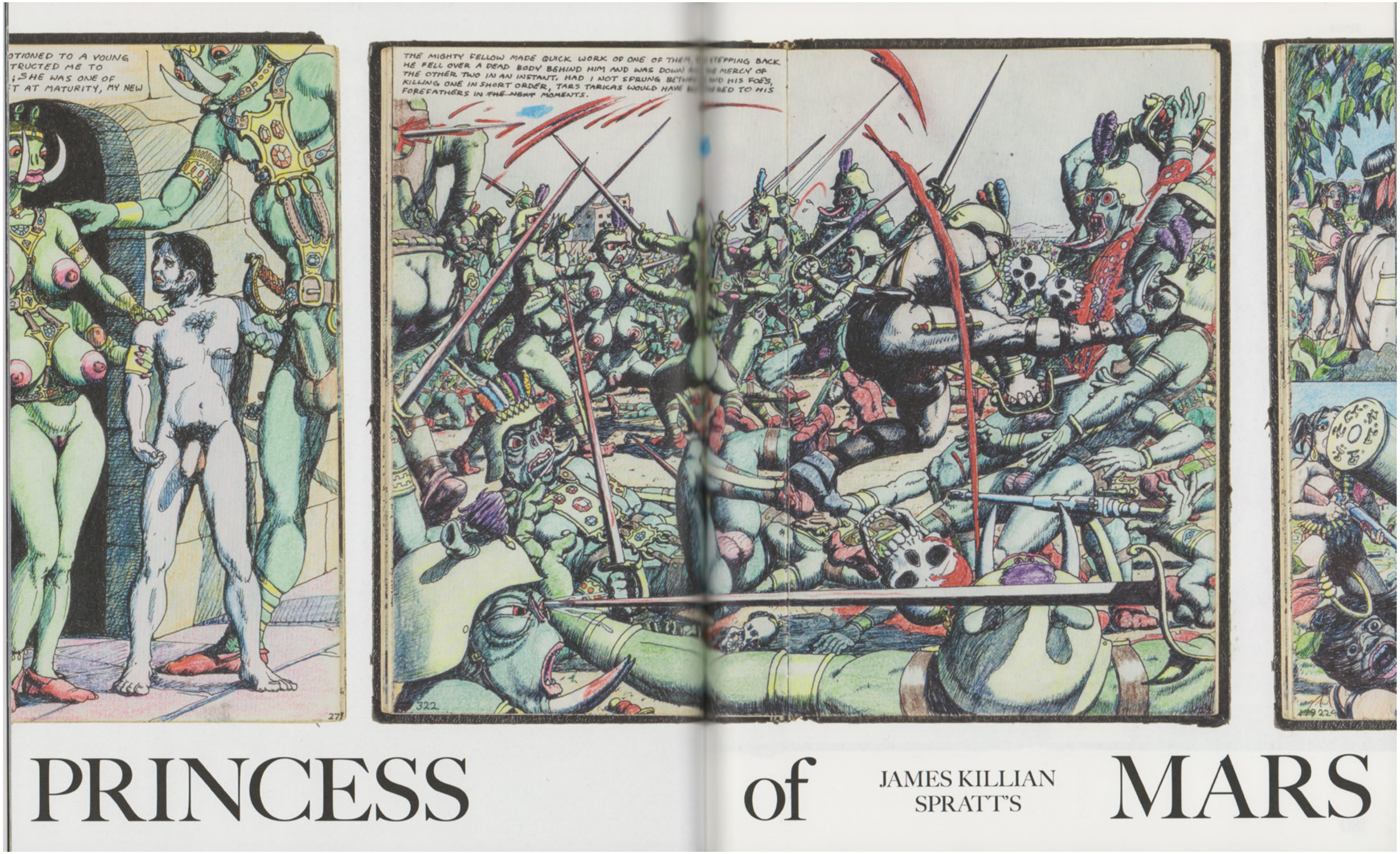
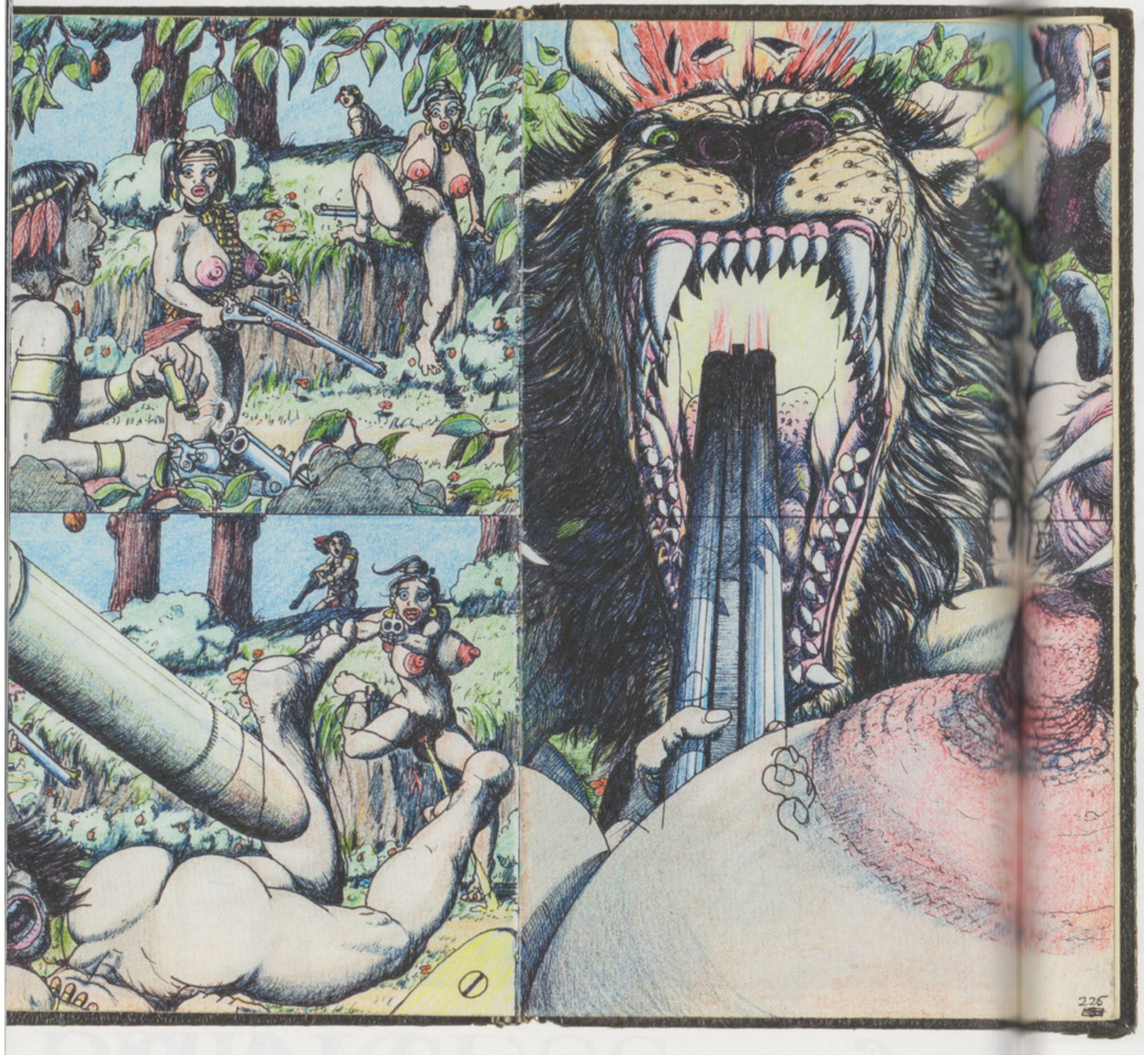
BLAU International
Dunham, Carroll; Nadel, Dan: *Princess of Mars*
Spring/Summer 2022

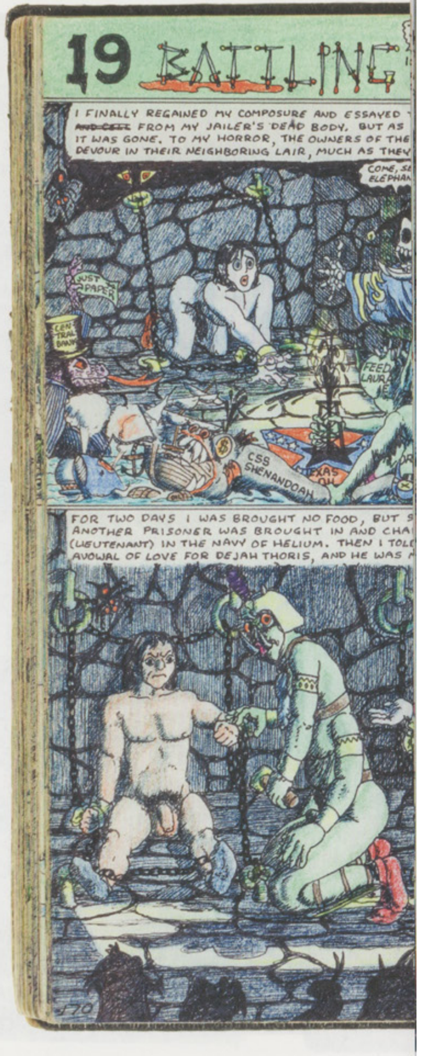

OTIONED TO A YOUNG
TRUCTED ME TO
; SHE WAS ONE OF
T AT MATURITY, MY NEW
271
THE MIGHTY FELLOW MADE QUICK WORK OF ONE OF THEM, STEPPING BACK HE FELL OVER A DEAD BODY BEHIND HIM AND WAS DOWN THE MERCY OF THE OTHER TWO IN AN INSTANT. HAD I NOT SPRUNG BET AND HIS FOES, KILLING ONE IN SHORT ORDER, TARS TARKAS WOULD HAVE ED TO HIS FOREFATHERS IN ~~THE NEXT~~ MOMENTS.
322
224

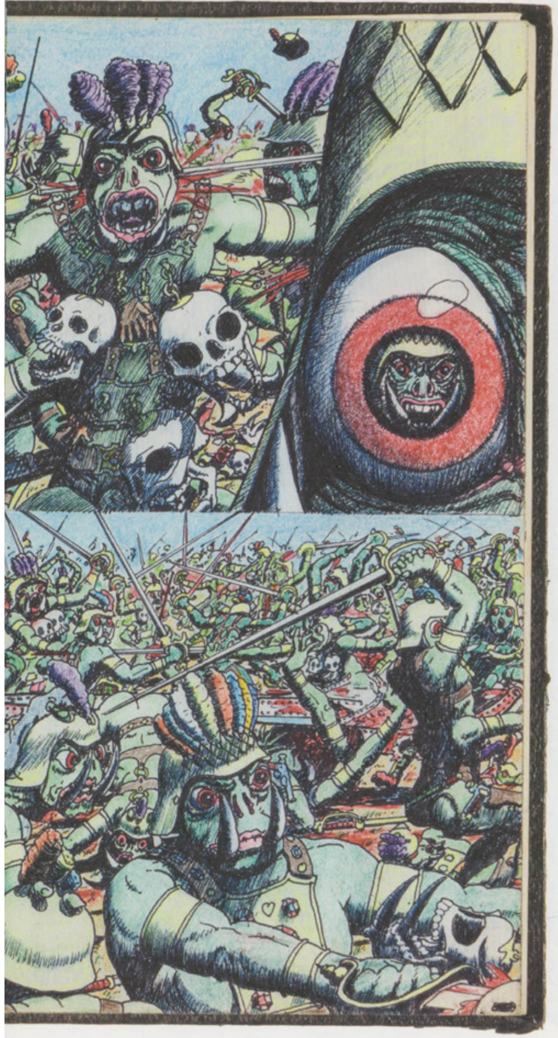
PRINCESS of MARS

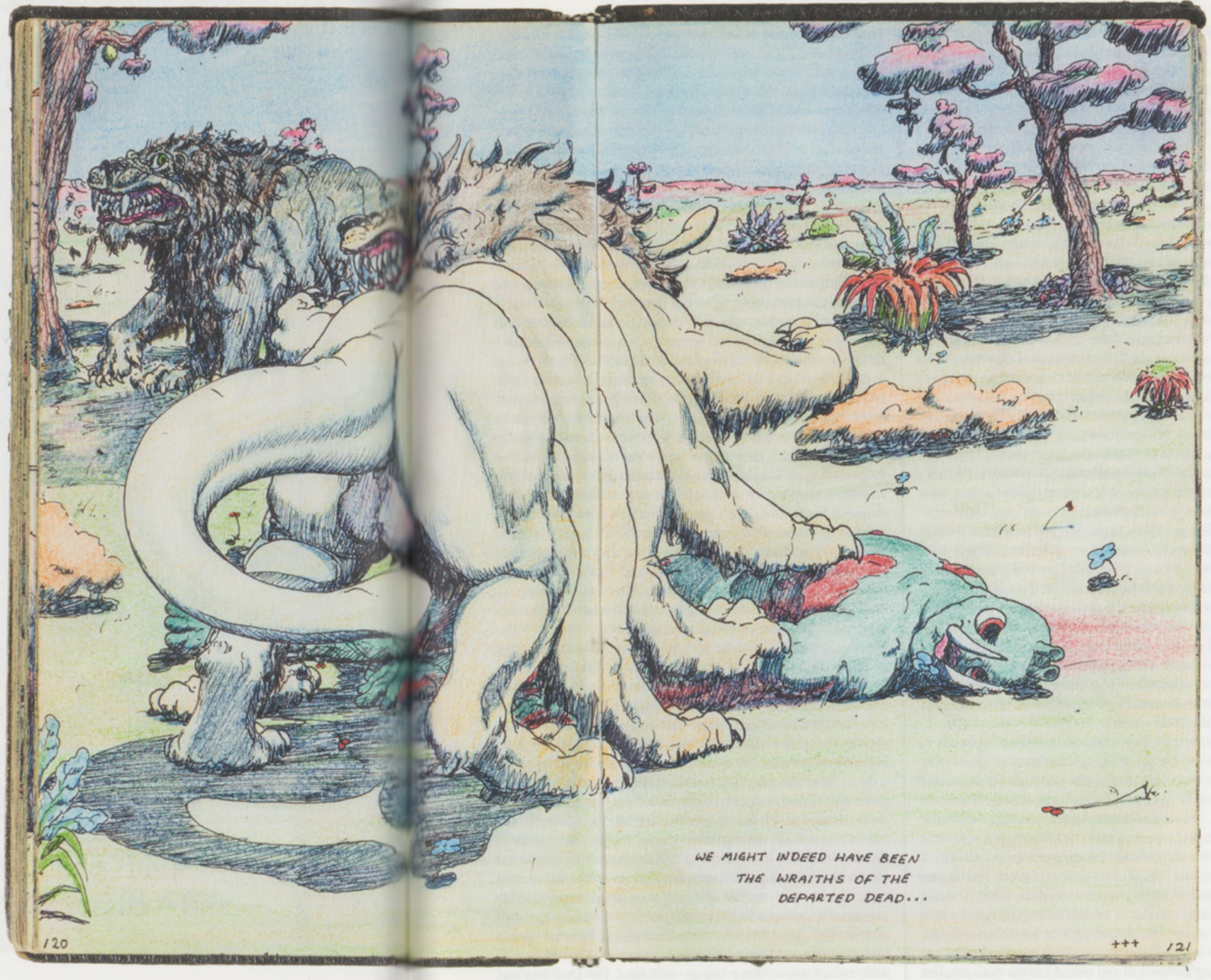
JAMES KILLIAN
SPRATT'S

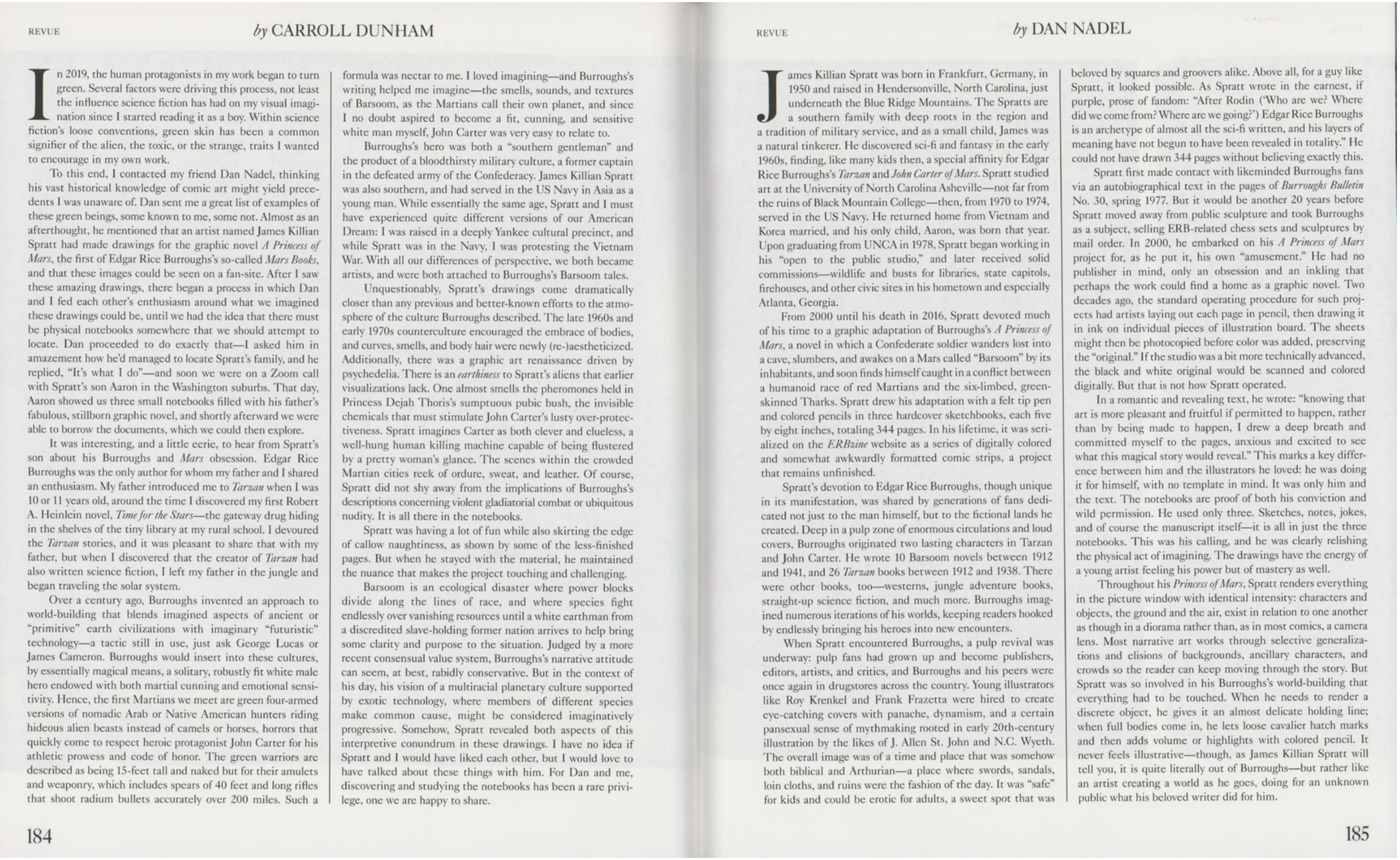


From 2000 to his death in 2016, JAMES KILLIAN SPRATT dedicated himself to drawing a graphic adaption of Edgar Rice Burroughs's pulp classic *A Princess of Mars.* As yet unpublished, and as lewd and camp as the original, Spratt's version is among the greatest pieces of fan art ever created. Fans of the fan, painter *Carroll Dunham* and art historian *Dan Nadel* loaned the artist's original notebooks from his son to curate—and comment upon—this first printed portal into Spratt's high-strung and well-hung metaverse


19 BATTLING
I FINALLY REGAINED MY COMPOSURE AND ESSAYED
~~AND CELL~~ FROM MY JAILER'S DEAD BODY. BUT AS
IT WAS GONE. TO MY HORROR, THE OWNERS OF THE
DEVOUR IN THEIR NEIGHBORING LAIR, MUCH AS THEY
COME, SE
ELEPHAN
JUST PAPER
CENTRAL BANK
FEED LAURA
CSS SHENANDOAH
TEXAS OIL
FOR TWO DAYS I WAS BROUGHT NO FOOD, BUT S
ANOTHER PRISONER WAS BROUGHT IN AND CHA
(LIEUTENANT) IN THE NAVY OF HELIUM. THEN I TOLD
AVOWAL OF LOVE FOR DEJAH THORIS, AND HE WAS
170




WE MIGHT INDEED HAVE BEEN
THE WRAITHS OF THE
DEPARTED DEAD...
120
+++
121



by CARROLL DUNHAM

In 2019, the human protagonists in my work began to turn green. Several factors were driving this process, not least the influence science fiction has had on my visual imagination since I started reading it as a boy. Within science fiction's loose conventions, green skin has been a common signifier of the alien, the toxic, or the strange, traits I wanted to encourage in my own work.

To this end, I contacted my friend Dan Nadel, thinking his vast historical knowledge of comic art might yield precedents I was unaware of. Dan sent me a great list of examples of these green beings, some known to me, some not. Almost as an afterthought, he mentioned that an artist named James Killian Spratt had made drawings for the graphic novel *A Princess of Mars*, the first of Edgar Rice Burroughs's so-called *Mars Books*, and that these images could be seen on a fan-site. After I saw these amazing drawings, there began a process in which Dan and I fed each other's enthusiasm around what we imagined these drawings could be, until we had the idea that there must be physical notebooks somewhere that we should attempt to locate. Dan proceeded to do exactly that—I asked him in amazement how he'd managed to locate Spratt's family, and he replied, "It's what I do"—and soon we were on a Zoom call with Spratt's son Aaron in the Washington suburbs. That day, Aaron showed us three small notebooks filled with his father's fabulous, stillborn graphic novel, and shortly afterward we were able to borrow the documents, which we could then explore.

It was interesting, and a little eerie, to hear from Spratt's son about his Burroughs and *Mars* obsession. Edgar Rice Burroughs was the only author for whom my father and I shared an enthusiasm. My father introduced me to *Tarzan* when I was 10 or 11 years old, around the time I discovered my first Robert A. Heinlein novel, *Time for the Stars*—the gateway drug hiding in the shelves of the tiny library at my rural school. I devoured the *Tarzan* stories, and it was pleasant to share that with my father, but when I discovered that the creator of *Tarzan* had also written science fiction, I left my father in the jungle and began traveling the solar system.

Over a century ago, Burroughs invented an approach to world-building that blends imagined aspects of ancient or "primitive" earth civilizations with imaginary "futuristic" technology—a tactic still in use, just ask George Lucas or James Cameron. Burroughs would insert into these cultures, by essentially magical means, a solitary, robustly fit white male hero endowed with both martial cunning and emotional sensitivity. Hence, the first Martians we meet are green four-armed versions of nomadic Arab or Native American hunters riding hideous alien beasts instead of camels or horses, horrors that quickly come to respect heroic protagonist John Carter for his athletic prowess and code of honor. The green warriors are described as being 15-feet tall and naked but for their amulets and weaponry, which includes spears of 40 feet and long rifles that shoot radium bullets accurately over 200 miles. Such a formula was nectar to me. I loved imagining—and Burroughs's writing helped me imagine—the smells, sounds, and textures of Barsoom, as the Martians call their own planet, and since I no doubt aspired to become a fit, cunning, and sensitive white man myself, John Carter was very easy to relate to.

Burroughs's hero was both a "southern gentleman" and the product of a bloodthirsty military culture, a former captain in the defeated army of the Confederacy. James Killian Spratt was also southern, and had served in the US Navy in Asia as a young man. While essentially the same age, Spratt and I must have experienced quite different versions of our American Dream: I was raised in a deeply Yankee cultural precinct, and while Spratt was in the Navy, I was protesting the Vietnam War. With all our differences of perspective, we both became artists, and were both attached to Burroughs's Barsoom tales.

Unquestionably, Spratt's drawings come dramatically closer than any previous and better-known efforts to the atmosphere of the culture Burroughs described. The late 1960s and early 1970s counterculture encouraged the embrace of bodies, and curves, smells, and body hair were newly (re-)aestheticized. Additionally, there was a graphic art renaissance driven by psychedelia. There is an *earthiness* to Spratt's aliens that earlier visualizations lack. One almost smells the pheromones held in Princess Dejah Thoris's sumptuous pubic bush, the invisible chemicals that must stimulate John Carter's lusty over-protectiveness. Spratt imagines Carter as both clever and clueless, a well-hung human killing machine capable of being flustered by a pretty woman's glance. The scenes within the crowded Martian cities reek of ordure, sweat, and leather. Of course, Spratt did not shy away from the implications of Burroughs's descriptions concerning violent gladiatorial combat or ubiquitous nudity. It is all there in the notebooks.

Spratt was having a lot of fun while also skirting the edge of callow naughtiness, as shown by some of the less-finished pages. But when he stayed with the material, he maintained the nuance that makes the project touching and challenging.

Barsoom is an ecological disaster where power blocks divide along the lines of race, and where species fight endlessly over vanishing resources until a white earthman from a discredited slave-holding former nation arrives to help bring some clarity and purpose to the situation. Judged by a more recent consensual value system, Burroughs's narrative attitude can seem, at best, rabidly conservative. But in the context of his day, his vision of a multiracial planetary culture supported by exotic technology, where members of different species make common cause, might be considered imaginatively progressive. Somehow, Spratt revealed both aspects of this interpretive conundrum in these drawings. I have no idea if Spratt and I would have liked each other, but I would love to have talked about these things with him. For Dan and me, discovering and studying the notebooks has been a rare privilege, one we are happy to share.

by DAN NADEL

James Killian Spratt was born in Frankfurt, Germany, in 1950 and raised in Hendersonville, North Carolina, just underneath the Blue Ridge Mountains. The Spratts are a southern family with deep roots in the region and a tradition of military service, and as a small child, James was a natural tinkerer. He discovered sci-fi and fantasy in the early 1960s, finding, like many kids then, a special affinity for Edgar Rice Burroughs's *Tarzan* and *John Carter of Mars*. Spratt studied art at the University of North Carolina Asheville—not far from the ruins of Black Mountain College—then, from 1970 to 1974, served in the US Navy. He returned home from Vietnam and Korea married, and his only child, Aaron, was born that year. Upon graduating from UNCA in 1978, Spratt began working in his "open to the public studio," and later received solid commissions—wildlife and busts for libraries, state capitols, firehouses, and other civic sites in his hometown and especially Atlanta, Georgia.

From 2000 until his death in 2016, Spratt devoted much of his time to a graphic adaptation of Burroughs's *A Princess of Mars*, a novel in which a Confederate soldier wanders lost into a cave, slumbers, and awakes on a Mars called "Barsoom" by its inhabitants, and soon finds himself caught in a conflict between a humanoid race of red Martians and the six-limbed, green-skinned Tharks. Spratt drew his adaptation with a felt tip pen and colored pencils in three hardcover sketchbooks, each five by eight inches, totaling 344 pages. In his lifetime, it was serialized on the *ERBzine* website as a series of digitally colored and somewhat awkwardly formatted comic strips, a project that remains unfinished.

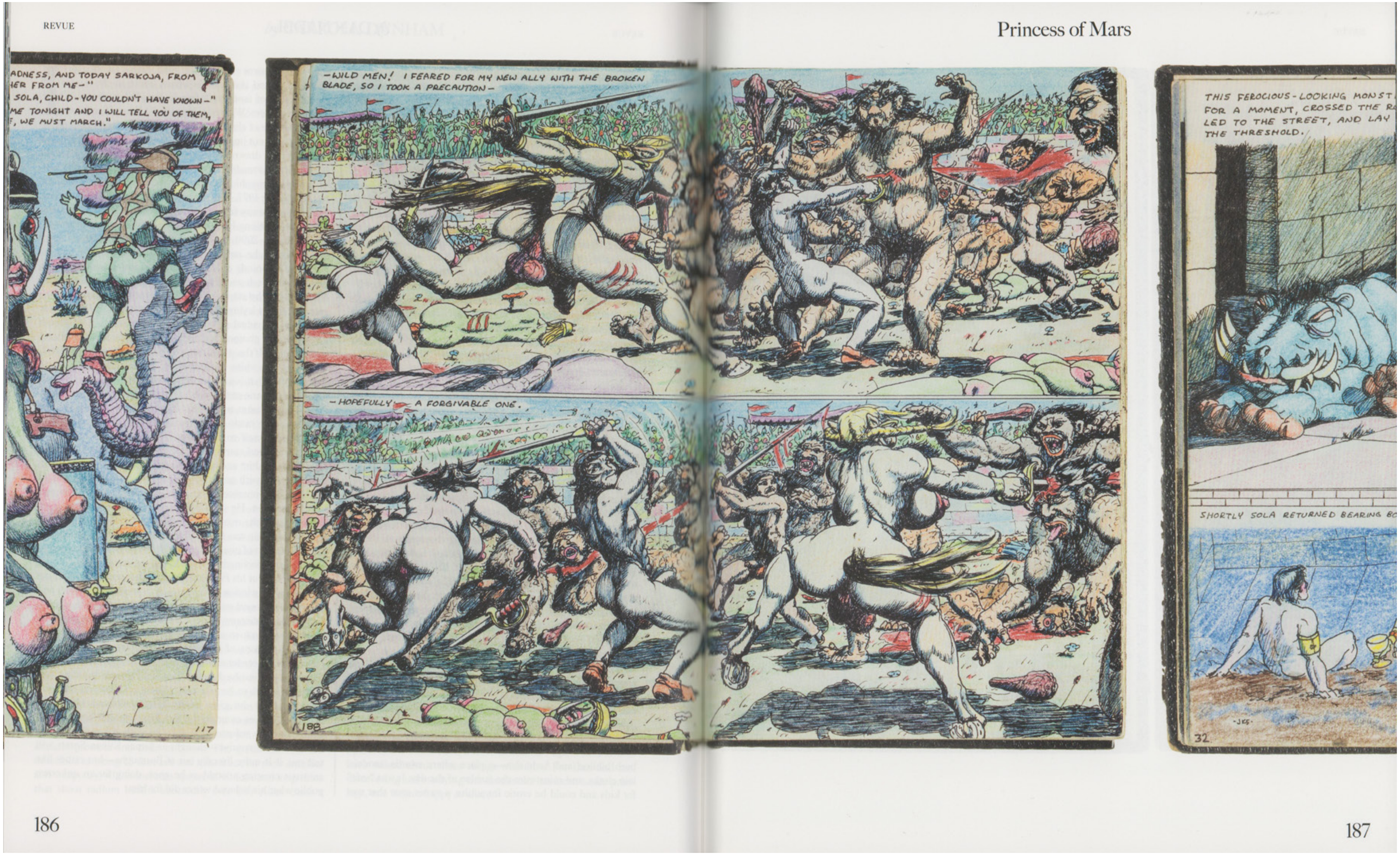
Spratt's devotion to Edgar Rice Burroughs, though unique in its manifestation, was shared by generations of fans dedicated not just to the man himself, but to the fictional lands he created. Deep in a pulp zone of enormous circulations and loud covers, Burroughs originated two lasting characters in Tarzan and John Carter. He wrote 10 Barsoom novels between 1912 and 1941, and 26 *Tarzan* books between 1912 and 1938. There were other books, too—westerns, jungle adventure books, straight-up science fiction, and much more. Burroughs imagined numerous iterations of his worlds, keeping readers hooked by endlessly bringing his heroes into new encounters.

When Spratt encountered Burroughs, a pulp revival was underway: pulp fans had grown up and become publishers, editors, artists, and critics, and Burroughs and his peers were once again in drugstores across the country. Young illustrators like Roy Krenkel and Frank Frazetta were hired to create eye-catching covers with panache, dynamism, and a certain pansexual sense of mythmaking rooted in early 20th-century illustration by the likes of J. Allen St. John and N.C. Wyeth. The overall image was of a time and place that was somehow both biblical and Arthurian—a place where swords, sandals, loin cloths, and ruins were the fashion of the day. It was "safe" for kids and could be erotic for adults, a sweet spot that was beloved by squares and groovers alike. Above all, for a guy like Spratt, it looked possible. As Spratt wrote in the earnest, if purple, prose of fandom: "After Rodin ('Who are we? Where did we come from? Where are we going?') Edgar Rice Burroughs is an archetype of almost all the sci-fi written, and his layers of meaning have not begun to have been revealed in totality." He could not have drawn 344 pages without believing exactly this.

Spratt first made contact with likeminded Burroughs fans via an autobiographical text in the pages of *Burroughs Bulletin* No. 30, spring 1977. But it would be another 20 years before Spratt moved away from public sculpture and took Burroughs as a subject, selling ERB-related chess sets and sculptures by mail order. In 2000, he embarked on his *A Princess of Mars* project for, as he put it, his own "amusement." He had no publisher in mind, only an obsession and an inkling that perhaps the work could find a home as a graphic novel. Two decades ago, the standard operating procedure for such projects had artists laying out each page in pencil, then drawing it in ink on individual pieces of illustration board. The sheets might then be photocopied before color was added, preserving the "original." If the studio was a bit more technically advanced, the black and white original would be scanned and colored digitally. But that is not how Spratt operated.

In a romantic and revealing text, he wrote: "knowing that art is more pleasant and fruitful if permitted to happen, rather than by being made to happen, I drew a deep breath and committed myself to the pages, anxious and excited to see what this magical story would reveal." This marks a key difference between him and the illustrators he loved: he was doing it for himself, with no template in mind. It was only him and the text. The notebooks are proof of both his conviction and wild permission. He used only three. Sketches, notes, jokes, and of course the manuscript itself—it is all in just the three notebooks. This was his calling, and he was clearly relishing the physical act of imagining. The drawings have the energy of a young artist feeling his power but of mastery as well.

Throughout his *Princess of Mars*, Spratt renders everything in the picture window with identical intensity: characters and objects, the ground and the air, exist in relation to one another as though in a diorama rather than, as in most comics, a camera lens. Most narrative art works through selective generalizations and elisions of backgrounds, ancillary characters, and crowds so the reader can keep moving through the story. But Spratt was so involved in his Burroughs's world-building that everything had to be touched. When he needs to render a discrete object, he gives it an almost delicate holding line; when full bodies come in, he lets loose cavalier hatch marks and then adds volume or highlights with colored pencil. It never feels illustrative—though, as James Killian Spratt will tell you, it is quite literally out of Burroughs—but rather like an artist creating a world as he goes, doing for an unknown public what his beloved writer did for him.



REVUE

Princess of Mars

ADNESS, AND TODAY SARKOJA, FROM
HER FROM ME—"
SOLA, CHILD—YOU COULDN'T HAVE KNOWN—"
ME TONIGHT AND I WILL TELL YOU OF THEM,
F, WE MUST MARCH."
117
—WILD MEN! I FEARED FOR MY NEW ALLY WITH THE BROKEN BLADE, SO I TOOK A PRECAUTION—
—HOPEFULLY A FORGIVABLE ONE.
188
THIS FEROCIOUS-LOOKING MONST
FOR A MOMENT, CROSSED THE R
LED TO THE STREET, AND LAY
THE THRESHOLD.
SHORTLY SOLA RETURNED BEARING BO
-JCS-
32

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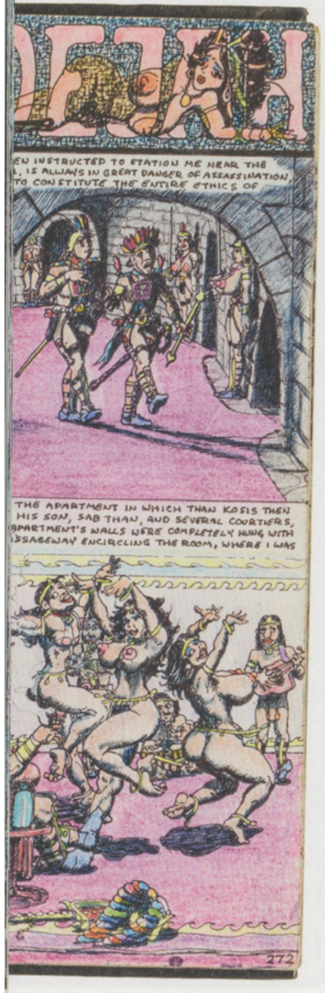
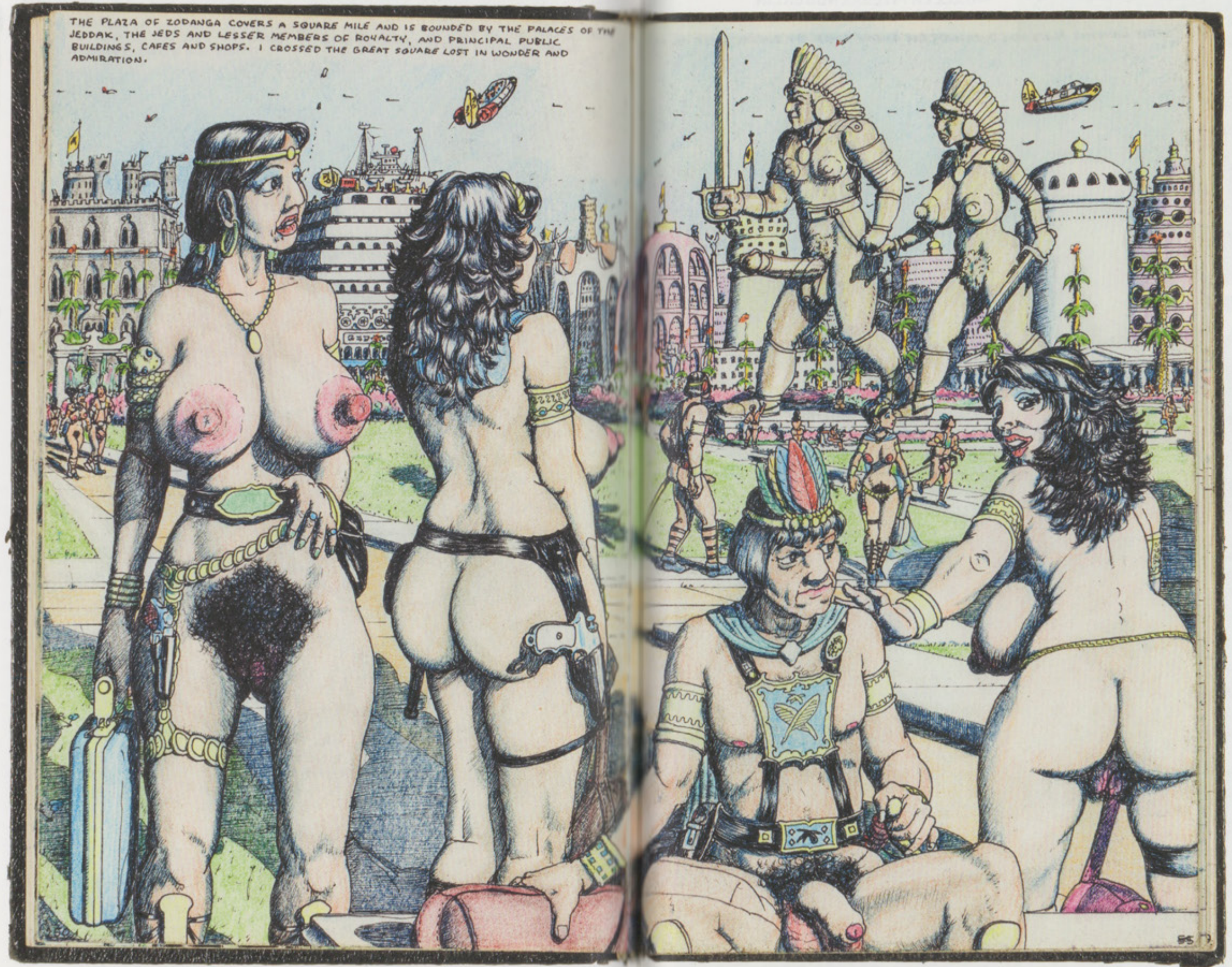
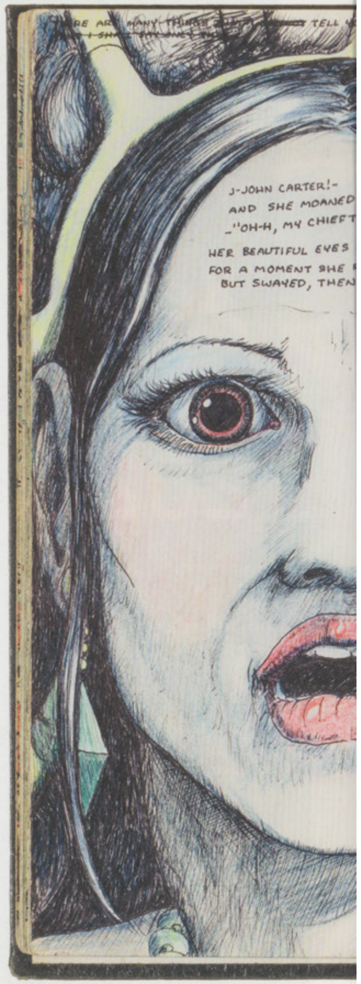
187


EN INSTRUCTED TO STATION ME NEAR THE
, IS ALWAYS IN GREAT DANGER OF ASSASSINATION,
TO CONSTITUTE THE ENTIRE ETHICS OF
THE APARTMENT IN WHICH THAN KOSIS THEN
HIS SON, SAB THAN, AND SEVERAL COURTIERS,
APARTMENT'S WALLS WERE COMPLETELY HUNG WITH
SSAGEWAY ENCIRCLING THE ROOM, WHERE I WAS
272


THE PLAZA OF ZODANGA COVERS A SQUARE MILE AND IS BOUNDED BY THE PALACES OF THE JEDDAK, THE JEDS AND LESSER MEMBERS OF ROYALTY, AND PRINCIPAL PUBLIC BUILDINGS, CAFES AND SHOPS. I CROSSED THE GREAT SQUARE LOST IN WONDER AND ADMIRATION.


RE ARE MANY THINGS [illegible] TELL
J-JOHN CARTER!-
AND SHE MOANED
_"OH-H, MY CHIEFT
HER BEAUTIFUL EYES
FOR A MOMENT SHE
BUT SWAYED, THEN