examine their weapons for tampering, poison, or sabotage.
- The duel will be fought in rounds or bouts. Between bouts, the duelists may rest and heal.
- The duel will be fought mounted.

Terms can be implied, customary, or explicitly laid out beforehand. Many nations and cultures have particular types of duels that come with assumed terms. These dueling customs make great role-playing opportunities and surprises for players who issue or accept a challenge and only then realize what they agreed to.

Example: *Haran Phel is a skilled duelist from Helium who has accepted a challenge while in a lost city of Okar during an adventure. Expecting a rather typical duel, he is surprised to find the "standard" duel in the city is fought with poisoned knives, with both participants chained together at the wrist. Unwilling to suffer the loss of face and honor for pulling out of the challenge, Phel prepares for this unusual conflict.*

Violating a term of the duel is often seen as dishonorable and is considered cheating. It may even end the duel, requiring it to be restarted, rescheduled, or resolved in some other manner.

Unusual Methods and Ends

The most common types of duels are discussed in this section, but duels fought in nontraditional or unusual ways sometimes require atypical resolutions. Narrators and players should feel free to come up with tailored results for certain duels. For example, a duel in the form of a jetan match could result in characters making tests for turns of play with the first to fail three tests losing the game. A very spirited debate might be run as a duel, but with "damage" representing attacking someone's arguments and reputation and blacking out representing being struck speechless and without proper retort.

Winning a Duel

The main prizes for winning a duel are personal satisfaction and survival. However, in most cases victory provides other benefits. Renown is a common reward. It is noteworthy and impressive to best a foe, especially a dangerous or superior one, in a duel. Even private duels between foes may result in renown gains once they become known. Other rewards are possible as well. Here are some examples.

- Defeating a ruler may result in the winner taking their place if they are a legitimate successor.
- In many cultures, such as the green Martian hordes, the weapons and supplies of the loser go to the duel's winner.
- Defeating a rival suitor may result in the winner being selected to court or marry a romantic interest — however, remember that on Barsoom you cannot marry the one who kills your spouse!
- If the deed and achievement rules from the ***Dotar Sojat Era Supplemental Rulebook*** are being used, winning a duel may qualify as a great deed. (See *Achievements and Deeds*, ***Dotar Sojat Era Supplemental Rulebook***.)

Narrators are encouraged to be creative and generous with rewards for winning duels, especially those of great importance politically or socially in their campaigns.

Cheating

Violating the terms of a duel is cheating. It ends the duel and carries dire consequences for the cheating characters— *if* they are caught.

Who Can Cheat

A character may cheat at a duel they are in or a character outside the duel may cheat by interfering with a duel.

How to Cheat

The character explains how they intend to cheat and makes an opposed test against the duelist they wish to target. The attributes used vary based on the method used, though Cunning is usually one of them. This test occurs outside the normal turn order and can be declared at any point once the duel has begun. However, only one cheating attempt can be made by the character per duel — even if the cheater's plan involves multiple steps or transgressions, the one test reflects the success or failure of the whole plan.

If the cheating party wins this opposed test, they may bank the Momentum gained for use during the duel.

Example: *The vile Odwar Um Noval is facing the Earthborn soldier Kale Singh in a duel. Noval is concerned the powerful Jasoomian may slay him and wants to give himself a leg up. He decides to coat his sword with a toxin that will slow Singh's reflexes and increase his sensitivity to pain. The narrator rules that this is a clear attempt to cheat using Noval's* ***Cunning + Daring*** *against Singh's* ***Cunning + Reason*** *to spot and avoid the attempt. Noval rolls his attempt and gains 5 successes, while Singh manages only 2. During an early exchange in the duel, Noval scratches the hero with his poisoned blade. Noval's 3 successes become 3 extra Momentum he can use to represent exploiting the effects of the toxin on his opponent.*

If a cheating attempt fails, the target immediately recognizes what has happened. For 2 Momentum, they gain some sort of proof they can bring after the duel ends to prove the cheating — provided they survive. For 4 Momentum, the cheating is so obvious an outside party notices and calls for action.

Getting Help Cheating

Cheaters may use assistance to cheat, with an outside character helping a cheating duelist succeed. The duel between Zad and John Carter in *A Princess of Mars* is such an example — Sarkoja blinds Carter as Zad attacks. (See Teamwork and Assistance in ***John Carter of Mars***, *Chapter 4: Adventuring in Barsoom*.)

Getting Caught Cheating

Being caught cheating during a duel is a grave insult and transgression. At the very least, the cheater is seen as dishonorable and gains no renown for winning a duel, no matter how powerful the foe they defeat.

If cheating results in the death or maiming of another, often the cheater risks the same fate. Most cultures on Barsoom will not balk at the execution or banishment of a known cheat whose actions cost the life of another, and even a cheater's allies might decline to avenge them under these circumstances.

Dueling Monster-Class Characters

Monster-class characters are easier to duel because their menace rating means they take fewer afflictions before they black out. However, some monster-class characters might be exceptionally dangerous in one-on-one combat. In such cases, narrators should feel free to increase the character's menace rating within the confines of the duel. This is especially appropriate for characters who serve as bodyguards, henchmen, and enforcers for other characters.

Example: *Pagg Vom is a massive green Martian who serves as an enforcer for the brutal jed in an upcoming adventure. During the adventure, Pagg challenges one of the heroes to a duel. Since Pagg is supposed to be a fearsome killer who has won many duels, the narrator increases his normal menace from 2 to 4 while dueling, reflecting his deadly aptitude for personal combat.*



Dueling Talents

The following talents are appropriate for duelists and characters who possess particular skill and training in the dueling arts. They serve as ready-to-use talents and also examples for players and narrators seeking to design their own dueling talents.



Assess Style (Grade 2)

You can study an opponent's combat style to determine their strengths and weaknesses.

- **Circumstances:** When studying an opponent.
- **Effect:** While facing an opponent, spend a conflict action to assess their strengths and weaknesses. This is an opposed test, usually **Cunning + Empathy** against their **Reason + Cunning**. Success means you learn your opponent's highest and lowest attributes. You may only use this talent once per opponent per scene. If you use this talent on a target you've successfully assessed in a previous scene, you gain a bonus d20 to your test and may learn their next highest or lowest attribute (your choice).

Casual Duelist (Grade 1)

You are quick, perhaps too quick, to enter into a duel. You will draw your weapon and issue or accept a challenge for any reason.

- **Circumstance:** When challenging someone to a duel or accepting one.
- **Effect:** If you challenge someone to a duel or accept one, you gain a bonus d20 on the first attack that you make against your opponent.

Eye of the Banth (Grade 2)

You are a warrior. Your fierce demeanor and unwavering tenacity drive you to victory over opponents, allowing you to brush off the terrors of battle and push onward.

- **Circumstances:** When facing an opponent in one-on-one combat.
- **Effect:** When fighting an opponent in one-on-one combat, you gain a bonus d20 to attack and may ignore the first Trauma affliction suffered.

Killer Duelist (Grade 1)

You are adept at death duels. You do not hold back, giving no quarter and expecting none in return.

- **Circumstances:** When facing an opponent in a duel to the death.
- **Effect:** When facing a character in a duel ending in death, you deal +1 damage to all attacks made during the duel.

Signature Weapon (Grade 3)

You are skilled at using a particular weapon, especially in duels and other one-on-one conflicts. You know its balance, strengths, and limitations.

- **Circumstances:** When using a piece of core equipment defined as a weapon.
- **Effect:** You have a signature weapon in the form of a piece of core equipment. This weapon deals +1 damage and grants a d20 bonus when used to attack or defend in physical combat. When using this weapon in a duel or one-on-one conflict, it takes 4 Momentum to disarm this weapon instead of the usual 2.

Note: *This talent does not include the cost of the core equipment itself. That must be selected and bought separately.*

This Is All I Need (Grade 3)

You are well versed in using smaller, seemingly inferior weapons in duels and battles. While their lesser reach is a problem for others, you find you can use your foe's false confidence in their superior weaponry and reach to slip inside their defenses and finish them off.

- **Circumstances:** When facing a foe and armed with an inferior weapon.
- **Effect:** When armed with an inferior weapon compared to your opponent, you gain a bonus d20 to defend against attacks with superior weapons, and may perform a Counterstrike for 1 less Momentum. Your Counterstrikes deal +1 damage.

Weapon Mastery (Grade 2)

You are exceptionally skilled at using a particular type of weapon — longswords, short swords, daggers, or some other weapon.

- **Circumstances:** When attacking and defending with a particular type of weapon.
- **Effect:** When wielding a particular type of weapon (selected when this talent is taken), you gain 1 Momentum for every successful attack or defense.

Dueling Styles

Dueling styles exist for players and narrators who want more advanced rules for creating and using combat styles and training in their ***John Carter of Mars*** campaigns.

Various styles of combat influence or are influenced by duels. Sword and weapon arts are among the most common, especially on Barsoom, though unarmed combat contests have a long and storied history, especially on Jasoom.

In ***John Carter of Mars***, a dueling style is represented by one or more talents which model the general strengths and capabilities of someone trained to fight in that fashion. For example, those who study an Okar dueling style learn to use the buckler shield and hook sword effectively to defend, deflect, and disarm. A pugilist educated in the style of Jasoomian boxing would practice using footwork and blocks to defend while using an offense primarily consisting of setting up an opponent for a punishing combination of barehanded blows. Some styles teach weapons and unarmed fighting, others concentrate only on one type of combat.

In pulp stories and often in the real world, the training and conditioning of combat arts is broadly applicable. A boxer might not be a skilled swordfighter, but that doesn't stop them from throwing a nasty jab with the basket-hilt of their sword or ducking and weaving away from armed attacks. Most of these dueling arts, while they excel at one-on-one combat, are also quite useful against multiple opponents.

Learning Styles

Characters may start with a style by building it as a talent or series of talents during character creation. As knowing a dueling style is an important part of a character, players should consider where their character learned this style and from whom. This decision is important for native Barsoomians, as they may run into fellow students or masters of their style.

Characters wishing to learn a style during play may do so by spending experience and purchasing talents with the proper techniques. They must also find a teacher or school to train them and spend time learning the style. This likely results in a time jump or training montage scene where the character trains with their master and learns their new style. Player heroes experienced with a dueling style may even instruct others, using their down time to instruct an ally or other player hero in the dueling arts.

Buying a Style

Dueling styles in ***John Carter of Mars*** are purchased as talents. They are actually constructed from a number of effects, which can be chosen and combined to form a "style" of combat that provides distinct benefits. Each of the following martial arts techniques adds to the overall grade and cost of a style.

These techniques show a particular strength of a style. This doesn't mean a style without a strike or disarm cannot hit targets or take away a foe's weapon — they simply aren't the focus of the style. Also, these effects are examples: they can be increased for additional effect. For example, a Strike is normally a +1 grade and does +1 ◆ of damage. However, a character could add additional grades to do more damage — one additional grade per +1 ◆ of damage.

Styles can be organized as one talent or multiples as desired. This is a matter of preference and ease of player use. Some players will find having all their techniques in one talent makes them easier to remember, while others will find the opposite.

Example: *Victoria is making an Earthborn duelist who is a displaced samurai warrior. She gives the character the suggested Kenjutsu techniques of disengage, fast draw, lunge, and strike. These techniques total 5 grades of effect and Victoria places them all in one talent simply called "Kenjutsu Master."*

Example: *Jack is making a Zodangan duelist who has mastered Barsoomian Fencing. He takes all the suggested techniques: Bind, Defend, Lunge, and Strike, a total of 6 grades of techniques. He groups the techniques into two talents: one grade 3 talent called "En Garde!" which covers the Lunge and Strike effects, and one grade 3 talent that includes the Bind and Defend techniques which he calls "Wall of Steel."*

The following section lists numerous dueling styles, along with some effects they commonly employ. These are guidelines and suggestions, not requirements — there are many master duelists who borrow, alter, or omit techniques from their main style in practice. They are primarily for background and flavor and are not meant to be a comprehensive or perfectly accurate representation of real-world martial arts.

TECHNIQUE	GRADE	EFFECT
Blind	+1	After a successful attack, you may bind an opponent's weapon. Any attempts to use the bound weapon suffer a +1 difficulty. Binds last until the attacker ends the bind or the target spends 1 Momentum after a successful attack or defense.
Combination	+2	After making a physical attack, you may spend 2 Momentum to make an immediate extra attack against the same target.
Defend	+2	You gain a bonus d20 when defending against melee-based attacks.
Disarm	+3	After making a successful defense against a melee weapon, the defender can disarm the attacker. For 1 Momentum they may choose to be holding the weapon themselves.
Disengage	+1	After a successful defense in physical combat, you may automatically move from Immediate to Near range
Escape	+1	Any tests to escape grabs, grapples, and binds gain a bonus d20.
Fast Draw	+1	Your first attack in a combat gains a bonus d20. If you act before your opponent has a chance to attack, the bonus increases to 2d20.
Grapple	+2	You can grab a target as part of an attack for 2 Momentum. While grabbed, the target gains +1 difficulty to all actions. A grapple is broken once the defender manages to attack you successfully and inflict damage. At the narrator's discretion, you may suffer +1 difficulty to actions that are logically more difficult while grappling a target (attacking another character, piloting an airship, etc.).
Lunge	+2	Automatically move from Near to Immediate range when making a melee attack. This attack gains a bonus d20.
Riposte	+2	After making a successful defense against an attack, the defender may spend 1 Momentum to make an immediate Counterstrike against their attacker.
Strike	+1	Attacks with your style's chosen weapon deal +1 .
Throw	+2	As part of a successful attack you may throw a target to the ground anywhere within Immediate range. For 2 Momentum, you may throw them in any direction into Near range. Prone opponents suffer a +1 difficulty when attacking and defending against standing opponents until they take a Movement action to stand.

Some of the following styles are detailed or discussed in the Barsoom novels, while others are speculative. Still others come from other sources, fictional and historical.

American Heritage

This is a catch-all term for the fighting arts of the American frontier, including the close combat arts of various Native American tribes. This art excels with smaller weapons such as long knives, hatchets, and clubs, usually wielded one in each hand. The style focuses on quick and effective cuts and slashes to the limbs and vital organs, including the head, neck, and wrist. The goal is not always to kill a target with one blow, but to disable them quickly so they can be safely dispatched.

Common Techniques:
Bind, Combination, Grapple, Strike

Arnis

A Filipino martial arts system, sometimes known as Eskrima or Kali. Arnis students train in the use of various weapons — including swords, knives, and sticks — as well as unarmed combat. The focus is on quick evasion and series of fast attacks designed to whittle down an opponent. Arnis is currently popular in modern film, and is used as the basis for cinematic fights in many blockbuster movies and popular TV shows.

Common Techniques:
Combination, Defend, Disarm, Strike





Boxing

An unarmed Jasoomian art, this style is a great example of a focused art. Boxers learn to take lesser blows, avoid or block stronger ones, and hit hard and fast with combinations of unarmed strikes. That's largely it, and the effect can be devastating in the right hands — doubly so on Barsoom where Earthborn boxers enjoy superhuman might.

Common Techniques:
Block, Combination, Riposte, Strike

Brawling

Brawling isn't a "real" martial art, but that doesn't mean it doesn't have its students and the occasional master. The art of surviving and winning a back alley ambush or barroom rumble, brawling is about using weapons of opportunity, dirty fighting, and whatever else works to win. Most characters who excel at brawling learned to do so during a tough life or upbringing, often concentrating on a handful of simple but effective techniques that served them well in actual fights. Most soldiers, criminals, and panthans who don't study or learn some other method of combat are accomplished brawlers by necessity.

Common Techniques:
Defend, Grapple, Lunge, Strike

Fencing (Barsoomian)

Barsoomian fencing across numerous cultures is designed to use the dagger, short and long sword to quickly dispatch an opponent. As Barsoomian medicine can heal most nonlethal wounds, the focus is on dealing and avoiding the deadliest thrusts and strikes, even if it means taking the occasional lesser blow.

Common Techniques:
Bind, Defend, Lunge, Strike

Fencing (Jasoomian)

A general term of European-style swordplay, Jasoomian fencing focuses on using numerous fencing-style weapons to bind, parry, disarm, and otherwise avoid incoming attacks all while setting up a target for a final decisive thrust. These styles often have favored blades such as rapiers or sabers, but their arts can be adapted to use most lighter weapons capable of thrusting and cutting — this includes most Barsoomian blades.

Common Techniques:
Bind, Disarm, Lunge, Riposte

Gunfighting

While romanticized during the American West in the late 1800s, this dueling style involves any use of firearms as dueling weapons. The pistol is almost solely employed in such confrontations, though the speed and accuracy skilled gunfighters achieve is useful with any ranged weapon. The classic, if not wholly accurate, version of the gunfight duel involves holstered weapons and a face-off to see who can draw quickly and accurately shoot their opponent down. On Barsoom and in many parts of Jasoom, pistols are only appropriate dueling weapons if both sides are so armed — a gunfighter who shoots down swordfighters and unarmed foes is usually seen as dishonorable and criminal.

Common Techniques:
Combination, Disengage, Fast Draw, Strike



Kenjutsu

Traditional Japanese swordplay, usually using the katana, a curved sword native to that Jasoomian nation. Traditionally associated with the samurai culture of historic Japan, modern students and teachers still exist. During most of the period of the Barsoom novels, Japan was in its post-samurai Meijin period, though it is possible some of the last samurai or their students might find their way to Barsoom.

Common Techniques:
Disengage, Fast Draw, Lunge, Strike

Kickboxing

Kickboxing is a general description for dueling arts that focus on a mix of kicks and punches used to disable a foe. Sweeps, pushes, knee and elbow strikes, and simple throws are often employed in arts that focus on "foot and fist." This group of combat styles covers everything from Muay Thai to various styles of karate and kung fu to French savate.

Common Techniques:
Combination, Defend, Strike, Throw

Okarian Fencing

Okarian fencing uses the Okar signature weapons — a hooked main-hand blade, a short stabbing sword, and a small cup shield designed to be used in the secondary hand alongside the short blade. Fencers of this style bind, disarm, and block incoming attacks until an opportunity presents itself to dispatch a foe. More information on Okar fencing is found in the core rulebook (see the ***John Carter of Mars*** core rulebook, *Chapter 10: Okar and Beyond*).

Common Techniques:
Bind, Defend, Disarm, Riposte

Warhoon Hand Fighting

This style is favored by certain Warhoon fighters, most notably former jeddak Bar Comas, who used it to win many duels for leadership in his horde. This style is unarmed and focused on exploiting the lack of familiarity many warriors have with barehanded fighting compared to armed combat. Warhoons who learn this style are capable of beating opponents to death with a flurry of barehanded blows and snapping bones with painful grapples and holds. Other green Martian hordes may develop similar styles, using their four-armed forms and great size to dominate other opponents.

Common Techniques:
Combination, Grapple, Strike, Throw

Wrestling

Popular across Jasoom and Barsoom alike, wrestling is a meta-style that covers grappling and ground fighting arts from numerous cultures and groups. The focus on wrestling is to overpower, out-position, and subdue a target through a variety of grabs, chokes, locks, and other holds. Throws, sweeps, and takedowns are also employed, especially to get an armed opponent on the ground where they can be subdued and dispatched. While most sports wrestling avoids strikes while grappling, in actual combat all bets are off.

Common Techniques:
Bind, Escape, Grapple, Throw

Esoteric Martial Arts

The ***Dotar Sojat Era Supplemental Rulebook*** details a power, Esoteric Martial Arts, designed to emulate the strange and powerful martial arts of some pulp adventures. That power is designed to simulate many dueling styles, and can be considered to be one of them should a talent or test involve dueling styles — such as a character trying to figure out what style an opponent uses, or in case of a talent that provides bonuses when dueling styles are involved.



NARRATOR'S SECRETS: HELIUM

A THE HELIUMITE BATTLESHIP ARATHOR

The Heliumite battleship *Arathor* has been missing for almost forty teeans when it drifts powerless and derelict across the city walls. Roped and tethered like a stray zitidar at one of the many naval quays, it broods silently. Sent on a secret mission to an undisclosed destination, it has returned without its stalwart, hand-picked crew. Below decks, its holds are still filled with its original rations. Its water-tanks have not been touched. The magazine shows no sign of being depleted. In the captain's cabin, a log lies open on the skeel desk, its first page bearing the legend "We begin" in flowing, Barsoomian script. There is no other entry. On the stern taffrail, a leather strap flutters in the breeze. It is part of the harness of a Martian fighting man, but its metal represents no city known to Helium.

B GREAT LIBRARY, AVENUE OF ANCESTORS

The soaring towers and minarets of Greater Helium's airy public library are astir with speculation. Ancient tomes, bound in the hides of extinct marine species and varicolored collages made from the skins of Martian men, have appeared throughout the building. They materialize at night, when the library is deserted by all save the elusive darseen. Found on shelves and desks, balustrades and platforms, some are filled with neat, cuneiform writing, unused on Barsoom for 10,000 years. Others are more modern and more unsettling. They describe dark rites conducted in the city's pits and implicate many of Helium's nobility in unspeakable acts. Scholars and librarians are at a loss to explain their origin, but the sequence of their appearance describes a three-dimensional pattern mimicking a form inked in every unusual volume. Three volumes, and three nights, will complete the pattern.

C THE STUDIO OF KAR LUM

Kar Lum is one of Helium's most celebrated artists, appointed often to capture the likenesses of the city's noblest warriors and majestic princesses. His studio, once the epitome of order, is now a canvas of spilt paint, broken brushes and torn sketches. Of Kar Lum there is no sign. At the centre of the studio, miraculously untouched, is his current commission. Beneath its shroud, it is a masterpiece of landscape art. A scintillating representation of an alien vista, it is painted using Kar Lum's own pigments: a weird concoction of exotic plant distillations and powdered mirror-glass, charged from outlandish batteries with the energies of the ninth ray. The source of these distillations, and of the batteries, is unknown. Anyone observing the picture for more than a tak will claim the landscape is alive, as if Kar Lum had painted a gateway to a different world.

D SHATTERED BUILDING

Blasted by a violent explosion, the blackened shell of the building is a pockmark on Helium's otherwise perfect face. It was until recently the villa of a wealthy merchant whose fleet sailed far beyond the city walls, returning with riches and marvels and mysteries and, on occasion, curiously furtive passengers. Fragments of exquisite curios and scorched fabrics litter the shadows of its cracked and tumbled walls. A crater occupies the centre of the manor, a sightless eye staring at the open sky. In a charred bureau in the wreckage of a secluded office is a jar of red pigment and a tube of black hair dye. Both have been used. In the corner, beneath a tumble of plaster, is a stone slab that pivots to reveal an underground workshop. Laid out on a subterranean workbench are a series of black glass flasks, each containing different amounts of radium powder.

E AN UNDISTINGUISHED WAREHOUSE

Tucked into a quiet street in Helium's western quarter is a compact warehouse. Little distinguishes it from its anonymous surroundings save the well-armed panthans who patrol its perimeter. It is rented to a minor merchant that some city registers record as killed in an airship accident six teeans ago. With the exception of its guarded main and rear doors, and a lofty skylight, the only access is a trapdoor leading to and from Helium's pits and warrens. Inside, it is stacked with crates of radium rifles and pistols – enough to arm a rebellion. Invoices show the shipper to be a Zodangan jed and the recipient a minor Heliumite noble known for opposing the jeddak. Yet appearances can be deceptive. Perhaps the documentation is too convenient in naming the smugglers. Maybe there is another explanation for the weapons – an explanation the captain may provide.

F THE PNEUMATIC TRANSPORT TUNNELS

Beyond Greater Helium's pneumatic station are a series of ancient passages discovered during construction of the transport system. These were only partly explored by the engineers, laborers and slaves building the rail line and are now largely forgotten. Recently, passengers have reported seeing lights dancing in the tunnels. Helium's authorities have been slow to respond, for some reason denying the possibility of an unexplored subterranean labyrinth just outside the city. In truth, the maze is vast and runs deep though Barsoom's primordial crust. Eccentric archaeologist Ro Tem and his party of excavators have disappeared into its trackless passageways. The only evidence of their passing are pages from Ro Tem's notebook, blown along the tunnels like so many fallen leaves. What lies within the maze remains a mystery: a sleeping race waiting in crystal coffins; a coven of Orovars sustained and mutated by gigantic fungi; an ageless, vengeful cult of Issus.

Map of Helium



Locations

1. Scarlet Tower
2. Gate of Jeddaks
3. Avenue of the Ancestors
4. The Temple of Reward
5. Jeddaks Palace

Main Roads
Walls
Water Canals
Cisterns & Fountains
Plazas
Gardens

N

Scale : Haads

0 3 6 9

NARRATOR'S SECRETS: ZODANGA

A UNDERGROUND LABORATORY

Concealed amidst the tunnels and pits beneath the city, a series of radium-lit chambers form a grisly laboratory. Some rooms are pristine, though their walls and floors are coated now in fine dust. Others resemble abattoirs. Canisters of dismembered body parts, vats of foul-smelling liquids and discarded heaps of skins and bones are distributed seemingly at random in these awful places. Searching these charnel houses reveals the remains of banths and calots, malagors and ulsios. There is even evidence of orluks and white apes. Worst of all, there are the bodies of red and yellow Martians. Many have been eviscerated; some have their craniums sawn open and the brains removed. Elsewhere are patchwork chimeras, composite corpses of man and beast. Bloody notebooks and feverish jottings contain the secrets of what happened here, but not in whose name it was done. Somewhere on Barsoom, a chimeric army waits.

B THE TEMPLE OF ISSUS

Having survived the sack of Zodanga and endured the collapse of Martian religion, the Temple of Issus became an informal academy for the city's few philosophers. The Orphans of Iss, as they style themselves, are a secretive group rumored to have connections to the assassins' guild and prominent slave traders. No one really knows what occurs inside its walls, which are well-guarded by men masked and robed in purple and carrying weapons of peculiar design. In Zodanga's marketplace there are stories of the temple's vast and hidden wealth, of its chained library said to contain secrets of past and future, and of spirits that walk invisibly on the wind between the worlds. Strange emanations are said to flicker from its crystal casements and witnesses claim the air moves oddly in its vicinity. The authorities dismiss all such fancies and seem blind to the powerful men that pass through its portico.

C THE WRECK OF THE VOSIGAN

To the northwest of the Smuggler's Entrance to Zodanga's northern quarter lies the wreckage of the *Vosigan*, the mutinous battleship that defected to John Carter's forces when they sacked the city. Scuttled by persons unknown during the battle, it is widely considered to be haunted by the shades of its vanquished crew or, at the very least, by a monstrous black calot known to prowl its tumbled decks and lair in its broken hull. What made its captain defect, and what brought the mighty vessel down, is still the subject of speculation in Zodanga, but few will chance the shades of its warriors, the beast in its belly, or the armed cordon set around it since Carter's attack. Some have looked out on its gaunt skeleton and wondered if the guardsmen protect the city from what lies within the ship, or the ship from the more curious of the city.

D THE ASSASSINS' GUILD

Few think it possible the assassins' guild has a headquarters, preferring to believe it an organization of loose affiliates meeting in alleys and disreputable cafes. The reality is that the guild owns a lavish villa east of the jeddak's palace in which, under the guise of a successful mercantile operation, it conducts its business and follows its rituals uninterrupted by Zodanga's devastation and reconstruction or by the activities of the Jeddak of Jeddaks. Within its precincts, clerks and scribes, book-keepers and cashiers busy themselves with the operations of a trading organization. *Inside* its stout walls, however, down narrow, hidden passages and in covert chambers existing alongside the building's public spaces, the guild plots and schemes and thrives. Few clues point to this hidden world: the suspicious reports of a dwar in the city guard, curious ventilation shafts in the palace walls, the drone of generators late at night.

E THE PIT OF GAR VON

Beneath the ruins of Zodanga's shattered northern district lies the Pit of Gar Von, an underground arena where wealthy Barsoomians pay to disport themselves in violence and depravity, or watch others indulge their wickedness for a price. It is the cause of numerous disappearances and the source of many of the bodies found in the lawless, ruined neighborhood. Once a subterranean pleasure palace, it is now a hellish, sweating network of blood-soaked corridors and lightless cells clustered around an oval fighting pit. It is accessible only down a concealed ramp, hidden in the shell of a gutted villa, and watched over by desperate, landless men. Rumors circulate of a killing floor somewhere beneath the city, but no one has uncovered its whereabouts. Parents grow desperate for their missing children or lament their tragic deaths in brutal circumstances. Meanwhile, Gar Von, jedwar of Zodanga, grows in power.

F THE "BLIND" OBSERVATORY

A sardonic joke in Zodanga, the "Blind" Observatory is the remains of Sar Tak's celestial laboratory. Its great telescope was destroyed when the city was razed by Carter and his allies, leaving the building otherwise undamaged. Sar Tak disappeared, some say to travel far beyond Barsoom. Formerly an abandoned shell, the observatory is now home to peculiarly mute engineers engaged in constructing a vast and lensless telescope. Fliers bring in raw materials at night, lowering them into the walled gardens surrounding the observatory. These small, fast airships avoid local air-patrols, bear no insignia and fly no pennons. They are crewed by thin, hard-faced men who do not speak. As the "telescope" takes shape, the air hums with static. Sharp, inexplicable reports echo in the darkness as if air is being forced suddenly from enclosed spaces. The old joke has worn thin; the Blind Observatory has seen and welcomed something.


Zodanga
1. Central Plaza
2. Naval Tower
3. Jeddak's Palace
4. Fighting Arena
5. Temple of Issus
6. Naval Air Dock
7. Slave Market
8. The Ruins
9. Smugglers' Entrance
N
Scale : Haads
0 1 2 3
A
B
C
D
E
F
1
2
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NARRATOR'S SECRETS: PALACE

A THRONE ROOM

The throne room was once the embodiment of power and decadence. Time, however, has brought it nothing but decay and ruin. The only hint of the room's former splendor is the throne, set upon a huge stepped dais. While the marble walls are cracked and pitted, and the columns and benches crumbling to dust, the throne itself seems to have defied the dilapidation of the rest of the room. The great steps to its seat are untouched and the throne itself is still decorated with gold and gemstones that have long since been looted from the other places within the palace. Stranger still, the anti-chambers that lead off from this room—a meeting area and private audience chamber—are also untouched by age and dust. Rumors say voices can be heard coming from the throne room in the black of night, as if someone is still holding court within the ruined walls.

B SLEEPING APARTMENTS

Many travelers seek refuge in the great palace, hoping to stay safe from the dangers of Barsoom's wilds. At first glance, the sleeping apartments make comfortable shelter with a good vantage point. Those who make it out of the palace tell of strange happenings, stories of silent raiders who steal valuables unseen, of disappearing objects, and superstitions of the place being cursed by the ghosts of the dead. A handful of those who witnessed their belongings being stolen swear they were moved by invisible hands, pulled up along walls and between cracks but never saw the thief. In truth, this part of the palace has become infested by darseen, small creatures with chameleonic skin and an affinity for shiny objects. For them to work in organized packs, however, is almost as strange as their reason for residing in a place so lacking in their preferred gains.

C DUNGEON

The descent to the dungeons is dangerous. Steep stairs, unusual on Barsoom, give the feeling of balancing on a precipice with each step, made even more terrifying by the darkness that slowly consumes the passage. Eight cells line the walls, each with strong metal bars from floor to ceiling. Two decaying bodies are sprawled on the bottom steps, no doubt unlucky explorers or raiders who found the stairs unforgiving to their lack of caution. The first four cells contain desiccated skeletons, but the two ahead contain a more gruesome sight: two bodies, partially mummified from the Martian heat and dry conditions of the dungeon, mouths open in a silent scream. The last of the cells contain bodies only just beginning to decay, eyes wide open, mouths agape. The true horror of the dungeon can only be seen on closer inspection; all the keys are within the cells, each in reach of its inhabitant.

D MENAGERIE

This great menagerie would once have housed a prize collection of Barsoom's most exotic and terrifying creatures. Dozens of cages and enclosures line the wall of this room from floor to ceiling. Some lay empty and abandoned; in others the bones of creatures, long forgotten by their masters, lay undisturbed. Within the collection of decaying cages, one locked enclosure contains an unusual find: the bones of a strange animal and a collection of three ancient eggs. The nature of the beast or how the eggs came to be is of great interest to Valazar Voro, a scientist who resides in a nearby city. Many have attempted to retrieve the eggs, though none have returned successful and some did not return at all. Valazar's reasons for wanting to acquire the surely fossilized specimens is unknown, as is how to gain entrance to the eggs' ostensibly sealed enclosure.

E LIBRARY

Floor-to-ceiling bookcases line the walls in the first three chambers that make up the palace's grand library. Brittle papers are strewn across the floor and sit in piles on desks unused for centuries. Many books are missing, destroyed or pilfered for their rarity. In the third chamber, a bookcase holds a stack of forgotten books. Among them is a tome bound in an aged, dark purple leather. The book is written in a truly ancient language of Barsoom, one not heard in living memory. Drawings within the book show the planet's lost oceans and great forgotten creatures, walking the lush planet in a time before the great drying. Also sketched in its pages are schematics of recognizable technology that have never before been replicated; the radium torch, the structure of the canals of Barsoom, and the exterior and the technology of the great atmosphere plant.

F JED'S CHAMBER

This room was the private quarters of the palace's jed, his name lost long ago along with his city. Though locked from the inside, the mechanism stiff from age, the chamber's great treasures have been stolen. The fabrics, bleached by age, are turning to dust that floats in the warm light pouring through the open window. If one looks for too long however, you notice that not all the destruction in this room is due to the passing of millennia. The fine furniture strewn across the room is not the work of pirates or thieves, but a much more deliberate force. Deep red marks stain the floor and tell the story of someone who never left this room alive. Half of a bloody handprint decorates the wall shared with the dressing room, the red smear ending neatly, highlighting a thin line in the surface of the wall.


Palace Floorplan
Ground Floor
First Floor
Slaves' Quarters
Stables
Courtyard
Conservatory
Menagerie
Armoury
Kitchen
Sleeping Apartments
Bathroom
Dining Hall
Dungeon
Throne Room
Great Hall
Library
Jed's Chamber
Dressing Room
A
B
C
D
E
F

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Dungeon
Throne Room
Great Hall
Library
Ted's Chamber
Dressing Room
Sleeping Apartments







ADVENTURES ON BARSOOM IN THE PRINCE OF HELIUM ERA

Upon the bloody mound we met them, hand to hand, stabbing where the quarters were too close to cut, thrusting when we could push a foeman to arm's length; and mingled with the wild cry of the Okarian there rose and fell the glorious words: "For Helium! For Helium!" that for countless ages have spurred on the bravest of the brave to those deeds of valor that have sent the fame of Helium's heroes broadcast throughout the length and breadth of a world.

Edgar Rice Burroughs' ***John Carter of Mars: Prince of Helium Era Supplemental Rulebook*** provides you with an in depth look at the Prince of Helium era of play for the ***John Carter of Mars: Adventures on the Dying World of Barsoom*** roleplaying game.

- Narrator advice on using the themes and tone of the era and the plots of *The Gods of Mars* and *The Warlord of Mars* to create exciting Prince of Helium era campaigns.
- New character options for Okar, First Born and white Martians, including new pre-made talents, flaws, and expanded accolades and renown spends.
- New narrator characters, those most beloved and despised of the era.
- New strange technology, powers for your players to acquire, and mysterious places of the Prince of Helium era to explore, all packed with plot seeds to inspire narrators.
- New optional rules for using supporting characters as well as legacy and troupe play.
- Expanded rules exploring duelling and honor, including rules for exciting personal duels and duelling styles.

This supplement requires the ***John Carter of Mars: Adventures on the Dying World of Barsoom*** core rulebook.

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