

NAKEDNESS ON MARS
by
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INTRODUCTION

When Edgar Rice Burroughs wrote A Princess of Mars and its sequels, he was writing the legal pornography of the day. He wrote what was the literary equivalent of a peep show, which we know he was fond of from his 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition midway adventures. (See, ERBzine #1275, chpt. 6.) This is where Little Egypt became an international celebrity.

Because no acts of sex are explicitly described in this series, this fact passes mainly unnoticed to the modern reader, but a discerning eye sees on almost every page naked people with their sexual organs fully exposed, female breasts enhanced in leather harnesses, near rape scenes, acts of perverse cruelty and sado-masochistic bondage, including descriptions of violence, beheadings, and dismemberings, that put Kill Bill: Part One to shame.

This would have been shocking literature in its day. It was still shocking when C.S. Lewis followed suit in 1944 by having the inhabitants of Perelandra appear as naked as Adam and Eve, without fig leaves. I can only imagine the kind of moral outrage it must have induced in the minds of Puritanical prudes and Victorian moralists, so influential in politics and the arts at the time. I don't have to imagine too hard. My mother, a typical Victorian prude who hated Hugh Hefner till the day she died, knew all about ERB.

When I was in the fifth grade, around ten years old in 1957, I visited with a friend after school one day. My friend's mother had been an artist for Disney in the days of Fantasia and was the opposite of my mother. He had every one of the Tarzan books in hardcover on his bookshelf.

I told him that I loved the Johnny Weismuller Tarzan movies and asked him if I could borrow Tarzan of the Apes.

After telling me that the real Tarzan was totally different from the movie version but he refused to let me borrow any of his books. “Why,” I asked. “Because they are sacred to me,” he answered. I didn’t understand what he meant.

When I came home I asked my mother if she would buy me a Tarzan book, and she said, “No way! Edgar Rice Burroughs wrote graphic adult fiction and you are not old enough to be reading that kind of stuff.” And that was that. By the time I was 14, I was reading Playboy magazine and Ian Fleming paperbacks and getting my science fiction fix from Robert Heinlein.

Thus, I totally missed out on the young male ERB reading experience. I hardly regret this. Nearly every young man who read ERB at an early age hardly knew anything at all about sex and couldn’t help missing out on the legal pornography. But it was apparent to me when I finally got around to reading the Martian series in my college years during the 70’s.

The series was full of sexual innuendo meant to escape the censor’s pen. The male readers of the day were not fools and ERB knew how to cater to them. The Martian series is hardly juvenalia. If I could understand these stories as soft pornography at 25 when they were over fifty years old, I can only imagine the effect they must have had on the average male adult reader at the time.

This was the same time my mother’s brother, like Ernest Hemingway, was forced to wear dresses and look like a little girl when he was a young boy growing up in Alameda. My grandmother was an avid believer in a Victorian experiment to feminize young boys in order to

stamp out male aggression. Whenever I saw pictures of my uncle taken when he was a little girl, they would really creep me out.

My father, an officer in the Army, made sure that my mother didn't do to me what her mother had done to my uncle. He suspected my mother was grooming me for a girl's dress when she refused to cut my hair, which had grown long and blond. When I was two my dad intervened and took me to the barber for a military style haircut. I still recall the marathon fight they had over that one.

No wonder ERB rebelled against this monstrous assault upon the male ego, creating violent, aggressive male heroes. It amazes me when ERB is regarded as a writer of juvenile fiction by parents and it even further amazes me when modern readers, with an obvious prudish bias, make spurious arguments about Martian nudity, arguing that the issue is "slightly controversial." These people are in Barsoomian denial, not willing to face the naked truth: everyone on Mars is naked. ERB compels his readers to imagine Martians with exposed breasts, nipples, vulvas, buttocks, penises, and testicles. This is how it was meant to be read, as legal soft porn. If you imagine it otherwise, you are doing an injustice to ERB's genius.

The arguments proposing that Martians were not really naked as far as their genitalia are concerned downplay the shock value A Princess of Mars had when it first came out. I am particularly happy to see an artist like James Killian Spratt get it right. (See, ERBzine #1301.) If his artwork shocks you, then imagine the shock value in 1912 when adult men read the stories for the first time. This is not taken into account by later critics – such as Brian W. Aldiss in Billion Year Spree – who say ERB's works are sexless. The fact is that these critics have accepted the

fallacy that ERB wrote juvenalia. They ignore the state of censorship at the time and are clueless to the code words ERB used as euphemisms for sex.

I A Princess of Mars

A Princess of Mars is the main text on this subject. Any variation suggested later in any of the novels must be dealt with in the light of the original context. Thus, every mention of the subject, either directly or indirectly will be set forth in tedious detail.

1) John Carter arrives naked on Mars:

“And then the moonlight flooded the cave, and there before me lay my own body as it had been lying all these hours, with the eyes staring toward the open ledge and the hands resting limply on the ground. I looked first at my lifeless clay there upon the floor of the cave and then down at myself in utter bewilderment; for there I lay clothed, yet here I stood but naked as at the minute of my birth.” (APM/2.)

The first time ERB uses the word “naked” in the book he leaves the reader with no doubt of the meaning: “naked as at the minute of my birth.” Carter snaps away from his physical body in an eerie description of an out of body experience and leaves no doubt that his astral body is unclothed. As we all know, he then focuses his mind on Mars and projects himself across the cold gulfs of space to the Red Planet:

“It was midday, the sun was shining full upon me and the heat of it was rather intense upon my naked body, yet no greater than would have been true under similar conditions on an Arizona desert.” (APM/3.)

‘Unarmed and naked as I was, the first law of nature manifested itself in the only possible solution of my immediate problem, and that was to get out of the vicinity of the point of the charging spear.’ (APM/3.)

“When his force had come to a halt he dismounted, threw down his spear and small arms, and came around the end of the incubator toward me, entirely

unarmed and as naked as I, except for the ornaments strapped upon his head, limbs, and breast.” (APM/3.)

These are the first references to nudity in the story. It seems self evident to me that ERB means full frontal male nudity, with the penis and testicles fully exposed, like in the men’s locker room. We know for sure that Carter’s penis is exposed: he wakes up without any clothes on, naked as the moment he was born. This is ground zero in the argument about what it means to be naked on Mars. Based on this evidence, we can deduce that Tars Tarkas is no different, for the text definitely says that when he approached Carter, he was “entirely unarmed and naked as I.” This means that the reader is to imagine his penis swinging freely as he approached.

ERB’s use of “entirely naked” is steady throughout the book when he wants to make this subject clear. When someone’s genitalia are covered, ERB notes it so that the reader is tipped off to regard the covered genitalia as out of the norm. It is not open to the individual imagination.

Everyone is naked on Mars, and if we think of nudity as meaning “without clothing,” we will stay true to the original context. Moreover, as I will demonstrate below, clothing and the harness are two different distinct things on Mars, though sometimes confused.

2) All Martians are naked:

“With the exception of their ornaments, all were naked. The women varied in appearance but little from the men, except that their tusks were much larger in proportion to their height, in some instances curving nearly to their high-set ears.” (APM/4.)

One could argue at this point that Green Martian women had no breasts since they varied little in appearance from the men, but that would leave the vulva as the only clue to the fact that

Carter knew that they were females. However, when we are introduced to Sola, the text strongly suggests that her breasts are forming, for Carter knows she has reached maturity:

“My fair companion was about eight feet tall, having just arrived at maturity, but not yet to her full height. She was of a light olive-green color, with a smooth, glossy hide.” (APM/4.)

As we will see below, Green Martians have no body hair, so Carter would not have been able to tell her maturity by the growth of pubic hair, leaving breast formation as the only possible meaning. And that olive-skinned, smooth, glossy hide really gets the blood boiling. Remember, Sola kept Carter warm during those cold Barsoomian nights before Dejah Thoris arrived on the scene:

“After I had eaten I was greatly invigorated, but feeling the need of rest, I stretched out upon the silks and was soon asleep. I must have slept several hours, as it was dark when I awoke, and I was very cold. I noticed that someone had thrown a fur over me, but it had become partially dislodged and in the darkness I could not see to replace it. Suddenly a hand reached out and pulled the fur over me, shortly afterwards adding another to my covering.” (APM/5.)

Ah, a Green Martian hottie! And what handholds those tusks must have made. Clearly, ERB has created a soft porn scenario for the discerning reader. You are really missing out on the fun if you fail to see that both Carter and Sola are naked under the furs. Take it from Captain Kirk, the expert on interplanetary love: you have to take the women on a planet as you find them.

3) The Incomparable Dejah Thoris is naked:

“And the sight which met my eyes was that of a slender, girlish figure, similar in every detail to the earthly women of my past life....Her face was oval and beautiful in the extreme, her every feature was finely chiseled and exquisite, her eyes large and lustrous and her head surmounted by a mass of coal black, waving hair, caught loosely into a strange yet becoming coiffure. Her skin was of a light reddish copper color, against which the crimson glow of her cheeks and beautifully molded lips shone with a strangely enchanting effect.

“She was as destitute of clothes as the green Martians who accompanied her; indeed, save for her highly wrought ornaments, she was entirely naked, nor could any apparel have enhanced the beauty of her perfect and symmetrical figure.” (APM/10.)

We are not told what kind of ornaments she wore or how she wore them. She may or may not have been wearing a harness, for as we shall see below, ornaments are also worn in the hair by women. I prefer to imagine her without a harness, as do most artists.

The first time Carter sets eyes on Dejah Thoris is the seminal soft porn scene in Princess. Many artists have been inspired by this scene, from Irwin Myers, who illustrated the 1921 newspaper serialization of Princess (ERBzine #1192, #1193: yes, he portrayed her as totally naked), to the wonderful depiction of Thomas Yeats, who delightfully draws both Carter and Dejah as totally naked. (See, www.tarzan.org/yeates.) The one by Yeats is my all time favorite, although one criticism I reluctantly make is the appearance of pubic hair on the Green Martian women, because ERB makes it clear that they had no body hair:

“There was no hair on their bodies, which were of a very light yellowish green color.” (APM/3.)

Once again, following the strict logic of the text, we know that when Tars Tarkas approached Carter, he was as entirely naked as Carter, who had no clothes on. Dejah Thoris is exactly like earth women in physical form in “every detail!” This means that she has two breasts with nipples, buttocks, a vagina, and, if are going to be strict constructionists, she also must have had a belly button to be like an Earth woman in every way.

I know she was hatched from an egg thus making it unlikely that she had a belly button, but we are never given any details about these sorts of things. Take for example egg laying.

Martian women lay approximately 13 eggs a year, but we are never told what size they are when they are laid, or at what rate they grow after being laid. We just know that they are placed in incubators for five years until they hatch. Since the children when hatched seem to be already weaned, there would be no need for female breasts either.

ERB deliberately forces his readers to imagine impossible scenarios, and then makes them appear real. This is his magic. Think about it: how were Carter and Dejah Thoris able to conceive an egg? It would be impossible. But Carter and Dejah Thoris do conceive an egg – evidence that they got it on – and we must accept these impossibilities if we want to get on with the adventure.

When ERB wanted his readers to imagine Martian women, he wanted them to imagine them the same way “in every detail” as Earth women. If this means imagining them with breasts, it means imagining them with belly buttons too. Even this should not be “slightly controversial.”

Furthermore, ERB explicitly points out that she wore no clothing, describing her in the exact same words as he described Tars Tarkas: “entirely naked.” This appears to have been her natural state since we have no evidence that the Green Martians stripped her when they captured her. We are left to guess if Red Martian women have any body hair. Perhaps they did, for only Carter’s skin color is pointed out as foreign by the Martians, almost settling the issue of pubic hair, although I prefer to imagine all Martians without body hair. This still leaves open the question of circumcision as a distinction.

Was it practiced on Barsoom? Was John Carter circumcised? Would a circumcised penis be a thing of wonder on Barsoom? These seem to be the only subjects worthy of debate

and discussion. Nakedness and full exposure of sexual organs is a moot issue. Not even the devious inventions of prudish fans can make it go away. If you don't like looking at mens' penises, then Barsoom is not for you. As made clear by Dejah Thoris:

“‘Because, John Carter,’ she replied, ‘nearly every planet and star having atmospheric conditions at all approaching those of Barsoom, shows forms of animal life almost identical with you and me; and, further, Earth men, almost without exception, cover their bodies with strange, unsightly pieces of cloth, and their heads with hideous contraptions, the purpose of which we have been unable to conceive; while you, when found by the Tharkian warriors, were entirely undisfigured and unadorned.

“The fact that you wore no ornaments is a strong proof of your un-Barsoomian origin, while the absence of grotesque coverings might cause a doubt as to your earthliness.” (APM/11.)

People on earth wear clothes to cover their nakedness. Clothes are regarded as unsightly pieces of cloth, as grotesque coverings, on Mars. The fact that Carter's penis is fully exposed to Dejah Thoris makes her doubt Carter's earthly origins because of the earthly tendency to cover ones's nakedness. We can well imagine her pointing to Carter's penis as she broke this news to him.

There are a lot of touchy-feely scenes as the story progresses which take on a rich layer of meaning when the reader remembers that they are both entirely naked:

“As we reached the open two female guards who had been detailed to watch over Dejah Thoris hurried up and made as though to assume custody of her once more. The poor child shrank against me and I felt her two little hands fold tightly over my arm.” (APM/11.)

This is subtle description and it all depends on how you imagine Carter and Dejah approaching the open. If they are side by side, there is hardly anything sexual about this scene, but if Dejah is imagined as being in front of Carter, then shrinking against Carter would entail

her buttocks and his penis touching, which means he felt more than her two little hands on his arm.

Furthermore, a possible sexual relationship with Sola can be inferred from Carter's musings on his attraction to Dejah:

"I liked and trusted Sola, but for some reason I desired to be alone with Dejah Thoris, who represented to me all that I had left behind on Earth in agreeable and congenial companionship. There seemed bonds of mutual interest between us as powerful as though we had been born under the same roof rather than upon different planets, hurtling through space some forty-eight million miles apart.

"That she shared my sentiments in this respect I was positive, for on my approach the look of pitiful hopelessness left her sweet countenance to be replaced by a smile of joyful welcome, as she placed her little right hand upon my left shoulder in true red Martian salute." (APM/13.)

Carter may be unable to understand his desire for Dejah over Sola, but an adult male has no problem in comprehending ERB's gist. And how about that Martian greeting? Did you imagine her breasts touching Carter's chest as she reached up to touch his left shoulder? Congratulations if you did.

Here's another subtle scene drawn by the master taking place after Carter has called Dejah "my princess" for the second time:

"Dejah Thoris caught her breath at my last words, and gazed upon me with dilated eyes and quickening breath, and then, with an odd little laugh, which wrought roguish dimples to the corners of her mouth, she shook her head and cried:

"What a child! A great warrior and yet a stumbling little child." (APM/13.)

As we all know, calling a woman your princess on Mars are words of lovemaking, and it obviously created sexual desire in Dejah Thoris, who, in no uncertain terms, got turned on when

Carter used these words unwittingly. Her eyes dilated, her breath quickened, and the reader is not wrong to imagine her breasts and nipples hardening. The clue to this is ERB's use of "roguish dimples."

A rogue is an unprincipled person, a rascal, one who is playfully mischievous: a scamp. ERB leaves the reader with no doubt that Dejah Thoris has sex on her mind. Carter misses it all, like most young male readers would, and Dejah calls him a child in understanding. But it doesn't take him long to get back into the ballpark:

"The chill of the Martian night was upon us, and removing my silks, I threw them across the shoulders of Dejah Thoris. As my arm rested for an instant upon her I felt a thrill pass through every fiber of my being such as contact with no other mortal had even produced; and it seemed to me that she had leaned slightly toward me, but of that I was not sure. Only I knew that as my arm rested there across her shoulders longer than the act of adjusting the silk required she did not draw away, nor did she speak. And so, in silence, we walked the surface of a dying world, but in the breast of one of us at least had been born that which is ever oldest, yet ever new.

"I loved Dejah Thoris. The touch of my arm upon her naked shoulder had spoken to me words I could not mistake, and I knew that I had loved her since the first moment that my eyes had met hers that first time in the plaza of the dead city of Korad." (APM/13.)

This passage lends support to imagining Dejah Thoris without a harness while she was with the Greens. Her shoulders, where the leather straps of a harness would have crossed, are described as naked, with no straps. As for Carter's silks, we are to imagine a cape, and for the thrill of the naked touch, we are to understand that Dejah Thoris is still turned on and Carter has picked up on her vibe.

As the story progresses, Carter and Dejah are separated, and after many adventures Carter, disguised as an air scout for the Zodangan navy, finds her in Sab Than's palace. But first he must dispatch some guards that try to thwart him:

“They were brave men and noble fighters, and it grieved me that I had been forced to kill them, but I would have willingly depopulated all of Barsoom could I have reached the side of my Dejah Thoris in no other way.

“Sheathing my bloody blade I advanced toward my Martian Princess, who still stood mutely gazing at me without sign of recognition....

“As I came close to her she swayed toward me with outstretched hands, but as I reached to take her in my arms she drew back with a shudder and a little moan of misery.” (APM/22.)

Dejah has, of course, pledged herself to Sab Than and once a promise is made on Mars it cannot be broken. This is one of ERB's tricks of the trade: build up the reader for a victory and then spoil it. Yes, Dejah and Carter are finally reunited, and this time he really wants her sexually, willing to depopulate the whole planet in his lust for the Martian princess. And, yes, they almost embrace their naked bodies together, but.....not yet.

Later in the story, when Dejah Thoris is getting married to Sab Than, she is described as wearing a sort of harness:

“The object of the ceremony was clear to me; in another moment Dejah Thoris would be joined forever to the Prince of Zodanga. It was an impressive and beautiful ceremony, I presume, but to me it seemed the most fiendish sight I had ever witnessed, and as the ornaments were adjusted upon her beautiful figure and her collar of gold swung open in the hands of Than Kosis I raised my long-sword above my head, and, with the heavy hilt, I shattered the glass of the great window and sprang into the midst of the astonished assemblage.” (APM/25.)

Since Than Kosis places the ornaments on Dejah's figure, we assume these were not hair ornaments, thus suggesting a harness. As we shall see further below, when Princess Tara is getting married to O-Tar, she wears a wedding harness.

Thus we are to imagine her in a wedding harness during the bloodbath in the palace hall, and afterwards when Carter and Dejah Thoris are alone:

“She had sunk into one of the golden thrones, and as I turned to her she greeted me with a wan smile.

“‘Was there ever such a man!’ she exclaimed. ‘I know that Barsoom has never before seen your like. Can it be that all Earth men are as you? Alone, a stranger, hunted, threatened, persecuted, you have done in a few short months what in all the past ages of Barsoom no man has ever done: joined together the wild hordes of the sea bottoms and brought them to fight as allies of a red Martian people.’

“‘The answer is easy, Dejah Thoris,’ I replied smiling. ‘It was not I who did it, it was love, love for Dejah Thoris, a power that would work greater miracles than this you have seen.’

“A pretty flush overspread her face and she answered, ‘You may say that now, John Carter, and I may listen, for I am free.’

“‘And more still I have to say, ere it is again too late,’ I returned. ‘I have done many strange things that wiser men would not have dared, but never in my wildest fancies have I dreamed of winning a Dejah Thoris for myself – for never had I dreamed that in all the universe dwelt such a woman as the Princess of Helium. That you are a princess does not abash me, but that you are you is enough to make me doubt my sanity as I ask you, my princess, to be mine.’

“‘He does not need to be abashed who so well knew the answer to his plea before the plea were made,’ she replied, rising and placing her dear hands upon my shoulders, and so I took her in my arms and kissed her.” (APM/25.)

This is a finely wrought scene, fading out just when the going gets good. Carter expresses his love, it turns on the Princess, he is not a child this time, as all the talking about being abashed makes clear. Look at the Princess sunk in the golden throne, covered with blood, her breasts rising and falling, her legs spread; watch her as she flushes, then rises from the throne to embrace Carter. When Carter kisses Dejah Thoris, his naked body is pressed against her naked body.

This is great early soft porn. Is it any wonder ERB became famous after writing this book?

One last point. I stated earlier that when ERB wanted to make it clear that people were wearing concealing clothing, he made a distinction between the clothed state and the state of nakedness that was prevalent upon the Mars at the time. Earlier in the story, when Carter and Dejah explored the murals of the ancient race, a very important distinction is made between the ancient ones and the modern Reds:

“They were of people like myself, and of a much lighter color than Dejah Thoris. They were clad in graceful, flowing robes, highly ornamented with metal and jewels, and their luxuriant hair was of a beautiful golden and reddish bronze. The men were beardless and only a few wore arms.” (APM/11.)

The ancient ones are depicted as Greek Gods, but they are notably not naked, and ERB makes this point clear. The ancient ones were different.

4) Green Martians wear breast ornaments:

There is no description or even mention of a harness in the first story; instead, everyone wears “leathers and straps” for “trappings”:

“Unseen, we reached a rear window and with the straps and leather of my trappings I lowered, first Sola, and then Dejah Thoris to the ground below.” (APM/17.)

However, the fact that we are told that Green Martian women wear breast ornaments raises a question about whether these ornaments actually covered a woman’s nipples:

“As soon as they were through with me I hastened to the chariot of Dejah Thoris, where I found my poor Sola with her chest swathed in bandages, but apparently little the worst for her encounter with Sarkoja, whose dagger it seemed had struck the edge of one of Sola’s metal breast ornaments and, thus deflected, had inflicted but a slight flesh wound.” (APM/15.)

It appears that Sola had more than one metal breast ornament. We are not told how they were attached to the breast. We can assume that it was with straps and leathers, but without a

description of the metal, one has to exert a prudish bias to insist that it covered the nipples. If the intention of Sarkoja was to kill Sola, then she would have aimed for the heart, and an ornament covering one of her nipples would have been far from her mark. More likely, if the Martian harness criss-crossed the chest, then a metal ornament in the center of the criss-cross, right over the heart, would be the likely place for such an ornament, as Spratt has drawn correctly.

Other ornaments could have covered the harness in the four intersecting directions over and under the breasts, leaving them fully exposed, and providing a push-up effect. As we will see later when we get to Thuvia, a woman's harness is meant to accentuate and not conceal the breasts. Thus, if we imagine Sarkoja striking just to the right of the leather harness where it criss-crossed – with a metal ornament in the center partially covering the side of her left breast – could have easily deflected the blade, whereas any stab in the areas of the nipples would have been wide of the target.

5) Green Martians have only two breasts:

I know that the Green Martians have an extra pair of arms thus raising the natural question about whether they had an alternate set of shoulders and breasts, but I believe an obscure verse makes it clear that they only had two, making Spratt's depiction incorrect, yet still more visually appealing. It is easy to see why most readers miss this verse:

“He was a huge fellow, terribly scarred about the face and chest, and with one broken tusk and a missing ear. Strapped on either breast were human skulls and depending from these a number of dried human hands.” (APM/18, 6th paragraph.)

In my understanding, “either breast” means only two. This is, I believe, the only reference in the whole corpus to this fact. Moreover, if these skulls are alternate breast

ornaments, then the problem raised above about how they were attached is certainly resolved because we learn that they were “strapped on”. ERB later cleared up the ambiguity of “leather and straps trappings” to make them equivalent to a fully functional leather harness with a pocket pouch, hooks to attach to fliers, scabbards for swords, and holsters for radium pistols.

6) A collar can either be clothing or adornment:

A description of the old man running the atmosphere factory informs us that a collar worn around the neck is to be considered as either clothing or adornment:

“He wore but a single item of clothing or adornment, a small collar of gold from which depended upon his chest a great ornament as large as a dinner plate set solid with huge diamonds, except for the exact center which was occupied by a strange stone, an inch in diameter, that scintillated nine different and distinct rays....” (APM/20.)

Clothing covers, while adornments and ornaments enhance, decorate, and symbolize authority. This passage makes clear that clothing and ornaments are different and distinguishable. However, since the collar only covers the old man’s neck, ERB also refers to it in the alternative as an item of adornment, like wrist, arm, ankle and leg clasps. But since an ornament depends from the collar, he calls it an adornment to distinguish it from the ornament.

7) The pocket pouch is attached at the hip:

Once again, assuming that everyone wore the same kind of harnesses in the first novel as the ones later described by ERB in the sequels, we find the location of the pocket pouch to be on the side or hip of the harness:

“My metal and ornaments were also renewed in the style of a Zodangan gentleman, attached to the house of Ptor, which was the family name of my benefactors.

“They filled a little sack at my side with Zodangan money.” (APM/20.)

There can be little doubt that this little sack was the same as the pocket pouch of the Martian harness, for as we shall see below, the pocket pouch was used to store money, valuables, maps, flashlights, etc.. Thus, any argument that the pocket pouch would have provided a covering for the genitalia is ill conceived. It was worn on the side. Otherwise it would have banged against the testicles or vulva.

This is what is to be gleaned from A Princess of Mars on the subject of nakedness on Mars. It should constitute holy writ for the ERB Martian series. In the subsequent stories, we will find little to disagree with what has been laid out, and we must understand that any future ambiguities must be settled in favor of what ERB first wrote and made clear on the subject in Princess.

II The Gods of Mars

We find our first variations in the sequel. Describing the vestments of Tars Tarkas, ERB ventures to discuss clothing on Mars:

8) Clothing only worn to protect from the cold:

“Among the ornaments of Tars Tarkas’s leather harness, which is the only manner of clothing worn by Martians other than silk capes and robes of silk and fur for protection from the cold after dark, was a small mirror, about the bigness of a lady’s hand glass, which hung midway between his shoulders and his waist against his broad back.” (GM/3.)

This passage confirms that clothing is never worn to conceal, but only to protect from the cold Martian nights. This is the first mention of the Martian harness by ERB. We are confirmed in our belief that it constitutes the leather trappings of the first novel. We know that there is a distinction between it and all other clothing, because its purpose is not to cover or conceal, but to

provide utilitarian support for its wearer. ERB calls it an article of clothing in this passage, but only in the context of things Martians place on their bodies, which, of course, cover some parts of the body.

The fact that the mirror is in the position that a criss-crossing harness would occupy on the back side, is supporting evidence for this point of view.

9) Some Martian slaves are bare-ass naked:

Regardless if you are not convinced of my argument that Martians were entirely naked except for harnesses and ornaments, there is absolutely no doubt that certain Martian slaves wore absolutely nothing at all, as we learn by a close reading of ERB's description of the enchanting Thuvia, a girl he appears to be particularly fond of:

“She was the perfect type of that remarkably beautiful race, whose outward appearance is identical with the more god-like races of Earth men, except that this higher race of Martians is of a light reddish copper color. As she was entirely unadorned I could not even guess her station in life, though it was evident that she was either a prisoner or slave in her present environment.” (GM/4.)

She was “entirely unadorned.” This means no harness, no jewels, no nothing. Her breasts and genitalia were fully exposed to Carter. ERB later confirms this when he has Issus demote Xodar in front of her female slaves, one of whom Phaidor has become:

“No longer be you a Dator, but for evermore a slave of slaves, to fetch and carry for the lower orders that serve in the gardens of Issus. Remove his harness. Cowards and slaves wear no trappings.” (GM/9.)

Thus, we are clearly told that the slave girls of Issus were bare-ass naked. This knowledge is crucial for imagining the last scene in the book, where Dejah Thoris, Thuvia, and Phaidor are trapped together in the revolving Temple of the Sun. At the time, they all have

become the slaves of Issus. In other words, they are all bare-ass naked. In the end, Phaidor goes mad with jealousy and tries to stab Dejah Thoris with a dagger while Thuvia jumps between them. Their bare-ass nakedness is easy to surmise from the last lines of the novel:

“Ah! If I could but know one thing, what a burden of suspense would be lifted from my shoulders! But whether the assassin’s dagger reached one fair bosom or another, only time will divulge.” (APM/22.)

10) The Martian harness is multifunctional:

The Martian harness can be used for other functions besides supporting weapons, pocket pouches, ornaments and insignia. As used often in this series, the harness can also be used to effectively bind a prisoner:

“At the moment I noticed that the black I had dropped with my fist was commencing to show signs of returning consciousness. I sprang to his side. Stripping his harness from him I securely bound his hands behind his back, and after similarly fastening his feet tied him to a heavy gun carriage.

“Why not the simpler way?” asked Phaidor.

“I do not understand. What “simpler way”?” I replied

“With a slight shrug of her lovely shoulders she made a gesture with her hands personating the casting of something over the craft’s side.

“I am no muderer,’ I said. ‘I kill in self-defense only.’

“She looked at me narrowly. Then she puckered those divine brows of hers, and shook her head. She could not comprehend.” (GM/7.)

ERB was not afraid to use racial stereotypes. Take for example, this description of Xodar after he has been stripped of his harness:

“He was a handsome fellow, clean limbed and powerful, with an intelligent face and features of such exquisite chiselling that Adonis himself might have envied him.” (GM/7.)

I believe even at the time this story was written, the black man was known for his physical form, especially his male member. Remember, ERB saves this description until after

Xodar's harness has been removed, leaving no doubt that a totally naked black man is being described. Just think about the racism of the time and how this scene, with naked black men with large members, capturing naked blonde white women, must have affected the average male reader. When modern critics say the stories are without sex they have clearly forgotten that everyone is naked.

Now, if you believe I am stretching the facts too far, take note of how often the leather harness is used for sado-masochistic bondage in these stories. Women come within a hairbreadth of being raped and tortured all the time. Beautiful women princesses from other territories are captured and eaten by Issus or tortured in horrible ways in other stories. Most all of the women main characters are repeatedly beaten. And they are all naked. Like I said, as long as ERB didn't mention sex directly, he could get away with murder.

Consider the scene where Carter and Phaidor are tied together:

"The girl and I were linked together by a rope which permitted us to move only about three or four feet from each other. When we had entered the compartment we had seated ourselves upon a low bench beneath the porthole. It was of sorapus wood. The floor, ceiling and walls were of carborundum aluminum, a light, impenetrable composition extensively utilized in the construction of Martian fighting ships.

"As I had sat meditating upon the future my eyes had been riveted upon the port-hole which was just level with me as I sat. Suddenly I looked toward Phaidor. She was regarding me with a strange expression I had not before seen on her face. She was very beautiful then.

"Instantly her white lids veiled her eyes, and I thought I discovered a delicate flush tinging her cheek. Evidently she was embarrassed at having been detected in the act of staring at a lesser creature, I thought.

"Do you find the study of the lower orders interesting?' I asked, laughing.

"She looked up again with a nervous but relieved little laugh.

"Oh very," she said, "especially when they have such excellent profiles."

"It was my turn to flush, but I did not." (GM/8.)

When you realize that Carter and Phaidor are not “flushing” because of embarrassment – which would cause blushing – they are “flushing” because they are sexually aroused. You have to read these scenes very carefully to see what the master is up to.

This story came out in 1913, one year before the outbreak of WWI in Europe. If the adult reader in 1913 didn’t catch Phaidor checking out Carter’s package with approval, he was from another planet.

The straps on a harness can be broken down so as to bind a person or they can be used in lieu of a rope, as ERB makes clear when he has Carter, Carthoris, and Xodar escape from the prison isle of Shador:

“Another moment found me at the top of the partition wall again with the boy beside me. Unbuckling my harness I snapped it together with a single long strap which I lowered to the waiting Xodar below. He grasped the end and was soon sitting beside me....

“The moment his form [a sentry] disappeared I grasped Xodar and drew him to the top of the wall. Placing one end of my harness strap in his hands I lowered him quickly to the ground below. Then the boy grasped the strap and slid down to Xodar’s side.” (GM/13.)

We see that the harness is attached to a belt that goes around the waist, secured by a buckle. The straps appear to snap on and can be made to be as long as both the straps and the belt can make it. This is how it can bind both the hands and the feet.

11) The pocket pouch dangles from the harness:

The pocket pouch actually dangles from the harness, rather than being a part of it, as shown in this passage:

“With that he drew his dagger and cut open a locked pouch which had dangled from the Thern’s harness, and from it he brought forth a circlet set with a large gem.” (GM/19.)

Thus, from what we learned before, it would have dangled from the part of the harness that went around the waist from the side.

III Warlord of Mars

To continue the last point, we find John Carter using his pocket pouch in the dark passages around the Temple of the Sun:

“I am upon the right trail, I thought, as I slipped the bauble into the pocket pouch which hung from my harness.” (WM/3/.)

They either dangle or hang from the side at the hip. There is not a contrary passage in the whole series. Moreover, ERB next explains the function of the pocket pouch in full:

“Hastily I dumped the contents of my pocket-pouch upon the ground before me. Could I but find a slender bit of steel I might yet fashion a key that would give me ingress to the temple prison.

“As I examined the heterogeneous collection of odds and ends that is always to be found in the pocket-pouch of a Martian warrior my hand fell upon the emblazoned radium flash torch of the black dator.” (WM/3.)

12) Yellow Martians are naked:

Carter observes that after Talu, the rebel prince of Marentina, arrives back home and takes off his fur robe, he is exactly like all other Martians:

“The moment we entered the city Talu threw off his outer garments of fur, as did we, and I saw that his apparel differed but little from that of the red races of Barsoom. Except for his leathern harness, covered thick with jewels and metal, he was naked, nor could one have comfortably worn apparel in that warm and humid atmosphere.” (WM/10.)

13) ERB uses nudity to heighten drama:

Watch how the master attracts attention to Dejah Thoris’s breasts as she is dragged before Salensus Oll:

“Immediately two guardsmen appeared dragging the unwilling bride toward the altar. Her hands were still manacled behind her, evidently to prevent suicide.

“Her disheveled hair and panting bosom betokened that, chained though she was, still had she fought against the thing that they would do to her.”
(WM/14.)

This is the first time ERB directly referred to Dejah Thoris’s breasts, using the inoffensive “bosom,” and it is during a scene where the evil Jeddak is lusting after her. ERB knew what turned his readers on and what he could get away with vis-a-vis the censors.

IV Thuvia, Maid of Mars

There’s a little more titillation going on this book than in the ones before. While in the guise of a story about his son, Jack, disguised as Cathoris, and another woman to whom ERB was attracted disguised as Thuvia, ERB has a jolly good time in his doppelganger. ERB thought he could get away with this since he was not the lead character in the story. To further disguise his intent, he wrote it in the third person. Note how Carthoris woos Thuvia:

“He raised a jewel-encrusted bit of the girl’s magnificent trappings to his lips.” (TMM/1.)

That constitutes a very intimate gesture since we are not told what part of the harness he lifted, but since the straps criss-crossed in front, it must have been near to her breasts, especially since we are forced later in the story to focus on Thuvia’s breasts:

“Thuvia of Ptarth looked into his face for several moments. Her breast was rising and falling as though to some resistless motion. She half took a step toward him. Her lips parted as though to speak – swiftly and impetuously.”
(TMM/5.)

Note that ERB has abandoned the word “bosom” for “breast” instead. You don’t really have to imagine what the “resistless motion” was – she was getting turned on. If you follow the soft porn trend on cable TV, you will notice a progression of explicitness every few years. This is the same progression going on the Mars series.

I don’t know who ERB based Thuvia on, but she must have been a knockout.

14) Ornaments are worn in the hair:

As mentioned earlier, except for her ornaments, Dejah Thoris was entirely naked when Carter first saw her in the plaza. We speculated at the time that the ornaments could have been limited to her hair, the evidence being the following passage:

“With slightly lightened heart he started out to explore the valley, but scarce a dozen steps had he taken when the glistening of a jeweled bauble lying on the sward caught his eye.

“As he picked it up his first glance showed him that it was a woman’s hair ornament, and emblazoned upon it was the insignia of the royal house of Ptarth.” (TMM/5.)

15) Harness straps cross in front:

“Upon his already jewel-encrusted harness, to the strap that crossed his great chest beneath which beat his loyal heart, Carthoris, Prince of Helium, fastened the gleaming thing that Thuvia of Ptarth had worn, and wearing, had made holy to the Heliumite.” (TMM/5.)

Whatever strap this is, it is said to cross in front. I picture this strap crossing diagonally, but in his otherwise masterful article, “Dressed to Kill: A Study of Martian Fashion,” Fredrik Ekman argues that this passage indicates that only one strap crossed Carthoris’s chest in a horizontal fashion, connecting to perpendicular shoulder straps. (ERBzine #0438.) However, a cautious reading shows that the strap was only part of a jewel-encrusted harness, and thus could

only be referring to one of the straps that crossed his chest, the one specifically to which he attached the bauble. I see little evidence for the proposed harness that Ekman puts forth, as illustrated by Jeff Doten. (*Id.*) This is speculative dreaming at best. His depiction of the harness would be almost impossible to break down in a way that it could bind both hands and feet.

Such a harness is an obvious prudish invention devised by someone under the delusion that imagining naked people is sinful or immoral – for this harness not only manages to cover the breasts and nipples, but the genitalia as well. Such a harness is a total contradiction to the idea of nakedness on Mars as ERB conceived it. But, after all, this wouldn't be the first time that ERB rolled over in his grave.

16) Thuvia is full-breasted:

As I mentioned above, ERB was fascinated with the character of Thuvia, and needed to pawn her off on his son to keep Emma from becoming too suspicious. From the following passages we can assume that Thuvia was a full-breasted heartbreaker:

“Tario had raised himself up on one elbow. For the first time he saw the full figure of Thuvia, who had been concealed behind the person of Carthoris.” (TMM/7.)

“Then he turned to Carthoris, but ever his gaze wandered to the perfect lines of Thuria's glorious figure, which the harness of the Barsoomian princess accentuated rather than concealed.” (TMM/7.)

This last passage is ignored by Mr. Ekman, and yet it shoots a fatal broadside into the hull of his argument that the harness somehow hides a woman's breasts or nipples. In the first quote, ERB emphasizes the fact that Thuvia has a full figure, which suggests large breasts, especially in light of ERB's description of Tavia in *A Fighting Man of Mars* (see below). From the second

quote, it is easy to imagine the harness bulging her glorious breasts in accentuation. What else could it mean to accentuate?

The modern reader and media viewer is spoiled today because virtually nothing is left to the imagination, but the reader of 1916 didn't have the template that we do today, and any suggestion of titillation was taken to the max in the normal male mind. ERB was giving that reader just what he wanted:

“With a muffled cry he sprang upon her, throwing his arms about her and attempting to drag her lips to his.

“‘Woman!’ he cried. ‘Lovely woman! Tario would make you queen of Lothar. Listen to me! Listen to the love of the last of the jeddaks of Barsoom.

“Thuvia struggled to free herself from his embrace....

“Again he caught her roughly to him, dragging her towards his couch.

“‘If you will not be my queen,’ he said, ‘you shall be my slave.’

“‘Neither!’ cried the girl.” (TMM/8.)

It seems almost silly to point out that this is a full blown rape scene. Tario's hands seem to be roaming freely over Thuvia's body in his rough embrace. The last reference is clear: Tario intends to copulate Thuvia whether she likes it or not. This happens a few more times as the story progresses, and each time we are forced to imagine the position of Thuvia's breasts, as in this example:

“Carthoris, still clasping Thuvia tightly to his breast, came to the ground catlike, upon his feet, breaking the shock for the girl.” (TMM/9.)

He broke the shock by pressing her tightly, so the reader can fully imagine the feel of her full breasts against his flesh. You can bet that this story was read in many bathrooms.

Like I said, every man in this book wants to copulate Thuvia, and I believe her full figure holds the key to their desire.

Check out this scene where a Lotharian makes a pass at her, then attempts to rape her when she spurns him:

“‘It would appear possible, and yet in so far as I am concerned I have all the attributes of a corporeal existence. I eat, I sleep,’ he paused, casting a meaning look upon the girl – ‘I love!’

“Thuvia could not mistake the palpable meaning of his words and expression. She turned away with a little shrug of disgust that was not lost upon the Lotharian.

“He came close to her and seized her arm....

“....And he attempted to crush her to his chest.

“The girl struggled to free herself, striking at the man with her metal armlets. Yet still he drew her toward him, until both were suddenly startled by the hideous growl that rumbled from the dark wood close behind them.” (TMM/9.)

“Thuvia of Ptarth, battling for more than life against the lust of Jav, cast a quick glance over her shoulder toward the forest from which had rumbled the fierce growl.

“What they saw filled each with apprehension. It was Komal, the banth-god, rushing wide-jawed upon them!

“They had not long to wait, for though the Lotharian attempted to hold the girl between himself and the terrible fangs, the great beast found him at last.

“Then, shrieking, he attempted to fly toward Lothar, after pushing Thuvia bodily into the face of the maneater. But his flight was of short duration. In a moment, Komal was upon him, rending his throat and chest with demoniacal fury.” (TMM/11.)

Did you imagine that when Jav told Thuvia that he still “loves,” he was getting an erection. After all, Thuvia could not mistake the palpable meaning of his words and “his expression.” Her disgust was likely just as much for his penis as it was for his person.

Alas, for lusting after the fair Thuvia, Jav ends up being banth food, much in the same way as Rokoff ended up being Sheeta food in The Beasts of Tarzan, written two years earlier. ERB was making sure that Thuvia would be unspoiled for her union with Carthoris, perhaps

forgetting that she had been the bare-ass naked plaything of the degenerate incestuous Therns for fifteen years.

In order for Carthoris to legally have her on Mars, however, certain conditions must be met. For example, she is betrothed to another older man and must somehow overcome her loyalty to Martian custom to make this possible. Watch how ERB deals masterfully with her emotions after Carthoris has again called her “my princess”:

“Then she had not chidden him for the use of that familiar salutation, nor did she chide him now, though she was promised to another. She wondered at herself – flushing at her own turpitude; for upon Barsoom it is shameful for a woman to listen to those two words from another than her husband or her betrothed.” (TMM/10.)

In the end, she allows her forbidden love for Cathoris to come before her Martian morality, a truly remarkable achievement for a Barsoomian woman:

“The girl put her hands before her eyes, as though to shut out some mighty temptation from her sight.

“‘May my ancestors have mercy upon me,’ she cried, ‘if I say the thing I have no right to say; but I cannot see you cast your life away, Cathoris, Prince of Helium! Stay, my chieftan. Stay – I love you!’” (TMM/14.)

Of course, before this takes place, Thuvia is captured by Astok, who also lusts after her and threatens her with bestiality:

“....He only smiled and pleaded his love for her.

“‘I would sooner mate with a white ape!’ she cried, when he would have urged his suit.

“Astok glowered sullenly upon her.

“‘You shall mate with me, Thuvia of Ptarth,’ he growled, ‘or, by your first ancestor, you shall have your preference – and mate with a white ape.’” (TMM/12.)

This is more than just a suggestion of bestiality; it is a real threat, much as Jane was almost raped by the great ape, Terkoz. In fact, the author of John Carter and the Giant of Mars – whom I believe, like most scholars, was written by ERB’s son, John Coleman Burroughs (JCB) – has a white ape embrace, fondle and kiss Dejah Thoris before Carter can stop it. (JCM/I-6.)

It is obvious to me that ERB did not write this story because the white ape of Giant is only eight feet tall and is covered with white hair, whereas the white apes of ERB are at least ten feet tall and hairless, except for a shock of bristly hair on top of their heads, much like a mohawk. Besides, ERB would never have allowed an ape, even if it had a human brain, to ever taint the incomparable beauty of Dejah Thoris, whereas his son could have allowed it if he thought of her as someone like Florence Gilbert or Coleen Moore and held her responsible for ERB’s divorce of his mother. After all, ERB was in Hawaii and JCB was with Emma, Hully and Joan in California when JCB wrote the story.

V

The Chessmen of Mars

Once again ERB adopts the third person to conduct his mischief. Chessmen was written during the golden age of Rancho Tarzana where ERB and his family would act out scenes from his books. He obviously invented the character of Tara for his daughter Joan. Of course, this allowed him much more leeway to be more risqué, which is seen by the keen eye throughout the novel. We have seen a progression so far from “bosom” to “breast,” but in Chessmen ERB goes right to the point and describes Tara’s breasts in detail. There is something very voyeuristic about this novel that anyone can see.

17) Tara's breasts are fully exposed throughout:

Mr. Ekman believes he found evidence in this book that gave credibility to his argument that it was reasonable to believe Martian harnesses concealed a woman's breasts and both sexes' genitalia. This amazes me because Tara is depicted in various states of nakedness throughout the story and there are vivid scenes that would have been considered soft porn at the time. Heck, it is still considered soft porn today. Take, for instance, the opening scene where she is wearing nothing but a see-through scarf that may or may not cover one of her breasts:

“Tara of Helium rose from the pile of silks and soft furs upon which she had been reclining, stretched her lithe body languidly, and crossed toward the center of the room....A scarf of silken gossamer crossing over one shoulder was wrapped about her body.” (CM/1.)

We don't have to worry about whether we can see her naked body through the scarf, because almost immediately after rising, Tara takes in a bath and a massage:

“Tara of Helium removed the scarf from about her and handed it to the slave. Slowly she descended the steps to the water, the temperature she tested with a symmetrical foot, undeformed by tight shoes and high heels – a lovely foot, as God intended that feet should be and seldom are. Finding the water to her liking, the girl swam leisurely to and fro about the pool. With the silken ease of the seal she swam, now at the surface, now below, her smooth muscles rolling softly beneath her clear skin – a wordless song of health and happiness and grace. Presently she emerged and gave herself into the hands of the slave girl, who rubbed the body of her mistress with a sweet smelling semi-liquid substance contained in a golden urn, until the glowing skin was covered with a foamy lather, then a quick plunge into the pool, a drying with soft towels, and the bath was over....In another half hour her hair was dried and and built into the strange, but becoming coiffure of her station; her leathern trappings, encrusted with gold and jewels, had been adjusted to her figure and she was ready to mingle with the guests....” (CM/1.)

Enough said. If you happen to have a foot fetish, you might get some extra yardage out of this passage. And if you enjoy a slave girl rubbing the naked flesh of her mistress into a lather –

yes, he really wrote that – you are not alone. And how about that harness being adjusted around her breasts? Like I said, ERB knew what his readers wanted.

But this is just the opening scene. ERB's hormones must have been raging during this period. Emma must have caught on for in 1924 she told ERB that he wasn't allowed to touch her any more. It appears that ERB had gone Hollywood, which is what the land of Gathol is based upon. Gahan of Gathol takes note of Tara:

“Nor did Gahan seem displeased with the excuse for further monopolizing the society of his fair companion. His eyes seem chained to her exquisite features, from which they moved no further that to a rounded breast, part hid beneath its jeweled covering, a naked shoulder or the symmetry of a perfect arm, resplendent in bracelets of barbaric significance.” (CM/1.)

As we will see from a description of Tara below, we know the jewel did not cover her nipples as Mr. Ekman would like us to believe – for reasons I don't fully understand. After all, we have just spent a good minute voyeuristically leering at Tara's naked body swimming around her bath and then watching her naked flesh get lathered up by a naked slave girl. There's little we don't know about her body by the time she flirts with Gahan. Note the scene where he and Tara dance:

“In the ever-changing figures of the dance the man found himself now with the girl's hand in his and again with an arm about the lithe body that the jeweled harness but inadequately covered, and the girl, though she had danced a thousand dances in the past, realized for the first time the personal contact of man's arm against her naked flesh. It troubled her that she should notice it, and she looked up questioningly and almost with displeasure at the man as though it was his fault. Their eyes met and she saw in his that she had never seen in the eyes of Djor Kantos. It was at the very end of the dance and the both stopped suddenly with the music and stood their looking straight into each other's eyes. It was Gahan of Gathol who spoke first.

“Tara of Helium, I love you!” (CM/1.)

I can see why Mr. Ekman singled out these two passages for his argument since they are two of the most explicit scenes ERB ever wrote in the Mars series. Does it take a genius to understand that Gahan was touching the undersides of her breasts, likely in a cupping manner, as he moved his arm around her lithe body? The prose is lurid at this point: note that Tara realizes that Gahan has copped a feel in a dance where she had never noticed getting touched before. There is electricity in this passage.

18) Tara may have lesbian tendencies:

Tara is angry and returns to her quarters and to the naked slave girl, Uthia – you know, the one who had lathered her naked flesh:

“‘My flying leather!’ she commanded.

“‘But the guests!’ exclaimed the slave girl. ‘Your father, The Warlord, will expect you to return.’

“‘He will be disappointed,’ snapped Tara of Helium.

“‘The slave hesitated. ‘He does not approve of your flying alone,’ reminded her mistress.

“‘The young princess sprang to her feet and seized the unhappy slave by the shoulders, shaking her. ‘You are becoming unbearable, Uthia,’ she cried. ‘Soon there will be no alternative than to send you to the public slave-market. Then possibly you will find a master to your liking.’

“‘Tears came to the soft eyes of the slave girl. ‘It is because I love you, my princess,’ she said softly. Tara of Helium melted. She took the slave in her arms and kissed her.

“‘I have the disposition of a thoat, Uthia,’ she said. ‘Forgive me! I love you and there is nothing that I would not do for you and nothing would I do to harm you. Again, as I have so often in the past, I offer you your freedom.’

“‘I do not wish my freedom if it will separate me from you, Tara of Helium,’ replied Uthia. ‘I am happy here with you – I think I should die without you.’

“‘Again the girls kissed. ‘And you will not fly alone, then?’ questioned the slave.

“‘Tara of Helium laughed and pinched her companion. ‘You persistent little pest,’ she cried. ‘Of course I shall fly – doesn’t Tara of Helium always do that which pleases her?’

“Uthia shook her head sorrowfully. ‘Alas, she does,’ she admitted. ‘Iron is the Warlord of Barsoom to the influences of all but two. In the hands of Dejah Thoris and Tara of Helium he is but potter’s clay.’

“‘Then run and fetch my flying leather like the sweet slave you are,’ directed the mistress.” (CM/2.)

I don’t know about you, but I see lesbianism in this passage. Sure, they both express their love for each other, and Tara is said to have kissed Uthia, which are both innocent enough, but the next time there is a kiss, ERB makes sure the reader understands that both women are kissing each other, as in French-kissing. And where did you imagine Tara was pinching Uthia? I imagined on the buttocks, how about you? And note the language about mistresses and sweet slaves. Yes, Tara is not shy about her body around men or women and I see absolutely no reason to imagine her with her breasts, nipples, and genitalia covered at any time during the story.

19) ERB does not shy from nonsexual physical contact:

ERB does not hesitate to describe Carter and his daughter and granddaughter doing things that normal family members do, but yet the scenes still come off as shocking because they are doing them while they are naked. Take for example the scene where Tara shares her humiliation with her father:

“An hour later she joined her father and mother at the evening meal.

“‘You deserted us, Tara of Helium,’ said John Carter. ‘It is not what the guests of John Carter should expect.’

“‘They did not come to see me,’ replied Tara of Helium. ‘I did not ask them.’

“‘They were no less your guests,’ replied her father.

“The girl rose, and came and stood beside him and put her arms around his neck.

“‘My proper old Virginian,’ she cried, rumpling his shock of black hair.

“‘In Virginia you would be over your father’s knee and spanked,’ said the man, smiling.

“She crept into his lap and kissed him.” (CM/2)

It is unclear if Tara is wearing a harness in this scene. She had just come back from flying so she must have removed her flying leather. Regardless, she doesn't hesitate to rub – what we later will discover are – her small, round, firm breasts against her father's chest, or creep into his lap. And not just Virginians would want to spank those supple buttocks.

Regardless of how innocent this all is on the surface, the honest reader must still picture Carter's penis against Tara's buttocks as well as her breasts squashed against his chest as he receives her kiss. Just an innocent father-daughter kiss, but almost erotic when we see it. Of course, how almost erotic it is depends on where you imagine Tara is kissing her father while his penis touches her buttocks and her breasts press against his chest. One wonders if it made her mother jealous. There are a few more of these types of scenes with Llana of Gathol, a full-breasted bombshell.

20) Tara is felt up by the kaldanes:

We have seen Gahan of Gathol feeling up Tara of Helium, but that was mild compared to the feeling and groping going around when Tara is captured by the kaldanes:

“Then they overpowered her and in another moment she was surrounded by fully a hundred of the creatures, all seeking to lay hands upon her. At first she thought that they wished to tear her to pieces in revenge for her having slain two of their fellows, but presently she realized that they were prompted more by curiosity than by any sinister motive.” (CM/4.)

Tara is now getting felt up and likely sexually penetrated by a hundred grotesque creatures straight out of H.G. Wells' War of the Worlds. The horror! The horror!

But ERB is just beginning to play with us. He introduces us next to some horrific characters in the rykers and kaldanes and their weird symbiotic relationship. The rykers are

beautiful headless creatures that need to be attached to the kaldanes – who are gruesome spider heads that have short spider legs – in order to be one complete creature. The kaldanes not only control the rykers when they are attached to them, they also eat them:

“The song that had been upon her lips as she entered died there – frozen by the sight of horror that met her eyes. In the center of the chamber a headless body lay upon the floor – a body that had been partially devoured – while over and upon it crawled half a dozen heads upon their short, spider legs, and they tore at the flesh of the woman with their chelae and carried the bits to their awful mouths.” (CM/5.)

Did you catch that it was the body of naked woman that was being eaten? This is certainly legal pornography. The female ryker being eaten was chosen because she was plump, thus we are forced to imagine the partially eaten body as having large breasts. Later, Tara is given the plump test:

“Several of those who examined her felt her flesh, pinching it gently between thumb and forefinger, a familiarity that the girl resented.” (CM/5.)

Yes, that entails pinching certain areas of the body, like arms, sides, belly, breasts, nipples, and, of course, the buttocks. Fortunately for Tara, she needed to be fattened up. Of course, she stopped eating when she discovered this awful truth.

21) Tara is nearly raped by a ryker-kaldane combo:

And then comes one of the most voyeuristic scenes I ever have read. While the spider head of the chief kaldane, named Luud, watches on at a distance, his headless male ryker, under his domination, attacks Tara:

“Behind her, urged on by the malevolent power of the great brain, the headless body crawled upon all-fours toward her. At last she had reached the aperture. Something seemed to tell her that once beyond it the domination of the kaldane would be broken. She was almost through into the adjoining chamber

when she felt a heavy hand close upon her ankle. The rykor had reached forth and seized her, and though she struggled the thing dragged her back into the room with Luud.

“‘You see now,’ she heard Luud’s dull voice, ‘the futility of revolt – and its punishment.’

“Tara of Helium fought to defend herself, but pitifully weak were her muscles against this brainless incarnation of brute power. Yet, she fought, fought on in the face of hopeless odds for the honor of the proud name she bore....” (CM/6.)

Gahan of Gathol comes to her rescue in the nick of time and finds them struggling on the floor:

“Beyond this opening he could see two figures struggling upon the floor, and the fleeting glimpse he had of one of the faces suddenly endowed with the strength of ten warriors and the ferocity of a wounded banth. It was Tara of Helium, fighting for her honor or her life.” (CM/8.)

We all know what fighting for her honor means: the headless body was trying to rape her. It would not be offensive to this passage to imagine the headless body with an erection as he paws at Tara. Note that Luud stays unattached to his ryker so that he can watch the rape from a short distance, like a voyeur watching a porn flick.

This is otherwise a masterfully crafted scene of horror, written years before H.P. Lovecraft entered the pulps. ERB then repeats the scene where Phaidor checks out Carter as Thuvia watches Gahan swordfight with a kaldane:

“As she looked down from above upon his almost naked body, trapped only in the simplest unadorned harness, and saw the play of the lithe muscles beneath the red-bronze skin, and witnessed the quick and delicate play of his sword point, to her sense of obligation was added a spontaneous admission of admiration that was but the natural tribute of a woman to skill and bravery and, perchance, some trifle to manly symmetry and strength.” (CM/8.)

Yes, she's admiring his manhood. ERB uses the word "symmetry" when he wants to draw attention to breasts or genitalia.

22) Gahan likely copulates with Tara:

Gahan later recalls the feel of Tara's body against his and becomes very passionate:

"Her hand was still in his as he rose and they were very close, and the man was still flushed with the contact of her body since he had carried her from the throne room of O-Tar. He felt his heart pounding in his breast and the hot blood surging through his veins as he looked at her beautiful face, with its downcast eyes and the half-parted lips that he would have given a kingdom to possess, and then he swept her to him and as he crushed her against his breast his lips smothered her with kisses." (CM/15.)

As Mae West said, "Is that change in your pocket, or are you just glad to see me." ERB uses "flushed" and "hot blood surging through his veins" to describe Gahan getting an erection, one that Tara was sure to feel when she was crushed against his body. This is one step beyond soft porn. Can we possibly imagine that they copulated in this scene? ERB gives us two subtle clues.

The first is in ERB's use of the euphemisms, "the way of a man with a maid," and, "kissing"; the second comes at the end of the story when Gahan is referred to as her lover. As for ERB using euphemisms for sex, we see that he had a lively mind.

Gahan and Tara come into contact with the Old Man of the Pits who has witnessed the last scene and finds it odd that Gahan has chosen the Pits for a place for a man to have his way with a maid, an ancient euphemism for sexual intercourse:

"We came not to the gloomy pits to speak of love; but times have changed and ways have changed, though I had never thought to live to see the time when the way of a man with a maid, or a maid with a man would change. Ah, but we kissed them then! And what if they objected, eh? What if they

objected? Why, we kissed them more. Ey, ey, those were the days!’ and he cackled again. ‘Ey, well, do I recall the first of them I ever kissed, and I’ve kissed an army of them since; she was a fine girl, but she tried to slip a dagger into me while I was kissing her. Ey, ey, those were the days! But I kissed her. She’s been dead over a thousand years now, but she was never kissed again like that while she lived, I’ll swear, not since she’s been dead, either.’” (CM/15.)

The old man is bragging about copulating women using a repetitious euphemism. Kiss = copulate. This is not idle speculation, because when ERB collaborated on a book with his son, JCB, for Coleen Moore’s *Fairytale Castle* in 1937, ERB used the repetitious euphemisms of the forbidden forest and Tarzan Jr. and the Princess skipping at the end of the story as a clear references to the sin of fornication and the actual act of sexual intercourse. (ERBzine #0042.) In other words, if a reader is hip to the lingo, he or she really knows what is really going on.

And then comes the scene that should lay to rest any doubt that Tara’s breasts are fully exposed:

“Tara of Helium sat with arms folded upon her small, firm breasts, her eyes flashing from behind narrowed slits, nor did she deign to answer his overture. O-Tar leaned closer to her. He noted the hostility of her bearing and he recalled his first encounter with her. She was a she-banth, but she was beautiful. She was by far the most desirable woman that O-Tar had ever looked upon and he was determined to possess her.” (CM/20.)

Calling a woman a she-banth on Mars is the same as calling a woman a bitch or slut on Earth. O-Tar is voyeuristically leering at Tara in physical desire, determined to possess her, meaning he likely had an erection when he leaned closer to her.

ERB is coming into his own now. This story was written when the censors grew more lax during the liberal Twenties, before they cracked down hard during the Great Depression.

From Dejah Thoris's panting bosom in 1912, to Tara's small, round, firm breasts in 1922, we track ten years of progress against prudery.

There is no way that O-Tar could have known that Tara had small, firm breasts if they were concealed by breast ornaments. If you are not convinced by now that Martian women walk around with their breasts exposed, don't bother reading any further.

We are next treated to a very sexual scene where Tara is being prepared for marriage with O-Tar:

“For hours slaves prepared the unwilling bride. Seven perfumed baths occupied three long and weary hours, then her whole body was anointed with the oil of pimalia blossoms and massaged by the deft fingers of a slave from distant Dugar. Her harness, all new and wrought for the occasion, was of the white hide of the great white apes of Barsoom, hung heavily with platinum and diamonds – fairly encrusted with them. The glossy mass of her jet hair had been built into a coiffure of stately and becoming grandeur, into which diamond headed pins were stuck until the whole scintillated as the stars in heaven upon a moonless night.” (CM/22.)

Hmmm, yeah, those those deft fingers. In the finale, there is a twist, where Tara, who has been betrothed to another, makes the same choice as Thuvia did, believing Gahan of Gathol to be merely Turan the panthan. But when John Carter arrives, she discovers that he is really Gahan of Gathol, who is her equal:

“For just a moment Tara of Helium looked her surprise, and then she shrugged her beautiful shoulders as she turned to her head to cast her eyes over one of them at Gahan of Gathol.

“‘Jed or panthan,’ she said; ‘what difference does it make what one's slave has been?’ and she laughed roguishly into the smiling face of her lover.” (CM/22.)

This is the second clue: “she laughed roguishly into the smiling face of her lover.” There is only one scene I know of where Gahan and Tara had a chance to become lovers and that was in

the Pits, where they had been secretly watched by the Old Man, an obvious voyeur. Things won't get this spicy again until ERB's hormones are raging out of control during his affair with Florence Dearholt.

VI The Mastermind of Mars

ERB's libido took a dive in the next book. Breasts are not mentioned once, at least in the context of real women. Ulysses Paxton arrives naked on Mars and witnesses a naked Red Martian attacking a shriveled old Red Martian, who wears a harness that does not cover his penis:

“He was, perhaps, five feet five in height, though doubtless he had been taller in youth, since he was somewhat bent; he was naked except for some rather plain and well-worn leather harness which supported his weapons and pocket pouches, and one great ornament, a collar, jewel studded, that he wore around his scraggly neck – such a collar as a dowager empress of pork or real estate might barter her soul for, if she had one.” (MMM/1.)

This is, of course, the mad scientist, Ras Thavis. Ekman chooses Ras Thavas taking down his harness to his waist as evidence that there may have been more to the harness below the waist other than the weapons and pocket pouches, postulating a jockstrap theory. However, in the context of Paxton's advent on Mars – as had been the case with Carter's advent on Mars with the “entirely naked” Tars Tarkas – it is Paxton's state of nakedness that gives definition to what ERB means when he chooses to use the word “naked” vis-a-vis Ras Thavas:

“He [Ras Thavas] was still groping for his spectacles and the naked man was almost upon him as I reached the decision to cast my lot upon the side of the old man. I was twenty feet away, naked and unarmed....” (MMM/1.)

We know that Paxton is bare-ass naked in this scene, and so is the other Red Martian, to wit, they both have their penises exposed. Ras Thavas definitely is not wearing a jockstrap because other than the harness, he is said to be naked too. When ERB chooses to use the word “naked” he means that sexual organs are fully exposed. By now the reader should be used to men getting around on Mars with their penises swinging free.

Since the same holds true for a woman’s harness – which would naturally expose the vulva to public view – to continue to hold that Martian women covered their nipples with ornaments is absurd. But let Mr. Ekman censor ERB and imagine the harness the way he wants. That is his prerogative. But it is only that.

23) Xaxa’s male escort wear their pocket pouches on their sides:

Not to beat a dead horse, but ERB makes it clear in this passage that the pocket pouch is worn at the side of the harness:

“Their conversation was lengthy and at the conclusion of it, at the direction of the woman, one of her male escort advanced and opening a pocket pouch at his side withdrew a handful of what appeared to me to be Martian coins.” (MMM/1.)

Oddly, we are left to imagine the beautiful girl, Valla Dia, entirely on our own as her suspended animated body is laid out on an operating table as Xaxa checks her out, but there is no doubt from the context that she is entirely naked:

“Each time she paused before a certain one which bore the figure of the most beautiful creature I had ever looked upon...” (MMM/1.)

“Figure” in this case would mean naked. Perhaps ERB drew too much controversy from his explicit description of Tara’s breasts in the last novel. He has certainly taken a step backward

in his war against prudery in this one. Perhaps Emma was getting to close to the truth. There is a strip scene in the next section, but it is of a withered old woman:

“Two female slaves or attendants were in this room and at a word from their master they removed the trappings from the old woman, unloosed her hair and helped her to one of the tables.” (MMM/1.)

That’s about as racy as this story gets. The only time female breasts are mentioned is in the description of a horrible idol in the Temple of Tur:

“He led me next to the figure of a monstrosity with a mouth that ran entirely around its head. It had a long tail and the breasts of a woman.” (MMM/10.)

Sure, there is the scene where Vad Varo carries the body of Valla Dia that has the brain of Xaxa inside it:

“At the landing where lay Xaxa’s apartments we halted and looked within, for the long night voyage I contemplated would be cold and the body of Valla Dia must be kept warm with suitable robes even though it was inhabited by the spirit of Xaxa. Seeing no one we entered and soon found what we required. As I was adjusting a heavy robe of orluk about the Jeddara she regained consciousness.” (MMM/12.)

My, how much fun that must have been getting her into that robe. Although ERB has left most of the spice out of this story, it is still one of the best adventure stories he ever wrote, reminding me in many ways of The Beasts of Tarzan, my all time favorite.

VII A Fighting Man of Mars

This is a rip-roaring, ribald, adventure story, told by Hadron of Hastor – a true Martian telling a story about Martians – told in the first person to Ulysses Paxton who relays it to ERB by means of the Gridley wave. ERB is so comfortable with Martian psychology, he believes he can

tell this tale from a Martian point of view. This is truly a remarkable work of imagination. He will not top it until Synthetic Men of Mars.

This story is also noteworthy because ERB introduces a theme in this series he will return to again and again, each time from a different perspective: invisibility. Add invisibility to naked people and the possibilities are endless.

As every ERB fan knows, he was secretly carrying on an affair with Florence Dearholt at the time, seemingly with her husband's approval. Thus, it is easy to detect his fully raging hormones throughout the adventure. Through the doppelganger of Hadron of Hastor, ERB was free to explore the idea of the "mannish woman" in the character of Tavia. As we will see, Ekman's argument about Tavia's vulva being concealed by the man's harness she wears is ludicrous in light of all of the information to be gathered from this complex and riveting story.

24) Tavia is flat-chested:

The first time Hadron comes across Tavia, he is walking in pitch darkness when his foot touches a soft body on the floor. When it moves against his feet, he almost stabs it with his sword. When he talks to the soft body he deduces that it is a girl by her voice. As things progress, there is no reason for him to suspect otherwise.

He feels over her body and discovers her hands and feet are bound with leather thongs, and he frees her with his dagger. He helps her to her feet and she tells him that the Green Martians in the next room are gambling to see which one she will belong to. She asks for a weapon and he attaches his short sword to her harness:

“I unsnapped the scabbard of the my short sword from my harness and attached it to hers at her left hip, and, as I touched her body in doing so, I could

not but note that there was no sign of trembling such as there would have been affected by fright or excitement. She seemed perfectly cool and collected and her tone of voice was most reassuring to me.” (FMM/4.)

So far, so good. Next, Hadron steals a thout and they both hop on it – one assumes that he is in front and she rides behind – escaping the Green Martians. It is at this time Hadron has his first assumption put to the test:

“Now, for the first time, I had a fairly good look at my companion, for both Cluros and Thuria were in the heavens and it was quite light. If I revealed my surprise it is not to be wondered at, for, in the darkness, only having my companion’s voice for a guide, I had been perfectly confident that I had given aid to a female, but now as I looked at that short hair and boyish face I did not know what to think; nor did the harness that my companion wore aid me in justifying my first conclusion, since it was quite evidently the harness of a man.

“‘I thought you were a girl,’ I blurted out.

“A fine mouth spread into a smile that revealed strong white teeth. ‘I am,’ she said.

“‘But your hair – your harness – even your figure bely your claim.’”
(FMM/4.)

ERB is really having fun here. What Ekman has missed in his argument is that Hadron is turning around in his saddle when he sees her clearly for the first time. Her vulva would not have been visible to Hadron at this point. What he could see, her hair, her face, and the upper part of her body, belied his first conclusion that she was a girl.

What must there have been about her other than her short hair, boyish face, and man’s harness, to make him fear that she was a man? Time’s up. It was her figure. Since all breasts are exposed in the Martian harness, she must have been flat-chested for him to have thought of her as a man. In fact, contra Ekman, this passage actually confirms the fact that all breasts were exposed, for only this view fits the situation.

Hadron discovers that she had been kidnapped from her own city when she was a child and raised as a slave, and was trained in the martial arts as a sort of joke because she always looked boyish. She tells him that she made herself look like a man so that she could escape from the hands of the degenerate Jeddak of Jahar, Tul Axtar, who had chosen her for his bed:

“He saw me and sent for me. I pretended that I was ill and did not go, and when night came I went to the quarters of a soldier whom I knew to be on guard and stole harness, and I cut off my long hair and painted my face that I might look more like a man, and I went to the hangars on the palace roof and by a ruse deceived the guard there and stole a one-man flier.” (FMM/4.)

Ekman raises the point that the guard would have known that Tavia was a woman if the Martian harness left the penis or vulva fully exposed, thus bringing us back to his jockstrap theory. This is his best and most devious argument, but, as we will discover later, her sex had nothing to do with the ruse that she pulled on the guard. Like I said, ERB is up to real mischief here.

Together, Hadron and Tavia steal a two-man flier, and are forced into close contact on the narrow deck, almost touching, for two and half days. They get to know each other intimately, although not sexually. Hadron believes he loves another, Sanoma Tora, a totally knockout babe, but he is falling in love with Tavia without knowing it. It makes an amusing romance.

We learn later, that although Tavia is flat chested, she still has the slender rounded features of a woman:

“Opposite the opening, upon a pile of sleeping-silks and furs, I saw a woman reclining. Only a bare shoulder, a tiny ear and a head of tousled hair were visible. At the first glance I knew that they were Tavia’s.” (FMM/6.)

“As we met in the center of the room her eyes, moist with tears, were upturned toward mine. ‘Hadron,’ she whispered, her voice husky with emotion,

and then I put my arm around her slender shoulders and drew her to me, and something that was quite beyond my volition impelled me to kiss her upon the forehead.” (FMM/6.)

Note that Tavia’s voice was husky, the way a female voice tends to get when it is turned on. Their breasts are touching when he draws her to him. She’s flat-chested, but I imagine her nipples as hard and erect against his chest, his penis – in whatever state of arousal – pressed against her belly. Then the poor lad chickens out because of his twisted love for Sanoma Tora and disengages. But this is almost a sex scene and when Hadron falters, ERB’s readers must have been really disappointed.

25) ERB pushes the boundaries of censorship:

Hadron is separated from Tavia, gets sentenced to the Death, and ends up with his fighting buddy, Nur An, at the gates of a volcanic city, greeted by a group of scarf-waving beautiful playmates, who beg them to enter:

“‘Come,’ called another of the girls; ‘behind these gloomy walls lie food and wine and love.’” (FMM/7.)

Six girls, with radiant faces and smiles, run out to greet the men as they enter the incongruous city:

“Beautifully wrought harness, enriched by a many a sparkling jewel, accentuated the loveliness of faultless figures.” (FMM/8.)

ERB wants to make it clear that these are really hot babes. Once again, we are happy to see bulging breasts accentuated by leather. This could easily have been made into a pictorial for Hustler magazine. If one has any knowledge of bondage literature, then one understands what is going on here.

Next we are forced to deal with some of the most horrific scenes in literature: chambers of torture and twisted sadism. This was truly the legal pornography of its day. What a joke that it was ever regarded as juvenalia. Any parent reading this section would surely have second thoughts about this common view.

Hadron and Nur An are wined and dined by Ghron – the Jed of Ghasta, the volcanic city – with writhing dancing girls and grotesque monstrosities:

“As we waited in the grand entrance hall of the palace of the Jed, four of the girls danced for our entertainment – a strange dance such as I had never seen upon Barsoom. Its steps and movements were as weird and fantastic as the mural decorations of the room in which it was executed, and yet with all there was a certain rhythm and suggestiveness in the undulations of those lithe bodies that imparted to us a feeling of well-being and content.” (FMM/8.)

Only someone suffering from erectile dysfunction would miss the obvious pagan sex orgy dance going on here and the natural male reaction that it causes – you know, that feeling of well-being and content caused by an erection. Next, they witness a very strange scene:

“Towards the end of the meal a troupe of dancers entered the apartment. My first view of them almost took my breath away, for, with but a single exception, they were all horribly deformed. That one exception was the most beautiful girl I have ever seen, with the saddest face I have ever seen. She danced divinely and about her hopped and crawled the poor, unhappy creatures whose sad afflictions should have made them the objects of sympathy rather than ridicule, and yet it was obvious that they had been selected for their part for the sole purpose of giving the audience an opportunity to vent ridicule upon them.” (FMM/8.)

What a scene. The most beautiful naked woman in the world doing a divine dance while horribly deformed creatures hop and crawl all around her. Hadron and Nur An are then drugged and when they wake up they are in another room. Nur An remarks that all the bad things they heard about this city were not apparent to them until the feast:

“‘Yet I believe we saw little or nothing of that.’ said Nur An.

“‘I saw enough,’ I replied.

“‘Those girls were so beautiful,’ he said after a moment’s silence. ‘I could not believe that such beauty and such duplicity could exist together.’

“‘Perhaps they were the unwilling tools of a cruel master,’ I suggested.

“‘I shall always like to think so,’ he said.” (FMM/8.)

Yep, always room for a little lusty humor. Next, our lads are manacled and led down to the pits, where they enter a chamber and are confronted with a grisly sight: Ghron is seated upon a throne, his eyes glued to the far end of the room, which is suddenly pierced by blood-curdling screams:

“I looked quickly in the direction from which the screams came, the direction in which Ghron’s gaze was fastened. I saw a naked woman chained to a grill before a hot fire. Evidently they had just placed her there as I had entered the room, and it was her first shrill scream of agony that had attracted my attention.

“The grill was mounted upon wheels so that it could be removed to any distance from the fire that the torturer chose, or completely turned about presenting the other side of the victim to the blaze.” (FMM/8.)

Hadron cannot watch, but that doesn’t stop us from seeing and hearing the beautiful – for all the girls in this city are beautiful – naked girl being barbequed like a steak, howling and screaming the whole time while her flesh chars and burns. Did ERB have Emma in mind when he wrote this scene?

Now comes a scene that highlights ERB’s genius. He creates a scenario and leaves it all in the mind of the beholder. Like Room 101 in Orwell’s 1984, or the Monsters from the Id in Forbidden Planet, it is the worst thing you can imagine:

“He led us from the apartment to another, and there we witnessed a scene infinitely more terrible than the grilling of the human victim. I cannot describe it; it tortures my memory even to think of it. Long before we reached that hideous apartment we heard the screams and curses of the inmates. In utter silence our guard ushered us within. It was the chamber of horrors in which the Jed of Ghasta

was creating the abnormal deformities for his cruel dance of the cripples.”
(FMM/8.)

Yep, that is what I want my ten year old reading before he goes to bed at night, especially after he has watched a poor beautiful girl screaming as she is cooked to a nice medium rare while tied to a grill. Next, Hadron has an intimate conversation with Sharu, the beautiful playmate that has been assigned to him:

“She beckoned me to come to the divan on which she reclined, and as I approached she motioned to me to sit down beside her.” (FMM/8.)

If you were not watching Sharu’s vagina when you approached the divan in this sexual seduction scene, you were not paying attention to the fact that everyone is naked on Mars. You are still in denial.

Sharu then gives Hadron three fates to suffer: 1) the grill; 2) the torture room of the cripples; or 3) Sharu and her luxurious lifestyle. The last choice comes with the condition that he will serve Ghron and conduct similar tortures on innocent victims. He chooses the fire out of a sense of honor, not because he is not attracted to Sharu. Once again ERB has built up the reader for an expectation of sex, an expectation that is once again disappointed.

Later, Sharu comes to Hadron’s aid:

“Sharu smiled. She drew a dagger from its sheath at her side and laid it upon the floor, and from a pocket pouch attached to her harness she produced a needle, which she laid beside the dagger. ‘My heart had hoped, Hadron of Hastor, that you would decide to remain with me, but I am glad that I have not been mistaken in my estimate of your character. You will die, my warrior, but at least you will die as a brave man should and undefiled. Good-bye! I look upon you in life for the last time, but until I am gathered to my ancestors your image shall remained enshrined in my heart.’” (FMM/9.)

Hadron takes the dagger and needle and makes a cloak of invisibility which he uses to explore the palace, allowing ERB to write a couple of scenes for the X-rated imagination:

“The royal apartments seemed interminable, and though I was constantly seeking a way out of them into one of the main corridors of the palace, I was instead constantly stumbling into places where I did not care to be and where I had no business, sometimes with considerable embarrassment, as when I entered a cosy, private apartment in the women’s quarters at a moment when I was convinced they were not expecting strange gentlemen.

“I would not turn back, however, for I had no time to lose, and crossing the room I followed another short corridor only to leap from the frying-pan into the fire – I had entered the forbidden apartment of the Jeddara herself. It is a good thing for the royal lady that it was I and not Hal Osis who came thus unexpectedly upon her, for her position was most compromising, and from his harness I judged her good-looking companion was a slave.” (FMM/12.)

It doesn’t take much to imagine the first scene as dealing with lesbian sex and in the second scene, the Jeddara’s position could entail anything from doggy-style to oral sex.

26) The Martian harness crosses in the back:

As made crystal clear in two passages that Ekman quotes to make a contrary point, it is beyond all doubt that the harness crosses both in the front and the back:

“I took a firm hold of Haj Osis’s harness between his shoulders and I kept the point of the dagger pressed against the flesh of his left shoulder-blade as I followed him towards the ante-room, while those who had crowded the dais behind the throne fell back to make an aisle for us.” (FMM/12.)

Ekman uses this quote to support his idea that not only did the straps cross in the back, to wit, criss-crossed, there was an extra strap that ran horizontally between the two other straps ascending the shoulders. This is not only a tedious intrusion, but, as noted before, it also makes the harness impossible to break down easily. There is no reason to read this passage as anything other than Hadrom grabbing Haj Osis’s harness where the straps criss-crossed between his

shoulders, for if a strap was there running horizontally, as Ekman imagines it, it would have covered the shoulder blades making it impossible for Carter to dig his dagger blade into the flesh located there. It is important to read the whole passage in context to visualize it correctly.

Ekman states that “it is nowhere mentioned that any straps cross over the chest,” forgetting the quote where Cathoris attached the bauble to the strap that crossed his chest. This quote must be interpreted in light of what we absolutely know for sure: the straps crossed in the back between the shoulders. This is not in doubt, as confirmed by the next passage when Hadron tosses Tavia into his invisible ship:

“It was a difficult and risky business. I wished I might have had grappling hooks, but I had none, and so I must do the best I could, holding the cloak with one hand and assisting Tavia to the sill with the other.

“‘There is no ship,’ she said in a slightly frightened tone.

“‘There is a ship, Tavia,’ I said. ‘Think only of your confidence in me and do as I bid.’ I grasped her firmly by the harness where the straps crossed upon her back. ‘Have no fear,’ I said, and then I swung her out over the hatch and lowered her gently into the interior of the Jhama.” (FMM/12; Ekman wrongly identifies Tavia as Sanoma Tora.)

Where the straps crossed in the back was between the shoulders. This makes for a very visually interesting scene where Hadron swings Tavia into the invisible ship. I hope you enjoyed it as much as I did.

It is best to argue from what you know absolutely and then extrapolate from there. The most logical harness setup would be consistent both front and back, and with the quote about Cathoris’s strap “crossing” his chest, Ekman’s theory is at best wishful moralistic thinking.

27) ERB was kinky:

Anyone who doubts that ERB was kinky, must close his eyes before he reads the next passage:

“Here it was that Tul Axtar occasionally held unique court, surrounded solely by his women. Here they danced for him; here they disported themselves in the limpid waters of the pool for his diversion; here banquets were spread and to the strains of music high revelry persisted long into the night....

“They were coming in droves now. I believe that I have never seen so many women alone together before. As I watched for Sanoma Tora I tried to count them, but I soon gave it up as hopeless., though I estimated that fully fifteen hundred women were congregated in the great hall when at last they ceased to enter.

“They seated themselves on the benches about the room, which was filled with the babel of feminine voices. There were women of all ages and of every type, but there was none that was not beautiful. The secret agents of Tul Axtar must have combed the world for such an aggregation of loveliness as this.

“A door at one side of the throne opened and a file of warriors entered. At first I was surprised because Tavia had told me that no men other than Tul Axtar ever were permitted on this level, but presently I saw that the warriors were women dressed in the harness of men, their hair cut and their faces painted after the fashion of of the fighting men of Barsoom. After they had taken their places on either side of the throne, a courtier entered by the same door – another woman masquerading as a man.” (FMM/13.)

Thus, Tavia’s ruse on the roof entailed her disguising herself as one of Tul Axtar’s macho lesbian bodyguard warriors. None of the warriors had a penis, which allowed Hadron to do his double take, realizing that they were women. The guard on the roof knew Tavia was also a woman in a man’s harness but mistook her for a lesbian warrior. It had nothing to do with a jockstrap covering her privates. I believe it was Ekman’s prudish bias that caused him to come up with the jockstrap theory and blinded him to facts such as these.

Go back and reread that last section and imagine it portrayed on the silver screen. A room filled with over fifteen hundred beautiful naked women used for the Jed’s amusement in

riotous orgies. A full compliment of lesbian warriors all strapped out in black leather masculine trappings. Most men would not need Viagra when reading this scene, and ERB is quick to follow it up with another after Hadron finds Sanoma Tora and noticeably does not get an erection when he sees her in all of her knockout glory, naked as the moment she was hatched:

“Perhaps a hundred women had passed before the Jeddak and come down the long hall towards me when something in the carriage of one of them attracted my attention as she neared me, and an instant later I recognized Sanoma Tora. She was changed, but not greatly, and I could not understand why it was that I had not discovered her in the room previously. I had found her! After all these long months I had found her – the woman I loved. Why did my heart not thrill?

“As she passed through the doorway leading from the great hall, I followed her and along the corridor to an apartment at the far end, and when she entered, I entered behind her. I had to moved quickly, too, for she turned immediately and closed the door after her.

“We are alone in a small room, Sanoma Tora and I. In one corner were her sleeping-silks and furs; between two windows was a carved bench upon which stood those toilet articles that are essential to a woman of Barsoom.

“It was not the apartment of a Jeddara; it was little better than the cell of a slave.

“As Sanoma Tora crossed the room listlessly towards a stool which stood before the toilet bench, her back was towards me and I dropped the robe of invisibility from about me.” (FMM/13.)

Why did his heart not thrill? Why was there no “boing!” at her beauty? And didn’t we all see a similar scene in Hollow Man when Kevin Bacon spied on his co-worker as she got ready for bed? This is ultimate voyeurism as ERB well knew.

Hadron show her how his cloak works and talks her into escaping. It is here that we learn that she is a slave, and, of course, bare-ass naked:

“What a change had come over the haughty Sanoma Tora! Was this the same arrogant beauty who had refused my hand? Was this the Sanoma Tora who aspired to be a jeddara? She was humbled now – I read it in the droop of her shoulders, in the trembling of her lips, in the fear-haunted light that shone from her eyes.

“My heart was filled with compassion for her, but I was astonished and dismayed to discover that no other emotion overwhelmed me. The last time that I had seen Sanoma Tora I would have given my soul to have been able to take her into my arms....I had changed...” (FMM/13.)

It will take another few chapters for Hadron to discover that he no longer loves Sanoma Tora, but Tavia instead. They hear people approaching and Hadron dons his cloak:

“Hastily I resumed my cloak of invisibility and stepped to one side of the room as the door leading into the corridor was thrown open, revealing one of the female courtiers of Tul Axtar in gorgeous harness. The woman entered the room and stepped to one side of the door, which remained opened.

“‘The Jeddak! Tul Axtar, Jeddak of Jahar!’ she announced.

A moment later Tul Axtar entered the room, followed by a half dozen of his female courtiers. He was a gross man with repulsive features, which reflected a combination of strength and weakness, of haughty arrogance, of pride and of doubt – an innate questioning of his own ability.

“As he faced Sanoma Tora his courtiers formed behind him. They were masculine-looking women, who had evidently been selected because of this very characteristic. They were good-looking in a masculine way and their physiques suggested that they might prove a very effective bodyguard for the Jeddak.

“For several minutes Tul Axtar examined Sanoma Tora with appraising eyes. He came closer to her, and there was that in his attitude which I did not like, and when he laid a hand upon her shoulder, I could scarce restrain myself.

“‘I was not wrong,’ he said. ‘You are gorgeous. How long have you been here?’

“She shuddered but did not reply.

“‘You are from Helium?’

“No answer.

“The ships of Helium are on their way to Jahar.’ He laughed. ‘My scouts bring word that they will soon be here. They will meet with a warm welcome from the great fleet of Tul Axtar.’ He turned to his courtiers. ‘Go!’ he said, ‘and let none return until I summon her.’

“They bowed and retired, closing the door after them, and then Tul Axtar laid his hands again upon the bare flesh of Sanoma Tora’s shoulder.

“‘Come!’ he said. ‘I shall not war with all of Helium – with you I shall love – by my first ancestor, but you are worthy the love of a Jeddak.’

“He drew her towards him. My blood boiled – so hot was my anger that it boiled over, and without thought of the consequences I let the cloak fall from me.” (FMM/13.)

Here we go again with the almost rape scene, built up to a frenzy with lots of beautiful naked women and the touching of bare flesh. Did you imagine Tul Axtar getting an erection as leered for several minutes at Sanoma Tora, then leaned close to her with a hand on her naked shoulder? Was the erection the “something in his attitude” that Hadron didn’t like? If it was, then it was pressing against her belly before he turned to dismiss his lesbian bodyguard.

There is no doubt that it is pressed against her belly when he turns back and places a hand on her shoulder and pulls her towards him with his other hand. Of course, ERB only builds up the scene in order to spoil it in our faces, but that is part of the fun. But it should be clear by now that rape and copulation are not the kinds of themes of juvenile literature. They are the kinds of themes of pornography.

Hadron eventually captures Tul Axtor, but he escapes after getting Sanoma Tora to betray Hadron and Tavia. Tul Axtar lets them down in cannibal territory from an invisible ship:

“Grumbling, he opened one of the keel hatches and unceremoniously dropped me through it. Fortunately the ship lay close to the ground and I was not injured. Next he lowered Tavia to my side, and then he, himself, descended to the ground. Stooping, he cut the bonds that secured Tavia’s wrists.

“‘I shall keep the other,’ he said. ‘She pleases,’ and somehow I knew he meant Phao. ‘This one looks like a man and I swear that she would be as easy to subdue as a she banth. I know the type. I shall leave her with you.’ It was evident that he had not recognized Tavia as one of the former occupants of the women’s quarters in his palace and I was glad that he had not.” (FMM/14.)

The scene is full of sexual innuendo, but not as much as the one to come:

“As I sat there on the ground, my head bowed in misery, I felt a soft arm steal about my shoulders and a tender voice spoke close to my ear. ‘My poor Hadron!’

“That was all; but those few words embodied such a wealth of sympathy and understanding that, like some miraculous balm, they soothed the agony of my tortured heart.

“No one but Tavia could have spoken them. I turned, and taking one of her little hands in mine, I pressed it to my lips. ‘Loved friend,’ I said. ‘Thanks be to all my ancestors that it was not you.’

“I do not know what made me say that. The words seemed to speak themselves without my volition, and yet when they were spoken there came to me a sudden realization of the horror that I would have felt had it been Tavia who had betrayed me. I could not even contemplate it without an agony of pain. Impulsively I took her in my arms.

“‘Tavia,’ I cried, ‘promise me that you will never desert me. I could not live without you.’

“She put her strong young arms around my neck and clung to me. ‘Never this side of death,’ she whispered, and then she tore herself from me and I saw that she was weeping.” (FMM/14.)

There is almost a coupling in this scene as their instincts kick in and they act without knowing why, but there is also a profound sadness because the woman Hadron loves is a two timing bitch who stabbed him in the back. Anyone who has experienced a like situation knows what kind of mental anguish a person goes through who is suffering from it. Once again ERB shows his mastery, painting a sexual scene that is more about love lost than about lust.

Surely Hadron saw it this way:

“I think that Tavia was quite the most wonderful girl that I have ever known, and as I had come to know her better and see more of her, I had grown to realize that despite her attempt at mannish disguise to which she still clung, she was quite the most beautiful girl that I had ever seen. Her beauty was not like that of Sanoma Tora, but as she looked up into my face now the realization came to me quite suddenly, and for what reason I do not know, that the beauty of Tavia far transcended that of Sanoma Tora because of the beauty of the soul that, shining through her eyes, transfigured her whole countenance.” (FMM/14.)

Soon, the two stranded almost lovers are harrassed by wild cannibals:

“The three upon our trail had approached us so closely by this time that I could discern what manner of creatures they were, and I saw before me naked savages with tangled, unkempt hair, filthy bodies and degraded faces. The wild light in their eyes, their snarling lips exposing yellow fangs, their stealthy, slinking carriage gave them more the appearance of wild beasts than men.” (FMM/14.)

They take the battle to the wild men and one of them has to do a double take when he first sets his eyes on Tavia:

“At first, I think, the fellow facing Tavia did not realize that she was a woman, but he must have soon, as the scant harness of Barsoom hides little and certainly did not hide the rounded contours of Tavia’s girlish body. Perhaps, therefore, it was a surprise that was his undoing, or possibly when he discovered her sex he became over-confident, but at any rate, Tavia slipped her point into his heart just an instant before I finished my man.” (FMM/15.)

We are given two clue words in this passage: “rounded contours” and “sex”. Quite clearly ERB is pointing to the camel toe feature of Tavia’s vulva, which the cannibal noticed after his double take to his chagrin. A woman’s “sex” is an obvious euphemism for the vagina.

Later, when all appears hopeless, Tavia begs Hadron to kill her with his dagger so that the cannibals don’t eat her alive:

“Her breast was bared to receive my dagger, her face was upturned towards mine. It was still a brave face with no fear upon it, and oh, how beautiful it was.

“Impulsively, guided by a power I could not control, I bent and crushed my lips to hers. With half-closed eyes she pressed her own lips upwards more tightly against mine.” (FMM/15.)

They are, of course, saved by one of the most famous of ERB’s coincidences, the sudden presence of the invisible ship on the hilltop where they are making their last stand. Tul Axtar eventually captures Tavia and is rescued by Hadron who shoots Tul Axtar through the heart:

“Point-blank I fired at his putrid heart, and Tul Axtar, Jeddak and tyrant of Jahar, lunged forward upon the lower deck of the Jhama dead.

“Instantly I sprang to Tavia’s side and turned her over. She had been bound and gagged and, for some unaccountable reason, blindfolded as well, but she was not dead. I almost sobbed for joy when I realized that. How my fingers seemed to fumble in their haste to free her; yet it was only a matter of seconds ere it was done and I was crushing her in my arms.

“I know that my tears fell upon her upturned face as our lips were pressed together, and I am not ashamed of that, and Tavia wept too and clung to me and I could feel her dear body tremble....

“In that instant, as our hearts beat together and she drew me closer to her, a great truth dawned upon me. What a stupid fool I had been. How could I ever have thought that the sentiment that I entertained for Sanoma Tora was love? How could I ever believe that my love for Tavia had been such a weak thing as friendship? I drew her closer, if such were possible.

“‘My princess,’ I whispered.

“Upon Barsoom those two words, spoken by man to maid, have a peculiar and unalterable significance, for no man speaks thus to any woman that he does not wish for wife.

“‘No, no,’ sobbed Tavia. ‘Take me, I am yours; but I am only a slave girl. Tan Hadron of Hastor cannot mate with such....’

“I looked her in the eyes, those beautiful, fathomless wells of love and understanding. ‘I love you, Tavia,’ I said. ‘Tell me that I may have the right to call you my princess.’

“‘Even though I be a slave?’ she asked.

“‘Even though you were a thousand times less than a slave,’ I told her.

“She sighed and snuggled closer to me. ‘My chieftan,’ she whispered in a low, low voice....

“When Tavia and I could tear ourselves apart, which was not soon, I opened the lower hatch and let the corpse of Tal Axtar find its last resting-place upon the barren ground below.” (FMM/17.)

This scene is both touching and steamy. I have no doubt in my mind that they copulated before they got rid of Tul Axtar’s body. Yes, this was quite a potboiler, but ERB tops this extraordinary performance in his next Mars novel, dedicating it to his girl from Hollywood.

VIII Swords of Mars

As every fan knows, the first letter of each chapter beginning with the prologue ends up spelling out “To Florence, with all my love, Ed.” By this time, the cat was fully out of the bag. Soon, Emma would be divorced and Florence could finally move in with ERB. She had refused to move in with him until they were married, even though she was still living with Ashton and

his mistress, Ula, a competitive swimmer Ashton had brought back from Guatemala. One wonders if they all slept in the same bed. After all, Ulah appears as a slave girl in Swords of Mars. Threesomes were not uncommon in Hollywood at the time.

One also wonders how long ERB had been carrying on the affair with Florence, and whether both of her children born during this time were actually fathered by Ashton. This could have provided the motive for Ashton bringing Ula home with him. Whatever the truth may be, there is a lot of randy activity taking place in this story.

It doesn't take a genius to see Florence as Ozara and Ula as Ozara's slave girl, Ulah. Having sex slaves in Hollywood was also not uncommon at the time. Whatever the background context for Swords of Mars, it is one of the finest science fiction fantasies ever written. Its influence is profound in the history of science fiction and among some of its best practitioners, including Robert Heinlein, Arthur C. Clarke, Isaac Asimov, and Ray Bradbury.

This is the first John Carter novel since the beginning trilogy, which says a lot about ERB's state of mind. He is almost free of Emma, living at the Garden of Allah – a hotbed of Hollywood sex and scandal – and he can once again be the greatest swordsman on two planets, writing in the first person, with women crawling all over him.

So let's get to it. John Carter goes undercover as a James Bond character in Zodanga, to infiltrate the Assassins Guild. Dejah Thoris doesn't think it is a good idea:

“That evening I spent alone with Dejah Thoris; and about twenty-five zats past the eighth zode, or at midnight earth time, I changed to a plain leather harness without insignia, and prepared to leave upon my adventure.

“I wish you were not going, my prince; I have a premonition that – well – that we are both going to regret it.’

“‘The assassins must be taught a lesson,’ I replied, ‘or no one’s life will be safe upon Barsoom. By their acts, they issued a definite challenge; and that I cannot permit to go unnoticed.’

“‘I suppose not,’ she replied. ‘You won your high position here with your sword; and by your sword I suppose you must maintain it, but I wish it were otherwise.’

“‘I took her in my arms and kissed her and told her not to worry – that I would not be gone long. Then I went to the hangar on the roof.’” (SM/1.)

For the first time in the Martian novels the reader can now clearly detect some lusty wordplay with the idea of swordsmanship being an euphemism for copulation. ERB is bragging about his sexual prowess in this book, for after all, he had just bagged a girl from Hollywood, a movie star, half his age.

Likewise, Carter spends some intimate time with Dejah alone – “Love me two times, baby” – and then gets ready for his adventure. When we hear about Dejah’s bad premonition, we know it is going to come true as sure as *deja vu*.

Carter adopts the role of a panthan, a soldier of fortune on Mars, and then the fun begins. Rapas the Ulsio, or The Rat, helps him get employed by a mad scientist, Fal Silvas, and as he sets into his quarters, he hears a noise, opens his door, and a female slave runs inside his room. Remember, slave girls are totally naked.

Her hair is disheveled, which, added to her nakedness, gives her a trampy, damaged goods, kind of look. Carter asks her who she is running from:

“‘She stood there trembling and wide-eyed, staring past me at the door, like one whom terror had demented.

“‘Him,’ she whispered. ‘Who else could it be?’

“‘You mean -----?’

“‘She came close and started to speak; then she hesitated. ‘But why should I trust you? You are one of his creatures. You are all alike in this terrible place.’

“She was standing very close to me now, trembling like a leaf. ‘I cannot stand it!’ she cried. ‘I will not let him!’ And then, so quickly that I could not prevent her, she snatched the dagger from my harness and turned it upon herself.

“But there I was too quick for her, seizing her wrist before she could carry out her designs.

“She was a delicate-looking creature, but her appearance belied her strength. However, I had little difficulty in disarming her; and then I backed her toward the bench and forced her down upon it....

“I laid my hand upon her shoulder as one might who would quiet a frightened child....

“I sat down on the bench beside her and laid my hand on hers.” (SM/2.)

Again, we find ourselves in a scene with a naked woman and man in closed quarters, with enough action between them to cause their bodies to come into intimate contact several times.

The reader must be constantly reminded of this to really appreciate how ERB pulls this off.

Zanda, the slave girl, then tells Carter about Fal Silvas’s inventions, including his brain experiments, using slave girls:

“‘Tonight Fal Silvas sent for two of us, another girl and myself. He purposed using only one of us. He always examines a couple and then selects the one that he thinks is the best specimen, but his selection is not determined wholly by scientific requirements. He always selects the more attractive of the girls that are summoned.

“‘He examined us, and then finally he selected me. I was terrified. I tried to fight him off. He chased me about the room, and then he slipped and fell; and before he could regain his feet, I opened the door and escaped.’” (SM/2.)

She decides to go back to her own quarters, but Carter tries to persuade her to stay:

“She looked at me in surprise and was about to reply when suddenly she cocked her head on one side and listened. ‘Someone is coming,’ she said; ‘they are searching for me.’

“I took her by the hand and drew her toward the doorway of my sleeping apartment. ‘Come in here,’ I said. ‘Let’s see if we can’t hide you.’....

“I took her into my room and made her lie down on the little platform that serves in Barsoom as a bed. Then I threw the sleeping silks and furs over her in a jumbled heap. Only by close examination could anyone have discovered that her little form lay hidden beneath them.” (SM/2.)

ERB is up to mischief here all right. Fal Silvas visits Carter, suspicious that Zanda might be with him. We learn that Carter purposely left both of the bedroom doors and the bathroom door open so as not to arouse suspicion. They have a long chat and before Fal Silvas leaves, he stands and stares into Carter's bedroom. Carter worries that Fal Silvas has seen a movement in the silks and furs, but Fal Silvas turns and leaves instead. Carter reads for several minutes, rightly suspecting that Fal Silvas is listening on the other side of the door. Fal Silvas finally goes back to his chambers and Carter returns to his bedroom:

“Crossing the room, I entered the chamber where the girl lay and threw back the covers that concealed her. She had not moved. As she looked up at me, I placed a finger across my lips....

“There were sleeping silks and furs in the room that I had assigned to her, and I knew that she would be comfortable.” (SM/3.)

What would nary raise an eyebrow today, was totally scandalous at the time ERB wrote this book. I am talking mainly about having a strange girl in your bed, especially if she is naked. He gives us two ways to view this scene: first when he tucks her under the silks and furs, and second, when he lifts them to expose her. We find out secondarily that there is another bedroom in his quarters that also has sleeping silks and furs, thus raising the question of why Carter had decided to hide her in his own bed.

Yes, ERB was hoping we would all anticipate Carter having a slip-up and bedding Zanda for the night, but alas, ERB found his way out with the other bedroom. But don't worry, there's lots more fun to come.

The next morning ERB has arranged to pick Zanda as his personal slave and during the selection process Zanda suggests to the guard, Phystal, that something sexual had taken place between her and another guard, Hamas:

““Where were you last night, Zanda?” he demanded, as the girl approached the table.

““I was frightened and I hid,” she replied.

““Where did you hide?” demanded Phystal.

““Ask Hamas,” she replied.

“Phystal glanced at Hamas. ‘How should I know where you were?’ demanded the latter.

“Zanda elevated her arched brows. ‘Oh, I am sorry,’ she exclaimed; ‘I did not know that you cared who knew.’

“Hamas scowled angrily. ‘What do you mean by that?’ he demanded; ‘what are you driving at?’

““Oh,” she said, ‘I wouldn’t have said anything about it at all but I thought, of course, that Fal Silvas knew.’

“Phystal was eyeing Hamas suspiciously. All the slaves were looking at him, and you could almost read their thoughts in the expressions on their faces.

“Hamas was furious, Phystal suspicious; and all the time the girl stood there with the most innocent and angelic expression on her face.

““What do you mean by saying such a thing?” shouted Hamas.

““What did I say?” she asked, innocently.

““You said – you said – ’

““I just said, “ask Hamas.” Is there anything wrong in that?’

““But what do I know about it?” demanded the major domo.

“Zanda shrugged her slim shoulders. ‘I am afraid to say anything more. I do not want to get you in trouble.’

““Perhaps the less said about it, the better,” said Phystal.” (SM/3.)

This is ribald humor of the Abbot and Costello variety. Did you see those expressions on the slaves’ faces? Did you imagine what they were thinking? Zanda’s definitely the most sassy babe on Mars since Thuvia.

28) ERB had no problem with male nudity:

I now draw the reader's attention to ERB's description of Ur Jan, the head of the Zodangan Assassins Guild:

“What I saw beyond that door gave me something to think about. There was a large room in the center of which was a great table, around which were seated at least fifty men – fifty of the toughest-looking characters that I have ever seen gathered together. At the head of the table was a huge man whom I knew at once to be Ur Jan. He was a very large man, but well proportioned, and I could tell at a glance that he must be a most formidable fighter.” (SM/4.)

Perhaps my imagination goes too far, but as in the description of Xodar, I believe ERB is telling us that Ur Jan has a big penis. “Well proportioned” can mean all sorts of things, I know, but it seems to be odd in this description, and it seems to fit the same circumstances when Phaidor and Thuvia checked out Carter's and Cathoris's packages respectively. I know most male readers are reluctant to imagine another man's penis, but ERB had no problem with male nudity. He and his buddies at military academy used to look at pictures of nude men and admire their form, as people do when they buy body building magazines for the same reason today.

Carter kills an assassin, carving his vigilante trademark – an “X” – on his chest, and as he returns to his quarters, Zanda cleans his sword:

“Zanda was waiting up for me. I drew my sword and handed it to her.
 “‘Rapas?’ she asked. I had told her that Fal Silvas had commanded me to kill The Rat.
 “‘No, not Rapas,’ I replied. ‘Another of Ur Jan's men.’
 “‘That makes two,’ she said.
 “‘Yes,’ I replied, ‘but remember, you must not tell anyone that is was I who killed them.’
 “‘I shall not tell anyone, my master,’ she replied. ‘You may always trust Zanda.’
 “She cleaned the blood from the blade and then dried and polished it.

“I watched her as she worked, noticing her shapely hands and graceful fingers. I had never paid very much attention to her before. Of course, I had known that she was young and well-formed and good-looking; but suddenly I was impressed by the fact Zanda was very beautiful and that with the harness and jewels and hair-dressing of a great lady, she would have been more than noticeable in any company.” (SM/8.)

When ERB has one of his characters take a good look at a woman, the reader is supposed to follow suit. ERB is reminding the reader that Zanda is not wearing a harness and if we are truly watching her clean and dry and polish Carter’s sword – with just a hint of fellatio – we are to watch her well-formed body – read large breasts – move as she works.

She then tells him she originally came from a good Zodangan family in the lesser nobility and how she was kidnapped and sold to Fal Silvas. Believing him to be Vandor, the panthan, she tells him that she blames her fate on John Carter, Prince of Helium, and has vowed to kill him to avenge the Old Zodanga of which he was the cause of its ruin.

Meanwhile, Ur Jan has his assassins abduct Dejah Thoris, after murdering two of her naked slave girls as they slept in their silks and furs. He takes her on a spaceship manufactured by Gar Nal – a rival inventor of Fal Silvas – to the moon, Thuria. Carter returns to Fal Silvas’s lab to steal his rival spaceship, which has a mechanical brain with the ability to fly by thought waves. He arrives just in time to save Zanda from brain experimentation:

“Just then I heard a cry from the room behind me, and a woman’s voice calling, ‘Vandor! Vandor, save me!’

“Fal Silvas went livid and tried to dash into the room and close the door in my face, but I was too quick for him. I leaped to the door and pushed him aside as I stepped in.

“A terrible sight met my eyes. On marble slabs, raised about four feet from the floor, several women were securely strapped, so that they could not move a limb or raise their heads. There were four of them. Portions of the skulls

of three had been removed, but they were still conscious. I could see their frightened, horrified eyes turn toward us....

“I might have pursued him, but I was afraid that something might happen here while I was gone, and so I turned back to the girl on the fourth slab. It was Zanda.

“I stepped quickly to her side. I saw that she had not yet been subjected to Fal Silvas’s horrid operation, and drawing my dagger, I cut the bonds that held her. She slipped from the table and threw her arms about my neck. ‘Oh, Vandor, Vandor,’ she cried, ‘now we must both die. They come! I hear them.’” (SM/12.)

This is pure soft porn pulp fiction. Naked girls strapped to slabs, portions of their skulls removed while they are still conscious. Remember, when Zanda embraces Carter, she is rubbing her large naked breasts against his chest. His penis, regardless of its state of arousal, would have been pressed against her belly. Only the suspense of the scene prevents it from being erotic. But not to worry, Zanda has one more last fling at Carter before he goes on to better things with Ozara. As they depart in Fal Silvas’s spaceship, she offers herself to him:

“As we passed out into the still night, Zanda threw her arms about my neck. ‘Oh, Vandor, Vandor!’ she cried, ‘you have saved me from the clutches of that horrible creature. I am free! I am free again!’ she cried, hysterically. ‘Oh, Vandor, I am yours; I shall be your slave forever. Do with me whatever you will.’

“I could see that she was distraught and hysterical.

“‘You are excited, Zanda,’ I said, soothingly. ‘You owe me nothing. You are a free woman. You do not have to be my slave or the slave of any other.’

“‘I want to be your slave, Vandor,’ she said, and then in a very low voice, ‘I love you.’

“Gently I disengaged her arms from about my neck.” (SM/13.)

Carter tells her of his love for Dejah Thoris, putting a buzz kill on the expectation of a sexual encounter, a perfect example of the master avoiding censorship. It is clear from this scene, however, that Zanda is sexually aroused and wants to copulate with Carter. Her breasts are squashed against his chest, his penis likely squashed against her belly.

ERB has Carter escape this lusty babe by pawning her off on Helium's Jat Or:

"As she left the control room, Jat Or's eyes followed her. 'She does not seem like a slave,' he said, 'and yet she addresses you as though she were your slave.'

"'I have told her that she is not,' I said, 'but she insists upon maintaining that attitude. She was a prisoner in the house of Fal Silvas, and she was assigned to me there to be my slave. She really is the daughter of a lesser noble – a well-bred, intelligent, cultured girl.'

"'And very beautiful,' said Jat Or. 'I think she loves you, my prince.'

"'Perhaps she thinks it is love,' I said, 'but it is only gratitude. If she knew who I were, even her gratitude would be turned to hate. She has sworn to kill John Carter.'" (SM/14.)

Jat Or knows a good thing when he sees it, and what he saw was a totally naked good-looking woman with large breasts. We are reminded that she was totally naked this whole time when she dons a man's fighting harness when they land on Thuria:

"Zanda had stepped from the control room a moment before, and now she returned with the harness and weapons of a Martian warrior strapped to her slender form." (SM/15.)

Don't knock Zodangan women: they know how to take care of themselves.

29) ERB points out when genitalia could be covered:

Everyone from Barsoom is captured by the Tarids of Thuria, a people with white skin and blue hair. They have the ability to make themselves invisible through telepathic suggestion.

Carter is incarcerated in a cell with another creature from the strange moon:

"For want of a better word, I may describe the figure I saw as that of a man; but what a man!

"The creature was naked except for a short leather skirt held about its hips by a broad belt fastened by a huge golden buckle set with precious stones." (SM/17.)

The creature, Umka, is one of the most remarkable creatures ERB ever invented and I won't go into his elaborate description at this point. All I wanted to make clear was that this was the only piece of clothing Umka wore, and we are not told how short it was, so it may or may not have covered his buttocks and genitalia. There is no hint that the skirt doubled as a G-string or jockstrap. Moreover, this is a creature not indigenous to Barsoom, but one of its moons.

Umka teaches Carter how to counter the Tarid telepathy and they soon are led into the throne room, with Carter having to pretend that he cannot see the Tarids:

“Occupying the throne at the man’s side was a young and very beautiful woman. She was gazing at me dreamily through the heavy lashes of her half-closed lids. I could only assume that the woman’s attention was attracted to me because of the fact that my skin differed in color from that of my companions as, after leaving Zodanga, I had removed the disguising pigment.

“‘Splendid!’ she whispered, languidly.

“‘What is that?’ demanded the man. ‘What is splendid?’

“She looked up with a start, as one awakened from a dream. ‘Oh!’ she exclaimed nervously; ‘I said that it would be splendid if you could make them keep still; but how can you if you are invisible and inaudible to them, unless,’ she shrugged, ‘you silence them with the sword.’” (SM/18.)

Carter rallies the other Barsoomians informing them as to what is going on in their own tongue and has a hard time convincing them that they are in a throne room being judged by a full court. As he speaks, Ozara, the woman on the throne, gets the idea that Carter can really see her:

“‘I have an idea that the light-skinned man among them can see us and hear us now,’ said the girl.

“‘What makes you think so?’ demanded the man.

“‘I sense it when his eyes rest upon mine,’ she replied dreamily. ‘Then, too, when you speak, Ul Vas, his eyes travel to your face; and when I speak, they return to mine. He hears us, Ul Vas, and he sees us.’

“‘I was indeed looking at the woman as she spoke, and now I realized that I might have difficulty in carrying on my deception.’” (SM/18.)

Ul Vas asks the guard who fetched Carter if he thought Carter could see them, and the guard relates that there was no way Carter could see them by the way he acted when they came for him:

“‘I thought you were wrong,’ said Ul Vas to his jeddara; ‘you are always imagining things.’

“The girl shrugged her shapely shoulders and turned away with a bored yawn, but presently her eyes came back to me; and though I tried not to meet them squarely thereafter, I was aware during all the rest of the time that I was in the audience chamber that she was watching me.” (SM/18.)

Ozara, like Phaidor before her, loves to watch John Carter’s naked body, and very likely her focus would have been on his penis. Ozara does everything but masturbate as she dreamily contemplates him. ERB downplays this lust with humor, saying that Carter thought it was because his skin was lighter than the others. This is really unlikely, for other than Carter’s black hair, his skin is the same color as the Tarid’s.

That Ozara was lusting after Carter is made clear a few scenes later when she sends her guards to fetch him for a private meeting in her apartments. A beautiful slave girl meets the guard at the front door of Ozara’s chambers and takes custody of Carter:

“As she approached me, the soldiers relinquished their grasp upon my arms; and taking one of my hands, she led me from the apartment.

“The room into which I was now conducted, though slightly smaller, was more beautiful than the other. However, I did not immediately take note of its appointments, my attention being immediately and wholly attracted by its single occupant.

“I am not easily surprised; but in this instance I must confess that I was when I recognized the woman reclining upon a divan, and watching me intently through long lashes, as Ozara, Jeddara of the Tarids.

“The slave girl led me to the center of the room and halted. There she waited, looking questioningly at the Jeddara; while I, recalling that I was supposed

to be deaf and blind to these people, sought to focus my gaze beyond the beautiful empress whose veiled eyes seemed to read my very soul.

“‘You may retire, Ulah,’ she said presently.” (SM/19.)

Frank Franzetta does a great job capturing this scene in his Doubleday edition illustration. (See, ERBzine #0736.) Just add nipples to Ozara and remove Carter’s loincloth, and you’ve got it right. This is a classic seduction scene. We are not amiss to imagine Ozara wantonly offering her vulva to Carter as he blows his ruse by getting an erection. You don’t need a dirty mind to imagine the scene this way – how many of you turned your heads when Sharon Stone flashed her blonde vulva in Basic Instinct?

Note in the Franzetta drawing that she looking at his penis. It was not that hard for Ozara to read Carter’s soul. They are both in the mood to copulate. Watch how ERB builds the sexual tension between them:

“The slave girl bowed low and backed from the room.

“For several moments after she departed, no sound broke the silence of the room; but always I felt the eyes of Ozara upon me.

“Presently she laughed, a silvery musical laugh. ‘What is your name?’ she demanded.

“I pretended that I did not hear her, as I found occupation for my eyes in examination of the beauties of the chamber. It appeared to be the boudoir of the empress, and it made a lovely setting for her unquestionable loveliness.

“‘Listen,’ she said presently; ‘you fooled Ul Vas and Zamak and the High Priest and all the rest of them; but you did not fool me. I will admit that you have splendid control, but your eyes betrayed you. They betrayed you in the audience chamber; and they betrayed you again just now as you entered the room, just as I knew they would betray you.’” (SM/19.)

You will recall in the last book how Hadron, wearing his cloak of invisibility, accidentally wandered into the Jeddara’s bedchamber and witnessed her in hanky-panky with a male slave. Thus, we shouldn’t be shocked that Ozara has the same instincts. She knew that by

wantonly offering herself to Carter that it would give him an erection, as the scene likely has given erections to millions of male readers, especially if they are imagining it correctly. Ozara didn't have to rely solely on his eyes as she stared at him during those pregnant moments of silence.

Of course, nothing becomes of it. However, if you are in the right frame of imagination, ERB provides some more fun a few scenes later, when all of the Barsoomians except Ur Jan have broken the Tarid telepathy, and Ulah walks in with a jar concealing some hidden files so they can saw through the metal bars in the window and escape:

“The door opened, and we all turned toward it. I saw Ulah, the Jeddara's slave, bearing a large earthen jar of food. She set it down upon the floor inside the door, and stepping back into the corridor, closed and fastened the door after her.

“I walked quickly to the jar and picked it up; and as I turned back toward the others, I saw Ur Jan standing wide-eyed staring at the door.

“‘What's the matter, Ur Jan?’ I asked. ‘You look as though you had seen a ghost.’

“‘I saw her!’ he exclaimed. ‘I saw her. Ghost or no ghost, I saw her.’”
(SM/20.)

This is another scene where ERB, knowing his male audience intimately, gives them an opportunity to imagine Ur Jan getting an erection when he sees the beautiful Ulah for the first time in her blue-haired regal nakedness, bending over as she puts down the jar. Yes, ERB has just given the discerning reader a jiggle and buttocks show.

Later, while sneaking through a dim corridor, he collides with a woman:

“It was a woman. She was probably much more surprised than I, and she started to scream.

“I knew that, above all things, I must prevent her from giving an alarm; and so I seized her and clapped a hand across her mouth....

“‘Keep still, and I will not harm you,’ I whispered, and then I dragged her along the corridor to the nearest door....

“I must have unconsciously released my pressure upon the girl’s lips; for before I could prevent it, she tore my hand away and spoke.

“‘John Carter!’ she exclaimed.

“I looked down at her in surprise, and then I recognized her. It was Ulah, the slave of Ozara, the Jeddara of the Tarids.” (SM/23.)

I hope by this time you were able to visualize Carter bumping into Ulah having immediate knowledge that she was a woman from the feel of her breasts, especially if we imagine her with perky pointy breasts. He seizes her and places one hand over her mouth. It doesn’t take much imagination to visualize the location of his other hand. It would have to be wrapped around her midsection in order to facilitate dragging her down the corridor, in other words, under her breasts, with his hand perhaps cupping one.

Here is where ERB’s real world tumbles into his story. Ashton brought Ula back from Guatemala and moved her into the house he shared with Florence. Was Ula their sex slave? ERB sure seems to hint at this:

“‘You need not fear me,’ she said; ‘I will not betray you.’

“‘You are a wise girl,’ I said; ‘you have bought your life very cheaply.’

“‘It was not to save my life that I promised,’ she said. ‘I would not have betrayed you in any event.’

“‘And why?’ I asked. ‘You owe me nothing.’

“‘I love my mistress, Ozara,’ she said simply.

“‘And what has that to do with it?’ I asked.

“‘I would not harm one whom my mistress loves.’

“Of course, I knew that Ulah was romancing – letting her imagination work overtime.” (SM/23.)

This is an inside joke, for ERB knew that all of his male readers’ imaginations were working overtime after Carter entered Ozara’s boudoir. If Ulah happened to notice Carter getting an erection before she left the boudoir, then she would have naturally assumed what was only natural in the setting: Ozara and Carter had become lovers.

Ulah helps Carter find Ozara, whose prison chamber window he enters by means of a hook and rope;

“Now I saw that the room was occupied. A woman rose from her bed upon the opposite side. She was looking at me with wide, horror-struck eyes. It was Ozara. I thought she was going to scream.

“Raising a warning finger to my lips, I approached her. ‘Make no sound, Ozara,’ I whispered; ‘I have come to save you.’

“‘John Carter!’ She breathed the name in tones so low that they could not have been heard beyond the door. As she spoke, she came close and threw her arms about my neck.

“‘Come,’ I said, ‘we must get out of here at once. Do not talk; we may be overheard.’

Taking her to the window, I drew in the rope and fastened the lower end of it around her waist.

“‘I am going to lower you to the window of the room just below,’ I whispered. ‘As soon as you are safely inside, untie the rope and let it swing out for me.’

“‘She nodded, and I lowered her away.’ (SM/23.)

Yes, there was a lot of physical contact in that scene. We know that Ozara is bare-ass naked because she has just risen from her bed, and Martians take off their harnesses before they get into bed. Ozara will remain bare-ass naked for the rest of the story. This is essential to remember in the scene where they spend the night in a Masena nest high in a tree after they have escaped the Tarids:

“I immediately examined the tree, climbing to the highest branches that would support my weight. With the aid of my light, I discovered that no creature was in it, other than Ozara and myself; and high among the branches I made a happy find – an enormous nest, carefully woven and lined with soft grasses.

“I was about to call down to Ozara to come up, when I saw her already ascending just below me.

“When she saw the nest, she told me that it was probably one of those built by the Masenas for temporary use during a raid or expedition into this part of the forest. It was certainly a most providential find, as it afforded us a comfortable place in which to spend the remainder of the night.

“It was some time before we could accustom ourselves to the noises of the beasts howling beneath us, but at last we fell asleep; and when we awoke in the morning, they had departed; and the forest was quiet.” (SM/24.)

ERB is counting on his male readers romancing this scene with imaginations working overtime. Martian nights, especially on Thuria, are very cold and Ozara was very naked. How were they going to accustomize themselves while the beasts below were howling? One thing is for sure, they would have held their naked bodies close together to stay warm.

Finally, ERB allows his readers to imagine Carter and Ozara copulating in the soft grass lining of the carefully woven nest. Yes, Carter knew how to take Ozara’s mind off the howling beasts below. With one of the most beautiful naked woman in the cosmos, nature would have taken its course, as it always does in jungle love.

This isn’t against the John Carter credo. The next time we encounter a full blown John Carter story in Llana of Gathol, we will discover that Carter can easily justify kissing another woman if it is necessary to get her to help him escape. Especially if he has that woman also kiss his wife, Dejah Thoris. This woman, as we shall see, was likely Ula in another incarnation, especially if her real last name was Rojas, an obvious Hispanic name. ERB may have spent many blissful hours with Ashton watching Florence and Ula make love.

IX Synthetic Men of Mars

There is not much sexual innuendo in this story, but it is not necessary, for this is one of the greatest works of the imagination ever written. Not only is this story told in the first person by a Red Martian, Vor Daj, but his brain is taken out of his skull and placed inside that of a

hideous monster. Vor Daj's tortured mental thoughts while he is in this body are truly a triumph of getting into a character's skin.

If you ever felt like a monster, this book is for you. In fact, it contains one of the creepiest ideas in all of horror literature: an uncontrollable blob of living tissue covering and eating everything it comes into contact with as it grows and grows with nothing to stop it. It's a pity that this novel is largely forgotten, for the problem in *Vat Number 4* is surely an idea that inspired horror fiction and film from then on: the Blob, the Borg, the virus from *The Andromeda Strain*, and the British Petroleum oil leak – meet your granddaddy! And the idea of what a man will do to sacrifice for a woman is fully developed in this novel, an extraordinary work of imagination.

30) The hormads don't wear nets for clothing:

The hideous monsters, the hormads, are the creation of the mad scientist, Ras Thavas, whom we met before in *Mastermind*. When Vor Daj and Carter see them for the first time they are wearing nets around their waists:

“Unslinging nets which they wore wrapped about their waists and which I had previously thought were only articles of apparel, they dragged them around and over us in an attempt to entangle us.” (SMM/3.)

To me it is obvious that the nets were never meant to be worn as clothing since after throwing the nets, the hormads are perfectly comfortable being naked. And as Ekman suggests that Vor Daj's observation somehow supports an argument that wearing apparel was so normal on Mars that he thought nothing novel in it bears little weight in light of the fact that the

hormads are hideous monsters first and would not be expected to be like the normal races of Martians. They were not odd because they wore nets, but because they were monsters.

ERB saves room for a little ribald humor when he has a couple of guards comment on Janai, the female interest in the story:

“As I approached her, with the intention of entering into conversation with her, the officer who had questioned us in the guardroom entered the compound with two other officers and several hormads. They gathered us together, and the two officers accompanying the officer of the guard looked us over. ‘Not a bad lot,’ said one.

“The other shrugged. ‘The jeds will take the best of them, and Ras Thavas will grumble about the material he is getting. He always does.’

“‘Our orders were to bring the prisoners,’ replied one of the others.

“‘I should like to keep the girl,’ said the officer of the guard.

“‘Who wouldn’t?’ demanded the other with a laugh. ‘If she had the face of an ulsio you might get her; but the good looking ones go to the jeds, and she is more than good looking.’

Janai was standing next to me, and I could almost feel her shudder. Moved by a sudden impulse, I pressed her hand; and for an instant she clung to mine, instinctively groping for protection; then she dropped it and flushed.

“‘I wish I might help you,’ I said.

“‘You are kind. I understand, but no one can help. You are only better off in that you are a man. The worst that they will do to you is kill you.’” (SMM/5.)

A little touchy-feely with sudden impulses, clinging, and instinctive groping, and just a hint of violent rape. Plus we have learned that Janai is better than good looking.

Vor Daj is separated from Janai, and hopes to rescue her by the ruse of taking on the body of a hormad. Ras Thavas transfers his brain into the body once owned by Tor-dur-bar – a sarcastic wise-cracking hormad – and penetrates the palace where Janai is likely located:

“One day, as I came to the end of a corridor, a hormad stepped from the doorway and confronted me. ‘What are you doing here?’ he demanded. ‘Don’t you know that these are the quarters of the women and that no one is allowed here except those who guard them?’

“‘You are one of the guards?’ I asked.

“‘Yes; now be on your way, and don’t come back here again.’

“‘It must be a very important post, guarding the women,’ I said.

“‘He swelled perceptibly. ‘It is, indeed. Only the most trustworthy warriors are chosen.’

“‘Are the women very beautiful?’ I asked.

“‘Very,’ he said.

“‘I certainly envy you. I wish that I might be a guard here, too. It would make me happy to see these beautiful women. I have never seen one. Just to get a glimpse of them would be wonderful.’

“‘Well,’ he said, ‘perhaps it would do no harm to let you have a little glimpse. You seem to be a very intelligent fellow, what is your name?’

“‘I am Tor-dur-bar,’ I said. ‘I am in the guard of the Third Jed.’

“‘You are Tor-dur-bar, the strongest man in Morbus?’ he demanded.

“‘Yes, I am he.’

“‘I have heard of you. Every one is talking about you, and how you threw a hormad up against the ceiling of the council chamber so hard that you killed him. I shall be very glad to let you have a look at the women, but don’t tell anybody that I did so.’

“‘Of course not,’ I assured him.

“‘He stepped to the door at the end of the corridor and swung it open. Beyond was a large chamber in which were several women and a number of the sexless hormads who were evidently their servants.

“‘You may step in,’ said the guard; ‘they will think you are another guard.’

“‘I entered the room and looked quickly about, and as I did so my heart leaped in my throat, for there, at the far end of the room, was Janai. Forgetful of everything else, I started to cross toward her. I forgot the guard. I forgot that I was a hideous monster. I forgot everything but that here was the woman I loved and here was I. The guard overtook me and laid a hand upon my shoulder.

“‘Hey, where are you going?’ he demanded.

“‘Then I came to myself. ‘I wanted to get a closer look at them,’ I said. ‘I wanted to see what it was that the jeds saw in women.’

“‘Well, you have seen enough. I don’t see what they see in them, myself. Come now, you must get out.’

“‘As he spoke the door by which we had entered swung open again, and the Third Jed entered. The guard shrivelled in terror. ‘Quick!’ he gasped. ‘Mingle with the servants. Pretend you are one of them. Perhaps he will not notice you.’

“‘I crossed quickly toward Janai and knelt before her. ‘What do you want?’ she demanded. ‘What are you doing here, hormad? You are not one of our servants.’

“‘I have a message for you,’ I whispered. I touched her with my hand. I could not help it. I could scarcely resist the tremendous urge I felt to take her in my arms. She shrank from me, an expression of loathing and disgust upon her face.” (SMM/10.)

The master has never been better. First he gives us a peep show into the women’s quarters. We know that they are all naked and beautiful. There is the joke about not knowing what the jeds see in the women after we have looked at them. Where did Tor-dur-bar touch Janai when he couldn’t help it – when he felt like making mad love to her on the spot? ERB doesn’t say, but she shrank from him.

There is some mental horror as Tor-dur-bar worries about his real body being destroyed, and some weird humor over the idea of Tor-dur-bar becoming jealous of his real body. Later, savages attack Tor-dur-bar and his party while they paddle a canoe on a lake:

“They were a savage lot; and as they came closer, I saw that they were stark naked, their bushy hair standing out in all directions, their faces and bodies painted them more hideous even as Nature had intended them to be.” (SMM/19.)

ERB uses “stark naked” in this passage just in case “entirely naked” didn’t have you convinced that Martians wear no clothing, for they have no body shame. Finally, we meet the Goolians and the sly fun ERB has with them:

“That they were some species of human being was apparent, but there were variations which rendered them unlike any other animal on Mars. They had long, powerful legs, the knees of which were always fixed except immediately after the take-off of their prodigious leaps, and they had long, powerful tails; otherwise, they seemed quite human in conformation. As they came closer, I noted that they were entirely naked except for a simple harness which supported a short sword on one side and a dagger on the other....

“The fellow shook his head. ‘You will never leave Gooli,’ he said. He was examining me closely. ‘What are you?’ he asked.

“I am a man,’ I said, stretching the point a little.

“He shook his head. ‘And what is that?’ He pointed at Janai.

“‘A woman,’ I replied.

“Again he shook his head.

“‘She is only half a woman,’ he said. ‘She has no way of rearing her young or keeping them warm. If she had any, they would die as soon as they were hatched.’

“Well, that was a subject I saw no reason for going into, and so I kept silent. Janai seemed slightly amused, for if she were nothing else she was extremely feminine.

“‘What do you intend to do with us?’ I demanded.

“‘We shall take you to the Jed, and he will decide. Perhaps he will let you live and work; perhaps he will destroy you. You are very ugly, but you look strong; you should be a good worker. The woman appears useless, if she can be called a woman.’” (SMM/20.)

I am not sure what ERB was going through in his personal life when he wrote this story, but if any of it is biographical, then perhaps he was fearing growing old and losing everything. He hadn’t moved to Hawaii yet. He may have been going through some kind of Jeckyl and Hyde thing, perfectly reflected in the tragic Tor-dur-bar. In his next novel, he is the old swashbuckler again, but this time, the female interests are his granddaughter, Llana of Gathol, and, of course, the ever randy, Rojas.

X

Llana of Gathol

Llana is, of course, Tara of Helium’s and Gahan of Gathol’s daughter, to wit, John Carter’s granddaughter. She could have been patterned after ERB’s real granddaughter, or more likely, since he wrote this book while in Hawaii, his stepdaughter, Carol Lee Dearholt. ERB even adopted her as his own daughter. When he first describes Llana during a game of Jetan – Martian chess – it is clear that she is a real heart stopper:

“I opened the leather pocket pouch such as all Martians carry, and took out a tiny, folding Jetan board with all the pieces – a present from Dejah Thoris, my incomparable mate. Pan Dan Chee was intrigued by it, and it is a marvelously

beautiful piece of work. The greatest artist in Helium had designed the pieces, which had been carved under his guidance by two of our greatest sculptors.

“Each of the pieces, such as Warriors, Padwars, Dwars, Panthans, and Chiefs, were carved in the likeness of well-known Martian fighting men; and one of the Princesses was a beautifully executed miniature carving of Tara of Helium, and the other Princess, Llana of Gathol.

“I am inordinately proud of this Jetan set; and because the figures are so tiny, I always carry a small but powerful reading glass, not alone that I may enjoy them but that others may. I offered it now to Pan Dan Chee, who examined the figures minutely.

“‘Extraordinary,’ he said. ‘I have never seen anything more beautiful.’ He had examined one figure much longer than he had the others, and he held it in his hand now as loath to relinquish it. ‘What an exquisite imagination the artist must have had who created this figure, for he could have had no model for such gorgeous beauty; since nothing like it exists on Barsoom.’

“‘Everyone of those figures was carved from life,’ I told him.

“‘Perhaps the others,’ he said, ‘but not this one. No such beautiful woman ever lived.’

“‘Which one is it?’ I asked, and he handed it to me. ‘This,’ I said, ‘is Llana of Gathol, the daughter of Tara of Helium, who is my daughter. She really lives, and this is a most excellent likeness of her. Of course it cannot do her justice since it cannot reflect her animation nor the charm of her personality.’

“He took the little figurine back and held it for a long time under the glass; then he replaced it in the box. ‘Shall we play?’ I asked.

“He shook his head. ‘It would be sacrilege,’ he said, ‘to play at a game with the figure of a goddess.’” (LG/I-6.)

ERB is informing the reader that Llana is the Marilyn Monroe of Barsoom. Did you see those large breasts and bulging nipples under the reading glass. I sure did. Did you feel her countours with your fingers as you ran them over the figurine? You are a good reader if you did.

As fate would have it, Llana of Gathol is hidden nearby and she joins the men in one adventure after another. It takes a while for us to learn that when they first discovered her, she was totally naked. We are given a hint of this when Llana tells Carter how she was kidnapped by Hin Abtol and how she had sabotaged his ship:

“Well, do something about it!’ he snapped. ‘You know all about this ship.’

“I should think that a man who is thinking of conquering all of Barsoom ought to be able to fly a ship without the help of a woman.’

“He flushed at that, and then he drew his sword. ‘You will tell us what is wrong,’ he growled, ‘or I’ll split you open from your crown to your belly.’ (LG/1-11.)

I wanted to visualize that scene with Llana being bare naked in the control room, imagining the blade cleaving her from her crown to her belly, and I was not disappointed when I learned that she had been. This discovery comes while Carter, Pan Dan Chee, and Llana are leaving the ancient city of the dead:

“‘There will be hills,’ I told them. ‘There will be deep little ravines where moisture lingers and things grow which we can eat; but there may be green men, and there will certainly be banths and other beasts of prey. Are you afraid, Pan Dan Chee?’

“‘Yes,’ he said, ‘but only for Llana of Gathol. She is a woman – it is no adventure for a woman. Perhaps she could not survive it.’

“Llana of Gathol laughed. ‘You do not know the women of Helium,’ she said, ‘and still less one in whose veins flows the blood of Dejah Thoris and John Carter. Perhaps you will learn before we have reached Gathol.’ She stooped and stripped the harness and weapons of a dead Panar from his corpse and buckled them on herself. The act was more eloquent than words.” (LG/1-13.)

We are not told that she took anything off before she put on the dead Panar’s harness and weapons, thus she must have been naked prior to that. Just prior to this scene, Llana comes into close physical contact with Carter in an innocent manner:

“Llana of Gathol pressed close to me and seized my arm. ‘It is horrible!’ she whispered. ‘Look! Look at the others!’” LG/I-12.)

I point this out now for later Carter and Llana will have to stay warm vis-a-vis Carter and Ozara in the Masena nest. Remember, we are thinking of her as the Marilyn Monroe of

Barsoom. Anyway, the three of them are captured by the Black Pirates and Llana is taken away to be a concubine for a rich noble:

“One of the nobles immediately took a fancy to Llana and made an offer for her. They haggled over the price for some time, but in the end the noble got her.

“Pan Dan Chee and I were grief-stricken as they led Llana of Gathol away, for we knew that we should never see her again. Although her father is Jed of Gathol, in her veins flows the blood of Helium; and the women of Helium know how to act when an unkind Providence reserves for them the fate for which we knew Llana of Gathol was intended.” (LG/II-6.)

We get to see Llana later in the story seated in the jeddak’s box at the Games, but ERB leaves it in the reader’s mind whether she was forced to engage in any sex bondage:

“‘Have you seen Llana of Gathol?’ I asked him. ‘She was in Nastor’s loge at the Games; so I presume she was purchased by him.’

“‘Yes, but I have not seen her,’ replied Pan Dan Chee, ‘however, I have heard gossip in the slaves’ quarters; and I am much worried by what is being whispered about the palace.’

“‘What have you heard? I felt that she was in danger when I saw in Nastor’s loge. She is too beautiful to be safe.’

“‘She was safe enough at first,’ said Pan Dan Chee, ‘as she was originally purchased by Nastor’s principal wife. Everything was comparatively well for her until Nastor got a good look at her at the Games; then he tried to buy her from his wife. But she, Van-tija, refused to sell. Nastor was furious, and told Van-tija that he would take Llana anyway; so Van-tija has locked her in an apartment at the top of the tower of her own part of the palace, and has placed her personal guards at the only entrance. There is the tower there,’ he said, pointing; ‘perhaps Llana of Gathol is looking down at us now.’” (LG/II-11.)

Hmmm, did you catch that? How could Llana have been originally purchased by Nastor’s wife when we witnessed another nobleman buying her in front of Carter? Was he a proxy buyer, or did he have his way with her and then sell her to Nastor’s wife? Llana will suffer the same fate in Okar and in Invak. Like Thuvia before her, everyone wants to copulate with her.

But back to the story: Carter steals a flier and steers it to the window where he believes

Llana is kept:

“As I drew slowly closer to the windows of Llana’s apartment, I heard a woman’s muffled scream and a man’s voice raised in anger. A moment later the prow of my ship touched the wall just below the window; and, seizing the bow line, I leaped across the sill into the chamber, Myr-lo’s sword in my hand.

“Across the room, a man was forcing Llana of Gathol back upon a couch. She was striking at him, and he was cursing her.” (LG/II-13.)

Carter rescues her just before she is raped, but we are never told if this was the first time that she had been forced back on the couch by a Black Pirate. Did you imagine the pirate with a large erect black penis? ERB was writing for you, if you did. Of course, they escape from the Black Pirates only to fall into the hands of the Yellow Martians. When they escape this time in an amusing scene where Carter crashes his flier through a dome that covers a hot bed city, they are left out in the freezing cold of the Martian night without any means of warmth:

“We both huddled close on the deck of the little cockpit – and hoped.

“The flier shuddered to the terrible impact; broken glass showered in every direction – and then we were out in cold, clear air of the Arctic.

“I levelled off then, and headed for Gathol at full speed; there was a danger of our freezing to death if we didn’t get into a warmer climate soon, for we had no furs.” (LG/III-13.)

Remember, Llana had just been rescued from being the plaything of the Yellow Martians and there is only way they could have stayed warm in the amount of time it would have taken to get to warmer climes. Again we must imagine Carter and his granddaughter in close physical nonsexual contact. Nothing going on, but it sure is fun to see him hugging the Marilyn Monroe of Mars to stay warm.

Llana really gets around in these adventures and things come to a ripe sexual boil in the last story, “The Invisible Men of Mars,” where Llana takes backstage to the beautiful lesbian, Rojas. There are delightful scenes of invisibility and ERB works his mischief wonderfully in this satirical story. The lead female squeeze is Rojas, a beautiful member of the Invak nobility, who takes it upon herself to rescue Carter from his captivity. They first meet when Carter is chained to a tree in one of the city’s plazas. All of the people of Invak are invisible to Carter and to each other when they are not under visibility lamps:

“Once a delicate perfume stopped near me, and a sweet voice said, ‘The poor man, and he is so handsome!’

“‘Don’t be a fool, Rojas,’ growled a masculine voice. ‘He is an enemy, and anyway he is not very good-looking.’

“‘I think he is very good-looking,’ insisted the sweet voice, ‘and how do you know he is an enemy?’” (LG/4-3.)

Motus, the masculine voice, gets jealous and Carter challenges him to a duel. Motus responds by kicking Carter in the testicles, who never saw it coming. Carter reaches out blindly, feels Motus’s harness, and punches him so hard he knocks him out for hours. Inside the corridor-streets of Invak, visibility lights cancel out a person’s invisibility, and as Rojas enters a corridor, Carter checks her out:

“‘He can lie there until he rots, for all I care,’ replied the voice as it trailed away. Almost immediately, I saw the slim figure of a girl materialize in the entrance to one of the streets. I could tell from her back that she was angry, and if her back were any criterion she was a beautiful girl – anyway, she had a beautiful voice and a good heart. Perhaps these Invaks weren’t such bad people after all.” (LG/4-3.)

Carter gets a chance to see Rojas later when he is taken into the throne room of Ptantus, the Jeddak of Invak. We are not told until later that she is beautiful, but she sticks up for Carter, whom she believes is Dotar Sojat, the Sultan of Swat (more penis innuendo).

Carter is returned to his tree and Rojas comes to him as a very sweet seductress. In one of the most explicit scenes ERB ever wrote, an invisible Rojas makes love to Carter while he's chained to a tree, with Ptor Fak watching on, at least for a time:

“Presently I felt a soft hand upon my arm, and then that same sweet voice that I had heard before said, ‘It is Rojas.’

“‘I am glad that you came,’ I said. ‘I wished an opportunity to thank you for the testimony you gave in my behalf before Ptantus today.’

“‘I am afraid it didn’t do you much good,’ she replied. ‘Ptantus doesn’t like me.’

“‘Why should he dislike you?’ I asked.

“‘Pnoxus wanted me as his mate and I refused him; so, though Ptantus doesn’t like Pnoxus, his pride was hurt; and he has been venting his spleen on my family ever since.’ She moved closer to me, I could feel the warmth of her arm against mine as she leaned against me. ‘Dotar Sojat,’ she said, ‘I wish that you were an Invak so that you might remain here forever in safety.’

“‘That is very sweet of you, Rojas,’ I said, ‘but I am afraid that Fate has ordained it otherwise.’

“‘The soft arm stole up around my shoulders. The delicate perfume which had first announced her presence to me that afternoon, filled my nostrils and I could feel her warm breath upon my cheek. ‘Would you like to stay here, Dotar Sojat,’ she paused, ‘–with me?’

“‘The situation was becoming embarrassing. Even Ptor Fak was embarrassed and there was no soft invisible arms about his neck. I knew that he was embarrassed because he had moved away from us the full length of his chain. Of course, he couldn’t see Rojas any more than I could, but he must have heard her words; and being a gentleman, he had removed himself as far as possible; and now he sat there with his back toward us. Being made love to by a beautiful girl in a moonlit garden may be romantic, but if the girl is wholly invisible it is like being made love to by a ghost; though I can assure you that Rojas didn’t feel like a ghost at all.

“‘You have not answered me, Dotar Sojat,’ she said.

“‘I have never loved but one woman – my incomparable Dejah Thoris; nor do I, like some men, run around pretending love for other women. So, as you say

in America, I was on the spot. They may say that all is fair in love and war; and as far as I was concerned I, personally, was definitely at war with Invak. Here was an enemy girl whose loyalty I could win or whose bitter hatred I could incur by my reply. Had I only myself to consider I should not have hesitated; but the fate of Llana of Gathol outweighed all other considerations, and so I temporized.

“‘No matter how much I should like to be with you always, Rojas,’ I said, ‘I know that is impossible. I shall be here only subject to the whims of your jeddak and then death will separate us forever.’

“‘Oh, no, Dotar Sojat,’ she cried, drawing my cheek close to hers, ‘you must not die – for I love you.’

“‘But Rojas,’ I expostulated, ‘how can you love a man whom you have known for only a few hours and seen but for a few minutes?’

“‘I knew that I loved you the moment I set eyes upon you,’ she replied, ‘and I’ve seen you for a great many more than a few minutes. I have been almost constantly in the courtyard since I first saw you, watching you. I know every changing expression on your face. I have seen the light of anger, and of humor, and of friendship in your eyes. Had I known you all my life I could not know you better. Kiss me, Dotar Sojat,’ she concluded. And then I did something for which I shall probably always be ashamed. I took Rojas in my arms and kissed her.

“‘Did you ever hold a ghost in your arms and kiss her? It humiliates me to admit that it was not an unpleasant experience. But Rojas clung to me so tightly and for so long that I was covered with confusion and embarrassment.

“‘Oh, that we could be always thus,’ sighed Rojas.

“‘Personally I thought that however pleasant, it might be a little inconvenient. However, I said, ‘Perhaps you will come often again, Rojas, before I die.’” (LG/4-6.)

If you didn’t picture an act of copulation with an invisible girl you lack imagination. For all of his embarrassment, Carter has just cheated on his wife with Rojas. Regardless if you only imagined a kiss, this is the first time since Carter spent the night in the Masena nest with Ozara, that ERB has allowed the reader to believe that Carter is having sex.

Surely you got the joke at the end about Rojas being multiorgasmic: “Perhaps you will come often again, Rojas.” “Come often” is pretty explicit. I mean, he could have just said, “I hope you come again,” but “come often again” adds one more word to the count – kaching! – as well as opens the door for the dirty joke. And, finally, for his last hee-haw, she must have been

multiorgasmic since Carter was “covered” with confusion and embarrassment. That’s really laying it on pretty thick, wouldn’t you say?

Later, a friendly guard, Kantus, shares to fate of Llana of Gathol with Carter:

“‘It would relieve my mind if you could tell me what has become of the girl who was captured at the same time that I was.’

“‘She is confined in the quarters of the female slaves. It’s over on that side of the city beyond the palace,’ and he nodded in that direction.

“‘What do you think is going to happen to her?’ I asked.

“‘Ptantus and Pnoxus are quarrelling about her,’ he replied; ‘they are always quarrelling about something; they hate each other. Because Pnoxus wants her Ptantus doesn’t want him to have her; and so, for the time being at least, she is safe.’” (LG/IV-5)

Oh, what a relief! Then Rojas, jealous of Llana, gets Llana into hot water because she mistakenly believes that Carter is in a sexual relationship with her – for what reasons, the reader is free to imagine. Kandus tells him that Llana will be given to Motus after he kills Carter in a duel to the death:

“‘Ptantus has given her to Motus,’ he replied; ‘it was all done very suddenly. Why, no one seems to know, because Ptantus hasn’t any particular love for Motus.’

“‘If Kandus didn’t know why, I thought that I did. I saw Rojas’s hand and a green-eyed devil in it – jealousy is a heartless monster.’” (LG/IV-7.)

Rojas repents when she learns that Llana is actually Carter’s granddaughter and comes to Carter in another scene where it can be assumed that they copulate:

“‘I was sitting dejectedly thinking of the fate that was so soon to overtake Llana of Gathol. I knew that she would destroy herself, and I was helpless to avert the tragedy. And, while I was thus sunk in the depths of despair, a hand was placed on mine. A soft hand; and a voice said, ‘Why didn’t you tell me?’”

“‘You didn’t give me a chance,’ I said; ‘you just ran out on me without giving me a chance to explain.’

“‘I am sorry,’ said the voice, ‘and I am sorry for the harm I have done Llana of Gathol; and now I have condemned you to death.’

“‘What do you mean?’ I asked.

“‘Ptantus has commanded Motus to fight you and kill you.’

“I threw my arms around Rojas and kissed her. I couldn’t help it, I was so happy. ‘Good!’ I exclaimed. ‘Though neither of us realized it at the time, you have done me a great favor.’” (LG/IV-8.)

Did you notice that Carter no longer needs a justification in order to kiss Rojas? And no wonder. We are finally given a description of her so that we can imagine her correctly in her full visible form when she meets Dejah Thoris for the first time:

“I heard many comments concerning me. One woman said, ‘He does not look like a Barsoomian at all.’

“‘He is very handsome,’ said a sweet voice, which I immediately recognized; and for the second time I looked Rojas in the face. As our eyes met I could see her tremble. She was a beautiful girl, by far the most beautiful of all the women in the room, I am sure.” (LG/IV-9.)

Carter, Ptor Fak, Llana, and Rojas all escape in a flier and there are amusing scenes as each one of them becomes visible depending on what time they took their invisibility pills. Eventually, they arrive in Helium.

31) ERB was into lipstick lesbians:

It isn’t just the modern male that is turned on by lipstick lesbians. As we saw in Chessmen, ERB was not shy suggesting that Tara and Uthia may have had a lesbian relationship, and in Fighting Man, ERB’s love of masculine women led him to suggest lesbian acts when Hadron walked in on some women in their quarters while wearing his cloak of invisibility. In our final quote from Llana, I direct the reader’s attention to the scene where Rojas is introduced to Dejah Thoris after being rescued from Invak:

“Ptor Fak, Llana, and Rojas were behind me when I took Dejah Thoris in my arms; then I turned and presented Rojas and Ptor Fak to her.

“‘Had it not been for Rojas,’ I told Dejah Thoris, ‘none of us would have been here,’ and then I told her very briefly of our capture and incarceration in Invak.

“I watched Rojas very closely as Dejah Thoris took both her hands in hers and kissed her on the forehead; and then, to my surprise, Rojas threw her arms about her and kissed her squarely on the mouth; the girl was absolutely bewildering.” (LG/4-13.)

There is great innuendo going on here, especially if we remember that Ashton brought Ula to live with him and Florence in their Hollywood home. Carter is doing the same, bringing Rojas home to Dejah Thoris. Is it possible for us to imagine a menage a trois? I did.

XI John Carter of Mars

We bring this work to a close with the last book in the series. I have mentioned before that I don’t believe ERB wrote the first story, “John Carter and the Giant of Mars.” He certainly wrote the second story, “Skeleton Men of Jupiter.” There is little if none sexual innuendo in this story and I note it only because Ekman mentions it as evidence that some people covered their genitalia, as the people from Jupiter:

“They wore no clothing other than a G-string. Their harness was quite similar to that which we Barsoomians wear, which is not at all remarkable, since it was designed to serve the same purpose – supporting a sword, a dagger, and a pocket pouch.” (JCM/2-1.)

First, the people from Jupiter are not Barsoomians, and ERB makes sure the reader understands this. Unlike naked Barsoomians, the people from Jupiter cover their genitalia. ERB never says that they are naked.

Second, ERB makes it once again clear in this last John Carter story that the purpose of the harness is not to conceal the genitalia, but to support a sword, dagger, and pocket pouch.

There was no major difference between a harness on Jupiter and one on Mars. Neither the harness of Jupiter or Mars covered the genitalia, made finally clear by the fact that the people from Jupiter wear G-strings under their harnesses.

In the light of the full context and the boring tedious detail we have gone into, how can there be any doubt that reading this series in the day was like watching a porn video today? If anything, ERB was the King of Pulp Fiction.