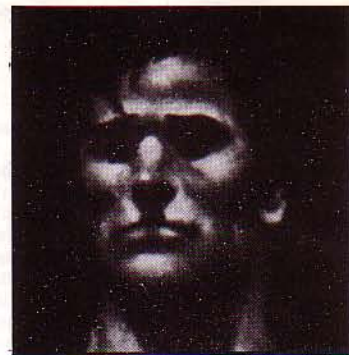


# JOHN CARTER

Warlord  
of Mars



## Love, Honour and the Barsoomian Way

A REVIEW AND GAME DISCUSSION BY JOHN & DEIRDRE EVANS

What's all this about, you may ask yourself? Well, this SPI game is based on a series of 11 books by Edgar Rice Burroughs that are tales of heroism and adventure on the planet Mars (or Barsoom as it is known to its inhabitants). The game seeks to recreate an era of swashbuckling valour, sweeping romance and dastardly villainy which the books describe.

Central to many of the stories and much of the game is one John Carter. Originally an American living at the time of the American Civil War and the Old West, Carter was teleported to Mars where, through his feats of valour, he gained renown and noble status to become its Warlord. He married the incomparably beautiful Dejah Thoris, who was princess of the Martian nation Helium.

Barsoom is a dying planet with dried up seas turned to wilderness. There are woods, forest and an ice cap at its north pole. Cities and capitals of the diverse Barsoomian nations dot the landscape, and are populated by the various coloured men, (red, white, black, green, yellow and even invisible) plus a few oddities. Age does not seem to trouble the peoples of Barsoom, most of whom are depicted as fit and in the prime of life despite the passage of time. This effect is Mr Burroughs' intention. The women of Barsoom are very beautiful.

The Martian outdoors and certain of its cities are roamed by a selection of fearsome monsters. Worse than these are the black-hearted Barsoomian villains who will abduct a hero's princess for rascally purpose or deed. Martian heroes must prove themselves equal to a pursuit across an oftentimes cruel and hostile environment to rescue their love and bring villains and accomplices to account.

Barsoomian heroes are armed with an awesome physical and moral fortitude. John Carter is their prime specimen; he is immensely strong, and the finest swordsman on 2 worlds; he can jump large distances due to the lesser Martian gravity; he is resolute, good and of the strongest moral fibre, and is possessed of a love for his princess which surpasses all things.

Provided with the game is an excellent background booklet by Scott B. Bizar entitled "The World of Barsoom" which presents the Barsoomian picture. Within it, Eric Goldberg provides a synopsis of Burroughs' Martian series. Hence the player gets a good idea of Barsoom and its history whether he has read the books or not.

### The Game Package.

The box cover is embellished with some stunning artwork, most laudable. Inside are a rulebook, the background booklet, a sheet of 400 counters, 2 identical sets of charts and tables, 168 cards in sheets, a standard SPI size mapsheet, decimal die and a normal die. With the American version came a counter storage tray with a snugly fitting lid which greatly reduces the chances of counter spillage.

First to the counters. They are colourful, functional and display the necessary quantitative data for play over some unusual identifying symbols. Some are back-printed. Most counters represent individual men or creatures; others represent fleets, or markers which will illustrate the various game functions.

2 sets of charts and tables are an obvious boon, and present a variety of easy to use matrices.

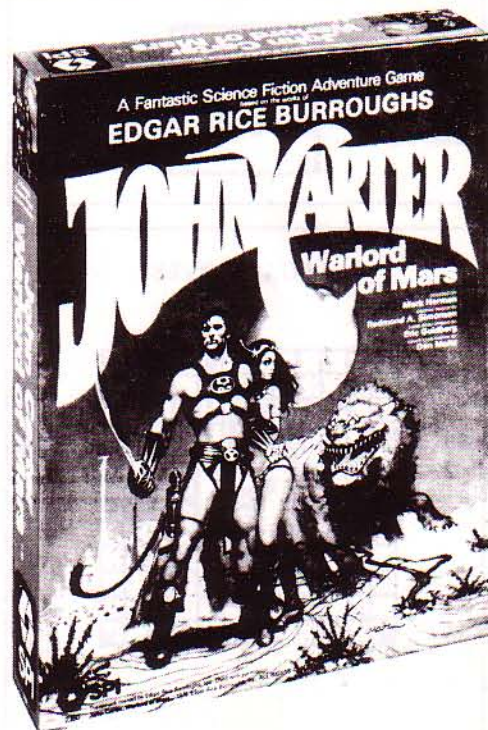
Cards portray random events, movement directions, manoeuvre options, diplomatic machinations and acquisition directions. It would appear that the game's budget did not stretch to illustrations of heroes, monsters and villains, though the game does not suffer because of it.

The cards provided should be carefully removed from their sheets so that no identifying mark is left on a card to "mark" it.

The unusual map is colourful, consisting of a number of tactical displays and a double circular projection of the planet Barsoom. The latter depicts the game's strategic setting, splitting the planet into topographical areas containing a number of cities that are joined by movement routes. The length of each route is given in haads, the Barsoomian measurement of distance. These cities and keyed routes constitute the basis of the quantified point-to-point system the game utilises for strategic movement. The various topographical areas affect movement and combat.

A display of an "average" Barsoomian city is presented, being broken up into various functional areas. Detailed tactical displays are also presented of a flier (which is 2 Barsoomian airships locked side to side for boarding combat); an open/arena display for encounters outdoors and duels in city arenas; a street display; a house display, which represents the house of a Barsoomian nobleman and a palace display, which is representative of a typical Barsoomian prince's palace. Across these displays breathtaking duels for the highest stakes between heroes and their adversaries occur. Movement across them is regularised by a grid of small squares. There is not a hex on the entire mapsheet!

The rules booklet complements the Barsoomian background article (described earlier) with commentary, further rationale and a comprehensive glossary of game and Barsoomian terms. The rules booklet has 28 pages, long for what is intended to be a simple game, despite the presence of such features as Designers Notes, counter inventory and play aids. This length is alleviated by the entertaining presentation of the commentaries plus rulings and by presenting the "John Carter, Warlord of Mars" package as 3 games: *The Duelling Game*; *The Strategic Game*; and *The Military Game*. The former 2 games are closely allied, the latter is more of a separate entity. For the purpose of this review we intend to limit ourselves to the former two though may return to the latter at a later date.





These games are meant to be played in the order presented above, so let's examine the Duelling Game first.

## The Duelling Game

The Duelling Game is both a separate game in itself and the combat module for the Strategic "John Carter" Game. It is for 2 players and is played on the 5 tactical displays mentioned above. Play occurs in Tactical Turns according to a novel sequence of play whereby the defending player may not react to the attacking player until that attacking player is discovered. The attacking player is the hero who is attempting to rescue his princess from the clutches of the villain, controlled by the defending player. Each duelling encounter will vary considerably, the villain himself may not even be present, but this is the basic theme of the duel situation.

The counters used represent either characters (heroes, villains, minor characters, warriors, princesses, male or female personages) or beasts of Mars (a nasty lot including apes, banths, white apes, and siths to name but a few). They are quantified as to strength, alertness, agility and "level". They are moved across the tactical displays in a strict order determined by their relative Alertness Ratings. Characters and beasts move at the same rate except heroes who can, due to their superior reflexes, move more quickly most of the time. Some heroes (John Carter of course) even have the ability to jump over another character's counter. Rules are presented for moving around corners and facing, which is important for combat.

Combat occurs when counters are adjacent and appropriately face each other. It is a 2 stage affair: first initiative is determined, second the blows are struck according to initiative (which is determined by comparison of the Alertness Ratings of the combatants, ties being diced out). Blows are struck by rolling the decimal die, adding the Strength Rating of the striker to the score and modifying the score by any relevant positional modifiers (such as rear attack, or whether the attacker has moved, or is unarmed). This score is then compared to the target's Agility Rating: should it equal or exceed it, then the target counter loses a level. Most characters and beasts have one or two levels; heroes have four. Critical hits can be gained.

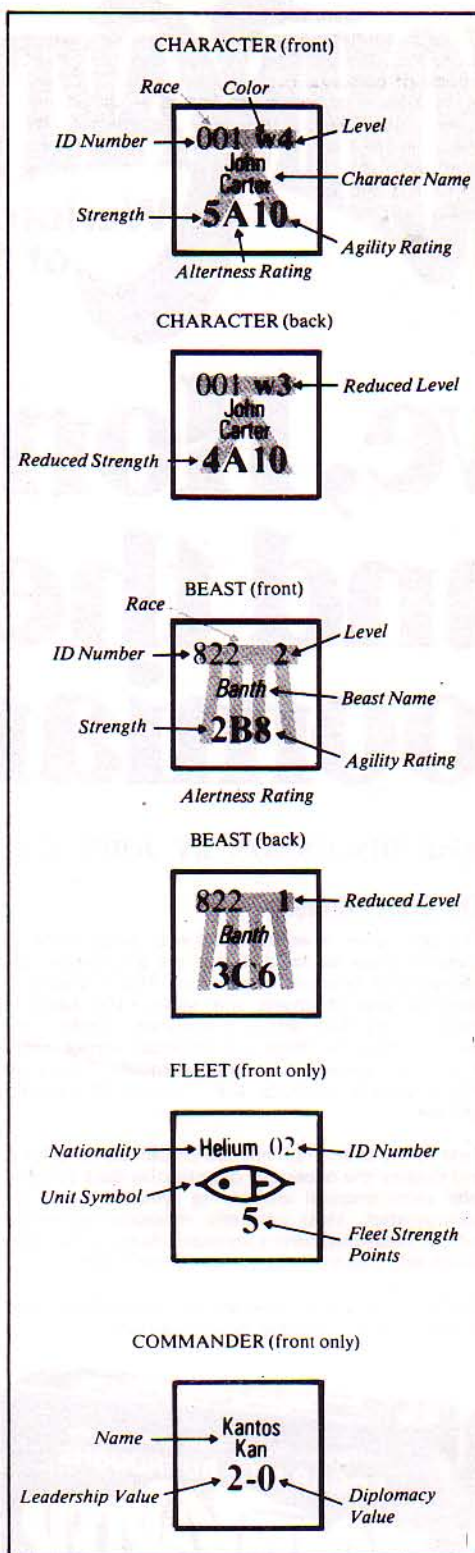
Positional modifiers are well handled, particularly rear attack where differing susceptibilities are presented for heroes, beasts and characters. A good idea is to summarise these modifiers on a file card for ready reference during the fast pace of a duel. The Duelling Game Sequence of Play could be written on the other side of the card to reduce wear on the rules booklet.

Personages, such as beautiful damsels, are practically all unaffected by melee. May I quote: "even the most vile caitiff would never swing at a woman with his sword."

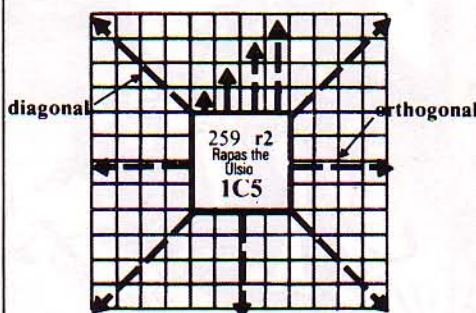
The element of surprise may be gained by the hero in a duel via the "discovery" rules. The hero (and retinue, if present) enters and manoeuvres around the house or palace display unbeknown to the villainous faction who may not move or announce a hue and cry until the hero, or his party, have been discovered. Simple matrices and die rolls produce discovery results; doors and corners may inhibit or prohibit discovery and the Alertness Rating of the discovering guard and he-to-be-discovered are determining factors. Should a hero or his retinue be discovered, they may attempt to silence the guard before the show is given away.

Under certain circumstances, a hero may encounter a hostile master swordsman. As heroes are master swordsmen too, a skillful battle will ensue. Hits, advantages or misses are scored this time, dependent upon the play of Manoeuvre/Option cards upon a 10 x 10 matrix by both players. 10 sword-play manoeuvres are presented, such as "circular parry". The idea is that you select a manoeuvre your opponent will not expect. A hit, or 2 consecutive advantages, result in the loss of a level.

Set-up criteria are easy to follow and comprehensive. 4 Sample duels are presented for your enjoyment. Play them for good, clean, quick fun, all 4 can be completed in an hour. Further duels are easy to construct, whether from the books or your own imagination. We recommend that players



## LEGAL MOVES



play the duels presented before proceeding to the Strategic Game so that they will familiarise themselves with the simple, novel, effective system of duelling combat. This system will be utilised frequently during the Strategic Game where duels are commonplace and should be played at a swash-buckling pace.

One important point about duels: heroes never die, they fall unconscious instead. Should John Carter fall unconscious, or lose 2 levels, his faithful calot (Martian dog with 10 legs, large jaws with many teeth, looks like a lion but fiercer, size of a Shetland Pony) named "Woola" comes to the rescue. Woola will get Carter out of many a jam, as he does in the books. Yes, Martian heroes are more heroic than intelligent; we'll see more of this in the Strategic Game.

Let's now evaluate the Duelling Game. It is a simple, fast, effective and simulative combat module. As a game it is largely intended to be an integral part of the Strategic Game, used for combat resolution. It can stand by itself, in which context it is largely meant to introduce players either to the "John Carter" combat system as a sort of programmed instruction, or to the concept of conflict simulations. It can re-create your favourite duel from the Martian books. It's fun.

From the design aspect, the Duelling Game is novel. No ZOCs, no odds, no hexes. The system of discovery, movement and combat work well despite their newness. The discovery system in particular is effective. Although simple, there is some provision in the system for subtle play.

The Duelling Game is not above criticism:

(i) The palace display may not be complete. It is possible that some interior walls are missing from the inside edge of the pink deployment areas; there should certainly be an extra ramp to the palace dungeon.

(ii) Step reduction for the captain of the guard and nobles are not on the same counter; hence it is both difficult to find and realise it exists.

(iii) Movement across the small squares of the tactical displays is fiddly. Dishonest players can gain some ground by inaccurate placement of counters or by miscounting movement allowance. Unintentional mistakes are easily made, eyestrain leading to genuine errors. The mapsheet must be held flat or taught, otherwise gravity will make the errors for you. The small boxes are not ideal, even if they do allow for visual duelling manoeuvre.

(iv) Due to there being no Tactical Turn limit to the length of a duel, stand-offs with neither side wanting to advance may characterise some melees on the street display. This runs contrary to the spirit of the game and the hero has little to gain in hanging back, but some awkwardness can occur.

(v) The rules regarding hero movement vis a vis adjacency and melee situations leave some unclear areas, particularly whereby a hero may wish to disengage from melee to make a second rush (in which he could use his superior manoeuvrability and reflexes).

(vi) The jumping manoeuvre is largely a curiosity since (a) the hero may not jump and melee in the same turn; (b) the hero probably cannot jump when adjacent to an enemy character; (c) on the street display, where jumping could well be most effective, there is no motivation for the opposition to approach the hero and he must use some of his movement allowance to approach them and hence not use it for jumping. Should they elect to approach him, it could be a different matter. All told, we have found the jumping rules somewhat ineffectual, though we can understand the designers' intent not to encourage its over zealous use.

And now let's take a look at the greater Barsoomian picture.

## The Strategic Game

The Strategic Game is the central feature and focal point of the "John Carter" package. It is a game of adventure for up to 6 players, but is recommended for no more than 2 or 3 players. It seeks to simulate the excitement of the archetypal Burroughs' plot;



villain abducts princess; hero pursues villain and entourage through rigour and danger; hero comes close to success but it just eludes him; finally hero corners villain and confronts him; a struggle ensues; the hero emerges victorious, the villain defeated, and his princess restored to him: Love and Honour have conquered those dark forces set against them.

Each player takes the part of a hero and his companions, and also the part of a villainous faction which will oppose one of the other players' hero. As the hero represents all the positive aspects of Barsoom, it is his performance which will be evaluated when players review their achievements. A player's villain and henchmen will be used in a spoiling role to ensure that that player's hero will succeed first.

The Strategic Game of "John Carter" is, as one of its designers points out, above such mundane drivel as Victory Conditions. Instead, a player's hero's performance is reviewed at the end of a game in light of the glory and love conditions. To fulfill his love condition, the hero must rescue his villain's captive and possibly his own princess (if they are not one and the same person) and bring her/them back to Greater Helium. Should an unspeakable act (I) be successfully perpetrated by the villain upon a captive female personage, a hero cannot fulfill his love condition.

Should a hero fulfill both conditions, he becomes hero of all Barsoom. If he should rescue a fellow hero who is held captive, or survive when other heroes have perished, his performance will be considered the better.

It is the hero who fulfills most conditions, or in the event of a tie, fulfills his first, that is declared Champion of all Barsoom.

In this way is a "winner" determined. A player's hero should eventually succeed, but his path is fraught with danger and the villain is mean, so it's by no means certain. The game ends when either all heroes are removed from play or have fulfilled a glory or love condition. With this delineation of objective and criteria in mind, let us now examine the mechanics by which success may be achieved.

Seven heroes are available to players to choose from, each player must choose a different hero, any disagreements being settled by die roll. Appropriate villains, henchmen and captives are assigned, and are placed at a city on the strategic map of Barsoom by a random process of dice and matrix. No two villainous factions are ever placed at the same city. The initial placement city is known as the villain's initial destination; the villain may flee with his entourage to up to 2 more cities (depending upon circumstances) on the Barsoom map. All of the maps and displays upon the mapsheet are utilised in the Strategic Game.

Heroes start out in pursuit of their respective villain and company from John Carter's palace in Lesser Helium. A villain may not leave his initial destination until the hero, who is pursuing him, reaches that city and then presents him with an opportunity to escape. The hero moves from city to city on the Barsoom map by flier, thoat (huge, many legged horse) or he may have to walk. Fliers and thoats may be acquired in cities and may be lost in combat encounters; legs are acquired at birth!

Movement is performed in the following manner. The moving player checks the distance in haads separating the cities between which he wishes to travel and notes this distance on the Haads Remaining Index (HRI). The player draws a Movement Card and examines the appropriate column for the hero's mode of conveyance to discover the number of haads the hero can cover. If the Movement Card yields insufficient haads to make the trip, the HRI is adjusted to reflect the number of haads remaining to his destination city. The hero player must then check to see if he must fight an outdoor encounter: Barsoom's great outdoors is fraught with danger. Should the Movement Card show sufficient haads to make the journey, the hero is placed in his destination city where his player must check to see if a city encounter ensues: most Barsoomian cities are no haven of respite.

Encounters are handled simply but effectively.

Outdoor encounters are determined by consulting the Area Encounter Chart for the area of the hero's destination, rolling a die and cross-referencing with his mode of conveyance. This may result in a duel with hostiles — warriors or beasts — or no encounter. City encounters are determined by checking in the City Directory (essential data concerning every city on the Barsoom map), finding the relevant die roll modifier and rolling on the City Encounter Table. Duels may ensue with city guards, or even with a master swordsman; no beasts of Mars are encountered this time (unless the city is deserted). Should a duel take place, there may be consequences: the decimal die is rolled on the Duel Results Table to determine whether our hero has been apprehended by city guards, overwhelmed and interned, has met a friend who will support him in his quest or whether there has been no response to the duel and he may go about his business.

It is in cities that Acquisition of fliers and thoats — and even weapons should the hero be unarmed — takes place. The hero states what he wishes to acquire, draws an Acquisition Card and reads the appropriate result. This may be a straightforward success, failure or may involve a duel which runs some risk of internment.

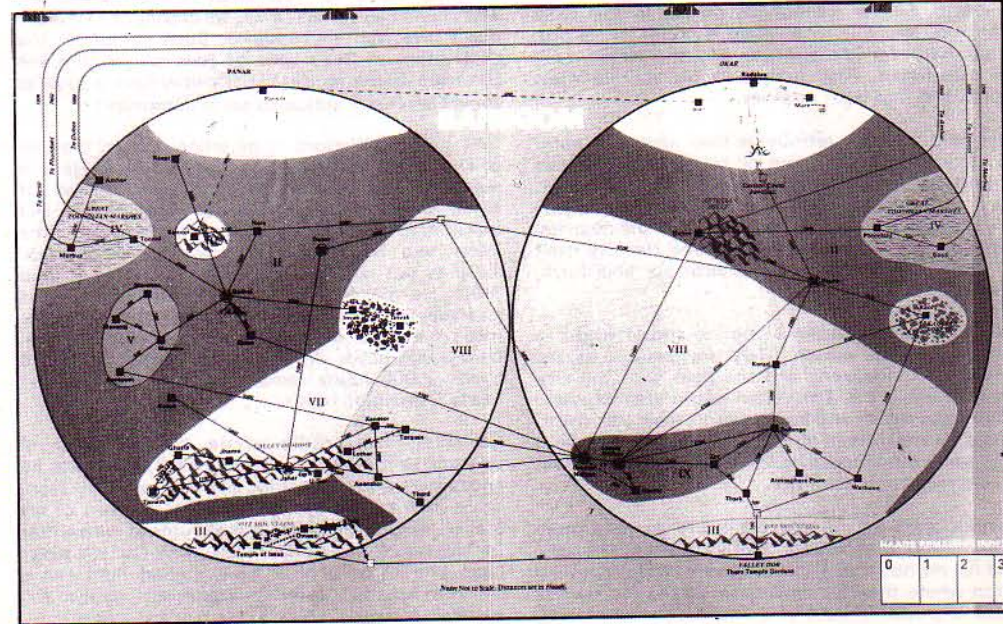
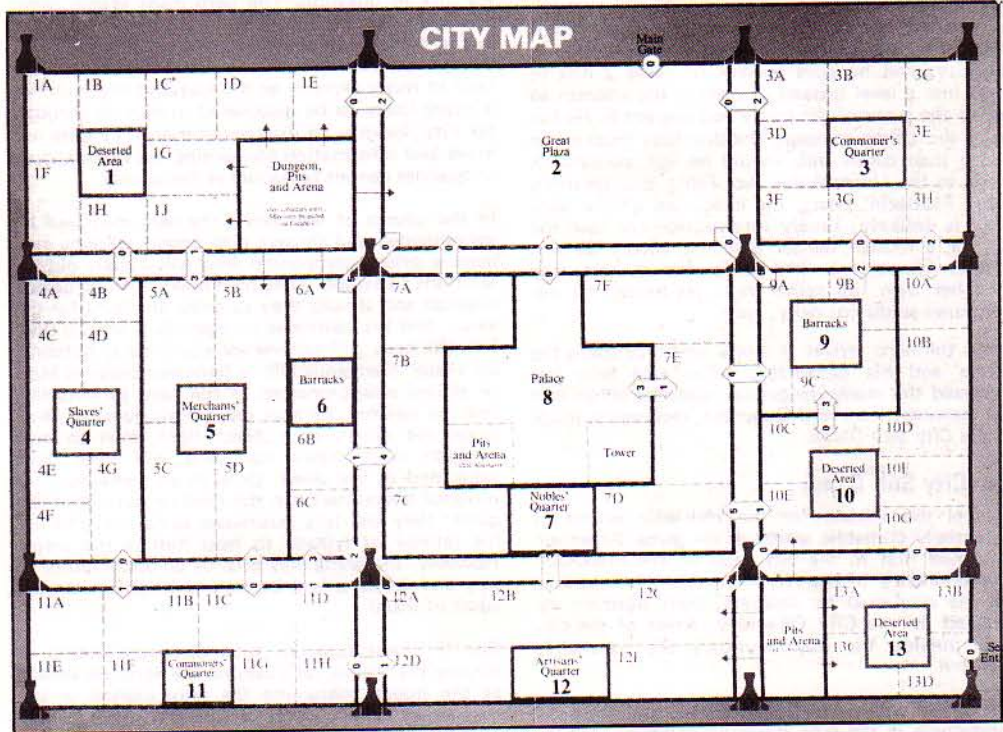
At the beginning of his player-turn, each player draws a Random Event Card. A Barsoomian hero's life is rewarded and plagued by the vagaries of

fortune, good and bad, and which are likely to show up at critical moments. By the play of Random Event Cards the game produces an authentic and effective "simulation" of this important Barsoomian element. They affect either a player's hero or villain character, though, rarely, certain cards will be indiscriminate and must be played immediately. Most cards can be retained for play at opportune moments, a limit of 3 cards being allowed to be held in a "hand". Many cards are humourously and evocatively phrased; play of Random Event Cards is important but not over-riding and can be skillful and subtle.

During the course of a game a hero is likely to be befriended. This can happen after an encounter, during internment or imprisonment. Minor characters, warriors of Mars, male or female personages may join the heroes retinue, though he will not meet a woman in jail as it would be contrary to Martian etiquette to place members of the opposite sex in the same cell.

The villain may induce treachery in the hero's party via "nefarious doings". The villain can find black-hearted ways to exploit the romance in our good hero's life, but before examining these machinations of the ne'er-do-well, let's examine the wonderful side first.

A hero will fall in love; what could be more natural in such a setting of high adventure and high





romance? And naturally, the woman he falls in love with will reciprocate!..... Complications only arise when another woman joins his retinue, as naturally this woman will eventually fall in love with the hero. He will insist that they are just good friends, but "she" will know better. There is nothing worse than love spurned and whether the hero's princess is in his retinue or held captive, this potential neutron bomb situation can erupt to produce the treachery alluded to above. You can bet that the villain will have his dirty paws in this somewhere. With his actions usually dropping the hero "right in it".

As if this wasn't enough, a minor character in the hero's retinue can be overcome by passion for the hero's loved one, be she in their party. At the urging of the heinous villain, the character will betray the hero, join the villain's entourage and abduct the hero's princess in the process. Thankfully this can go wrong and even should such dark deeds succeed treacherous persons can still be subject to remorse and once again strive for the side that is right! Such interplay is possible via fixed criteria and also the play of Random Event Cards.

The arch-fiendery available to the villain is *The Unspeakable Act* (!) Should the villain successfully perform such upon a captive female personage, the hero will be unable to fulfill his love condition. However, the hero must be in the same city as the villain and his entourage when the villain may play one of the few Random Event Cards which permit an attempt at an unspeakable act. The hero is informed of where the vile deed will take place in the city, and he goes berserk (it takes 2 hits to drop him a level instead of one) in his attempt to get to the scene of the crime and prevent it. He has but a short time to rescue the dear lady from a fate worse than death and, should he fail, recourse is made to the Unspeakable Act Table. But, be still o thine Flutterin' heart, the execution of the dark deed is unlikely: timely interruption can save the day or a hidden danger give the villain his just deserts. However in her panic, fair maiden may take her own life rather than let herself be dishonoured so do not dally, hero.

When the hero arrives at a city which contains the villain and his entourage, (after said hero has traversed the many dangerous haads the villain had put between hero and Quarries), recourse is made to the *City Sub-Game*.

### The City Sub-Game

This is the vehicle for the climactic action or potentially climactic action of the game. Attention is turned first to the city map on the mapsheet. The boundary of the city in question is described on the city map by markers, their position delineated by the City Directory. Areas of the city map outside the city boundary are considered deserted.

The villain and his entourage are secretly deployed somewhere in the city, decorum dictating that the beautiful captive cannot be placed in the same house as the villain. A guard detachment is provided both for the capture and the villain with his henchmen. The hero and his retinue must search and find both quarries.

The hero and any retinue he may have may enter the city by its main gate or by a secret entrance should he have the appropriate Random Event Card available for play. The deserted area outside the city can provide information as to the quarries' whereabouts but information within the city itself is liable to be much more accurate and forthcoming.

The hero's group enters incognito and attempts to mingle with the crowd. They are haunted by the thought of discovery and the duel with the city guard it will bring. The villain would then be aware of their presence and could act to their detriment. There is the threat of incarceration for the hero and arena duel should he fail to escape. So he must be discrete in his enquiries.

Certain areas of the city are likely to yield more information than others. Whilst moving, the hero and his retinue may incur discovery, this depending upon where they are moving to; a hero and retinue stand a greater chance of being discovered moving into the Palace than, say, the Commons' Quarter,

though there is likely to be more information to be had at the Palace. Note: the "discovery" described above differs from that of the Duelling Game, which is used on the tactical displays.

Gleaning information is handled on a comprehensive, straightforward matrix which reveals another factor which can militate either for or against the hero: the Hand of Fate. This can bring friends, or duels with guards or master swordsmen.

Diligent searching will reveal the whereabouts of either or both quarries. The hero, and any retinue he has, will then move towards the area and house where the quarry he wishes to encounter first is situated. Hopefully he will reach this location undetected and duel for the captive's freedom or to slay foul villain. At all points in a City Sub-game the hero must beware discovery, minimising risks by choosing the safest route and playing any helpful Random Event Cards. Should he be discovered, aside from the implications for duels and possible imprisonment, he may well be thwarted in his final goals. If the villain is not at his "final destination", he may flee the city complete with his entourage (including the captive), and the hero must set out after him again, play reverting to the Strategic Game proper.

If the villain is at his "final destination", he may not flee but he may redeploy himself with his entourage (and the captive plus her guards) within the city in question. The hero must search them out again, but should he be discovered three times in the passage of one Strategic (i.e. Player) Turn, he will be imprisoned. Discovery also forces the hero to move secretly as the hue and cry is on: he is more likely to be discovered in moving through the city, he may be discovered even if he does not move and information concerning the whereabouts of quarries cannot be gained as frequently.

In the course of the above, the hero may well be apprehended and thrown into prison. Here he may meet a prison companion who will usually aid his attempts to escape. They may make but one escape attempt and should they succeed, the hunt for the villain and his captive is on again but, should they fail, the hero will experience a turn delay followed by a duel in an arena with a ferocious beast of Mars or skilled weaponmaster. If the hero survives this trial by combat, he may resume his quest or challenge the villain to a direct fight, man to man (though it is likely our hero will have been weakened in the duel). Only in an arena duel (or outdoor encounter) can the hero be put out of the game: they are risky businesses as he may not use his retinue of friends to help him in the arena. However, the arena may provide an opportunity to slay and defeat a foul beast, and I don't mean the beast of Mars!

But let's not look to such desperate means of slaying the villain, let's assume the hero has arrived at the house containing the poor captive or unsuspecting villain. Then recourse is made to the Duelling Game for resolution in the finest style. The villain can still get away by exiting the display: don't give him that chance. Such completes the description of SPI's view of Barsoom, within the Strategic Game context. Let's now have a look at some Carter-size action to see it in motion:

"We join the Warlord as he sets out from the city of Dusar, his destination the city of Jahar. He is in search of his beloved Dejah Thoris, captive of Matai Shang, Father of Therns, and Thurid, evil black dador of the First Born of Barsoom. The latter two fiends hold her prisoner in Tjanath; Jahar is but part of John Carter's journey to that place. He travels alone, save for the trusty Woola and the thotat he rides. His player draws a movement Card and discovers his thotat will carry the hero 3,000 haads. As the distance to Jahar is 5,000 haads, 2,000 haads remain which is noted on the haads Remaining Index.

Carter rides in hostile terrain, but danger is no stranger to him. After covering his 3,000 haads, he encounters a mean looking guard detachment from Jahar intent upon his interrogation, a result of his player rolling an appropriate outdoor encounter for the area to which he travels. Now Carter's never been one to hang back from a good fight and a skirmish ensues. Carter is magnificent against the six Red Martians, slaying the first by a deft manoeuvre to his side and rear before the Red Martian

could lay sword upon him. Our hero manoeuvres cleverly on the open/arena display such that but one adversary may attack him each turn. Two more Red Men bite the dust before Carter takes a wound. Somewhat weakened, our hero wastes no time in despatching his immediate attacker. The next warrior charges in to his doom but the last takes advantage of his former colleague's bravado to deal Carter a telling blow which renders him unconscious, a 1% chance in these circumstances. Grinning somewhat evilly, the Red Man eyes up his prize, none other than the Prince of Helium, soon to be his captive. He can take no more than one triumphant step towards our fallen hero before the faithful Woola is upon him. The enraged calot opens his mighty jaws to reveal a fearsome array of teeth as he rushes to despatch the red warrior. At this point, this writer could look no longer and witness the assured end of the red rogue.

Carter recovered consciousness quicker than I did, evidently the gentle lapping of the great Martian dog's tongue aiding his revival. John Carter applied his healing balm to his wounds which began to heal visibly. Looking around for his thotat, he discovered it had escaped during the melee. He would have to continue to Jahar on foot .....

### Evaluation of the Strategic Game.

The Strategic Game is the main feature of the John Carter package and is fun, compelling, and racy in play. As a simulation we find it difficult to fault: all the essential Barsoom elements are there and the atmosphere of Burrough's Mars is faithfully recreated.

The personal behaviour of heroes and villains, so difficult to model, has been portrayed well and authentically whilst at the same time leaving the player substantial freedom of action. Considering the scope of the game — the entire Martian series — events usually come out how, if not where, they should. A very effective balance has been struck in recreating Barsoom whilst giving the player a game and at the same time conceding the essential elements of neither.

Players will enjoy the element of role-playing. More than that, they may find themselves swept into it and end up talking in outrageous American accents, speaking of love and honour, and breathing deeply the wonderful fresh air. The Strategic Game is constant action. Your hero will progress from one swashbuckling encounter to another, fighting for love and honour in the glorious Barsoomian tradition. You are spirited away from your games haunt in the course of a complete game which may take over an evening to complete.

Though the Strategic Game is only of moderate complexity, it is not an easy game to learn. New concepts must be dealt with and conditional parameters necessitate a good working knowledge of the rulebook. We will discuss how this and the other game components measure up to the task set them shortly.

The game's design utilises a fundamentally different approach to the norm. It is physically unusual and its attempt to capture a mood is impressive. In how many games that you've played has love been an important factor? It's definitely a different simulation. The singularly most impressive design feature to this writer is the successful mechanics for change of scale. In "zooming out" and "zooming in" from the map of a palace to the map of a planet a successful microcosm-macrocosm relationship is set up. We would regard this achievement as an important step in the evolution of fantasy game design.

Let's now take a critical look at the game components with an eye to examining their utility:

The tactical displays have been evaluated before (Duelling Game) as duelling surfaces. They slot neatly into their appropriate place in Strategic Game sequences, though we do feel the flier display is under-used.

The city display works well and is highly adaptable, a commendable feature; recent addenda has cleared up the few omissions that exist. The maps of Barsoom are both attractive and functional, their point to point movement system working well.



An intriguing and attractive selection of counters are utilised in the Strategic Game. Much of the mix will be inactive in any one game, as the involvement of many of the minor characters and some races is incidental. The simulative intent of this is laudable — everyone was not in just a few places at the same time — but some gamers may find it disconcerting. To contrast with this, not enough "unconscious" or "Red Martian warrior" counters are provided. Substitution for the latter with "Marsupial" counters — they bear identical "combat factors" — is not adequate: the Red Martian warrior counters are in frequent use and their substitution with Marsupials is prone to send your opponent into fits of giggles. Not the desired effect.

The Random Event Cards are very effective and their handling represents a real play function whilst not dominating play. A variety of simulative results are presented and an effort has been made not to offend the sensibilities with overt fudgings. Skillful play of the cards is available by (a) deciding which cards to keep with reference to the action taking place and (b) deciding upon the most opportune moment to play a card: don't spirit away that princess/captive until the hero has nearly reached her as your guards just might swing a lucky blow. If there is a "best" card in the pack it is only an escape-from-an encounter card: some encounters can be nasty so it is worthwhile holding one of these cards in your "hand", particularly if you are crossing hostile territory with no retinue as escort.

There are two card types we feel we must criticise though. Two cards outline the use of a skin dye or stolen clothes to effect disguise as a different race — I don't mean a different colour, I mean non-humanised, like a Marsupial. This stretches my imagination a bit and, perhaps more importantly, the intent is confusingly worded as reference is made to colour in the skin dye card legend whereas colour is not the intent. More important than this though, is what happens if your hero is defeated in an outdoor encounter by a beast of Mars and you don't have one of the miraculous escape cards alluded to earlier.

Heroes don't die and before such a fallen hero can be counted out of the game (he is actually saved by Green Martians and enslaved) *any* player with a card saving the character from being savaged by the beast must play it, although the owning player is obliged to play one if he has one. We really don't like this and feel some other expedient should have been found: it's no fun to have to save the hero of a competitor and it's much, much worse vice versa. What's worse, saving someone else's hero with your failsafe mechanism leaves you vulnerable to exactly the same situation as befell the hero you saved. There is no reward for rescuing another hero in this manner, though in play we did interpret such action as hero rescue which results in an improved performance. We consider the mechanism, as presented, is detrimental to the game and a design "fudge", made worse by the fact that the rules are comprehensive enough to have accommodated this situation in a more satisfactory way.

Before considering the rules themselves, let's briefly examine the charts and tables. The two copies are very welcome and necessary. A number of novel tables are presented and are clear and straightforward in use. Particularly impressive are the City Directory and the Area Encounter Chart, these contribute greatly to the game's variety and authenticity of simulation. Only one table concerns us: the legend beneath the Duel Results Table can cause confusion. The words "any Duel" and the semi-colon before it can mislead players into using the table far too often. A further minor point is that the Character Directory could have been a little more refined for easier retrieval of characters and, particularly, personages.

Strategic Game rules completeness is good. We feel though that the rules organisation makes fact retrieval and rules usage difficult. Here's our rationale: upon first reading the rules, one fairly frequently encounters references to a section of the rules one has yet to read. Now we're all for cross-referencing in rules and normally this feeling of trying to catch up will disappear once the rules have been read or familiarity achieved. But in play the reason for the discomfure becomes apparent; some rules sections have been broken up and scattered so that the first action in certain game

activities is not necessarily stated first.

Very importantly, to our minds, the Sequence of Play is not followed in a game that should be fast and furious. Lastly, no "Combat" Major Section is provided in the City Sub-sequence rules to coherently delineate the results of the various duels and their operational effects.

These factors result in difficult rule retrieval during play. We think that had the structure of the rules followed the flow of the Sequence of Play rather than adopt the SPI more formal approach than a more effective layout would have been achieved. This is no vital flaw to the game, far from it, but a fair bit of flicking through the rules is likely as are several "what do we do now?" questions. That's annoying in what's meant to be a fun game of high adventure in which continuous action is all important with play flowing along with minimal interruption. Familiarity with the system reduces this problem but until then it may well try your patience when you search for that elusive but important ruling.

Overall the rules are carefully and cleverly composed although several game rulings appear inadequate. Our reservations include the following:

- (i) It is difficult for the villain to bring his henchmen (warriors) to bear effectively and still be able to enjoy his full allotment of city guards in the City Sub-sequence. This makes the actual number of the villain's henchmen rather irrelevant as the limit to the number of warriors in his entourage may not be exceeded.
- (ii) Two types of discovery are presented in the game and by and large they are clearly defined and kept separate. But it is unfortunate that both actions should be called the same thing: they should really be differentiated by nomenclature. The present status is the sort of thing that *causes* confusion.
- (iii) The Imprisonment rules are sketchy concerning the order of events once imprisonment has occurred. More detail on procedure is required.
- (iv) Rules for surrogate villains should be clearer, more obviously displayed and more plentiful. Surrogates add an extra dimension to the game; as it stands players could easily overload their role entirely.
- (v) Some unclear elements in the City Sub-game such as entering either the city map or palace display via the tower, and (iv) above, can spoil a finish with a flourish.

Though the background article "the World of Barsoom" is excellent, we would have liked a little more description of the geography of Barsoom to complement the Barsoom maps. This is a minor criticism since an excellent idea of the world of John Carter is presented by both booklet and adventure simulation.

On a more personal level, we would have liked the Barsoomian Jeddakes (kings) to have taken a more active part in the game. They are actually factored in to the game system.

Overall, the Strategic Game offers racy swash-buckling excitement of a novel variety. Players should be prepared to wrestle with the rules: it's largely all there but one has to be prepared to look for it. Game skill is not of the highest premium and some bad rolls can do a hero down as he may only be supported by a few allies or friends. The high number of duels — which one might view as repetitive sequences — increase the chances of a stray, cruel blow, but a hero's life isn't easy, and that's what makes it worthwhile.

Appended below are a few hints for heroes and players:

- (i) As hero, try to keep one of those "escape from beasts of Mars" cards available for play. Ten hungry calots are no fun!
- (ii) Don't go to Kaol if you can't escape the Sith.
- (iii) Don't lose heart if loss of transport means your hero has a long walk ahead; he will most likely do quite a lot of walking through the game.
- (iv) Keep that counter tray well sorted out as finding characters can be difficult. It's a shame that both the character's colour and number are not presented in the scenario set-up as this would speed things up.

Despite the rules thumbing, the Strategic Game of "John Carter, Warlord of Mars" is exciting and enjoyable.

So, if you think you'd like swashbuckling excitement and you're prepared to bear with the rules layout, we think you'd enjoy "John Carter, Warlord of Mars": play it for fun.

*Footnote:* This review was undertaken with the aid of a prototype Addenda very kindly supplied by Eric Goldberg of SPI and for which we wish to thank him. We would urge Acquisition of the official model by every Barsoomian hero.

