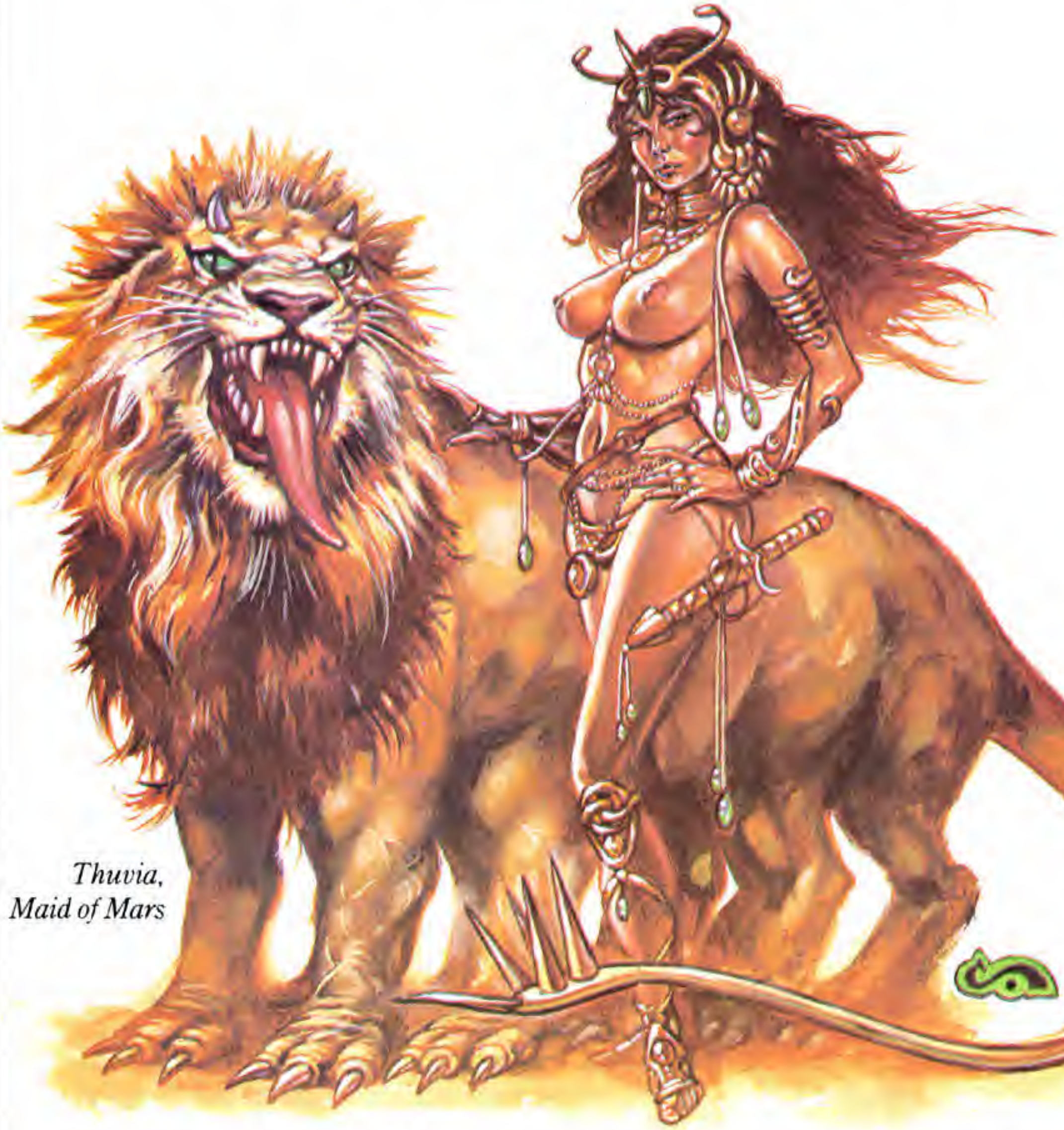
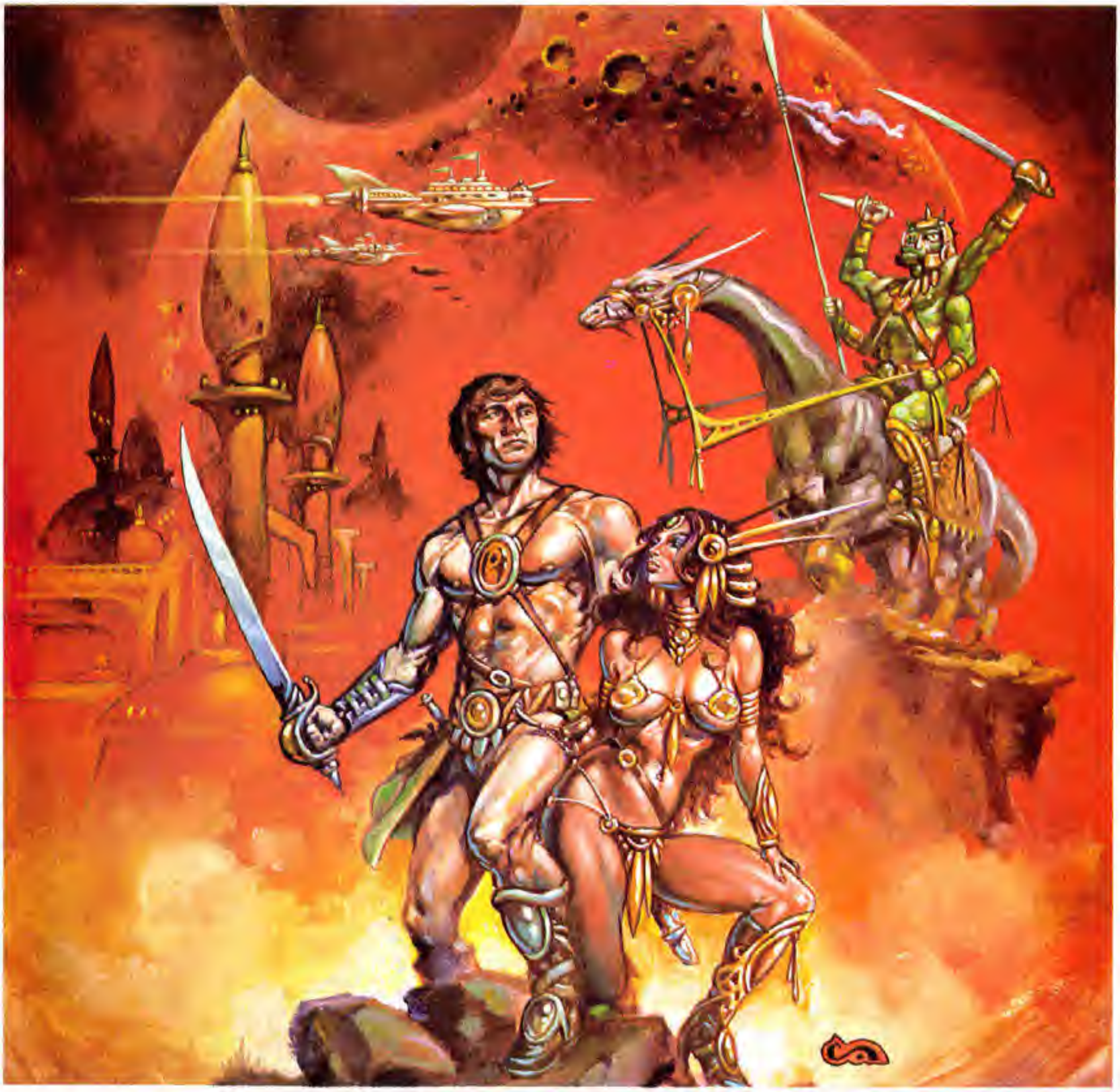
BARSOOM!

or, Tremble Not, My Naked Princess!
or, Who Was that Mighty Swordsman in the Leather Harness?



Thuvia, Maid of Mars

by Richard A. Lupoff Illustrated by Clyde Caldwell



Iowa urchins sneaking off to thrill to the yarns in *All-Story Weekly*, urban Arabs, tired businessmen, and unliberated women who snuck glances at the male-oriented pulp magazines, certainly got their charge from this stuff. The year was 1912. They were reading the first published work of a new author, Norman Bean, "Under the Moons of Mars."

That was the magazine version. The author was really more interested in beautiful princesses than in hurtling rocks, and for the story's book version he retitled the saga *A Princess of Mars*. Under that title it's still alive and kicking.

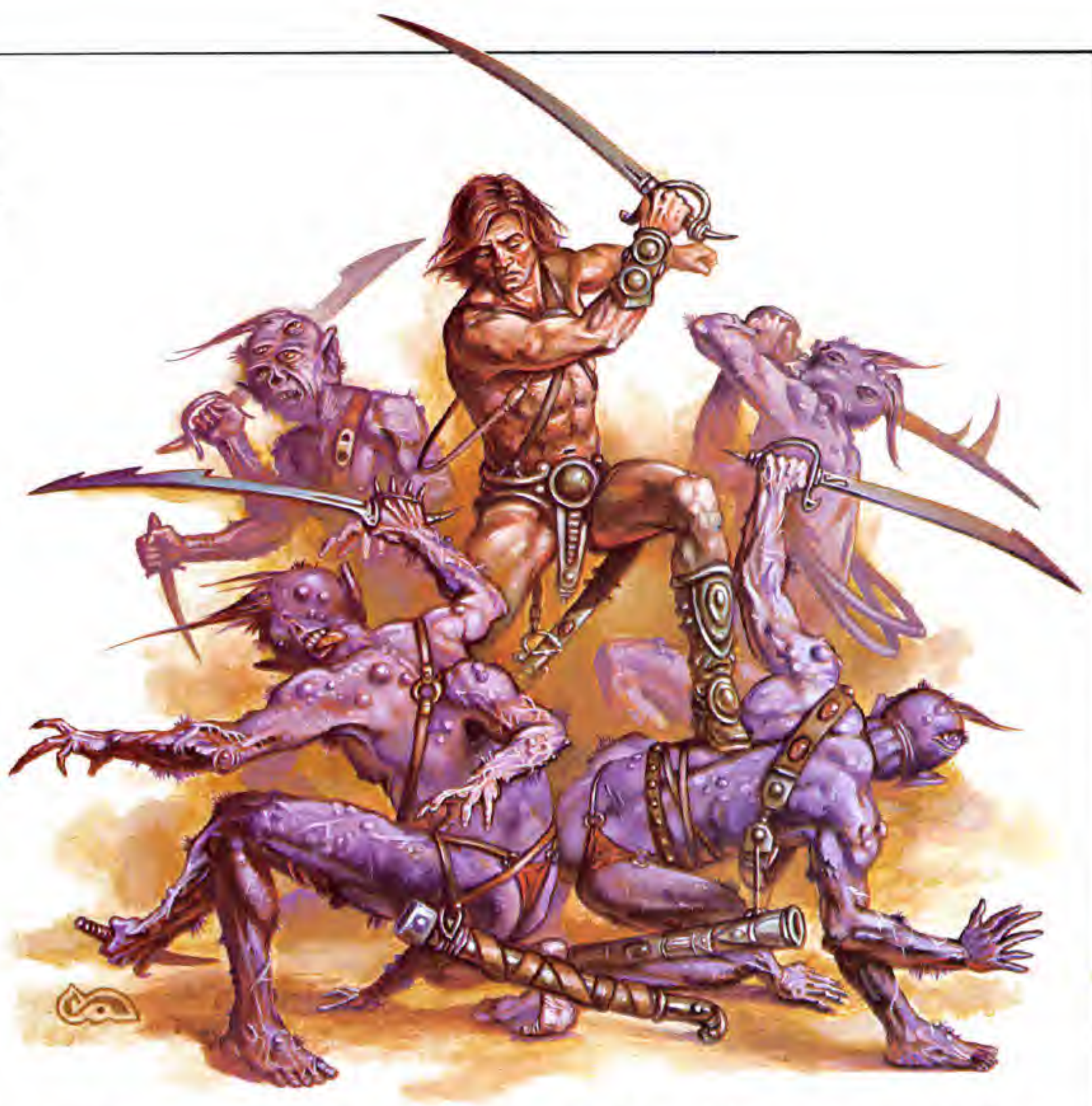
"Norman Bean," of course, was Edgar Rice Burroughs. The odd pseudonym was the unfortunate result of an unsuccessful pun. Burroughs had meant it to be "Normal Bean"—"Sane Head." When a proofreader did him the "favor" of changing Normal to Norman, Ed gave up and went back to his real monicker.

Who was this Burroughs/Bean guy anyhow?

He was a Midwestern business flop, washout onetime soldier, pots-and-pans peddler, magazine staff-man, advertising checker, military academy teacher, railroad cop, goldminer himself, onetime cowboy, ex-proprietor of a sundries shop and bookstore in Pocatello, Idaho. Pushing middle age by now. He wrote *A Princess of Mars* in 1911. It was serialized in '12.

He lived what we might politely term a

Synthetic Men of Mars



vivid fantasy life.

The baby was crying, Mama had another in the oven, Papa was broke and out of work. He used to lie there at night. Visions of unpaid bills danced in his head. A lot pleasanter to fantasize.

Gee, if he could only be something glamorous. How's about a cavalry captain? Riding his sleek mount across the arid Arizona plains, fighting fierce savages, searching for gold.

Where do we go from there?

What happens after the Arizona schtick?

Whoo!

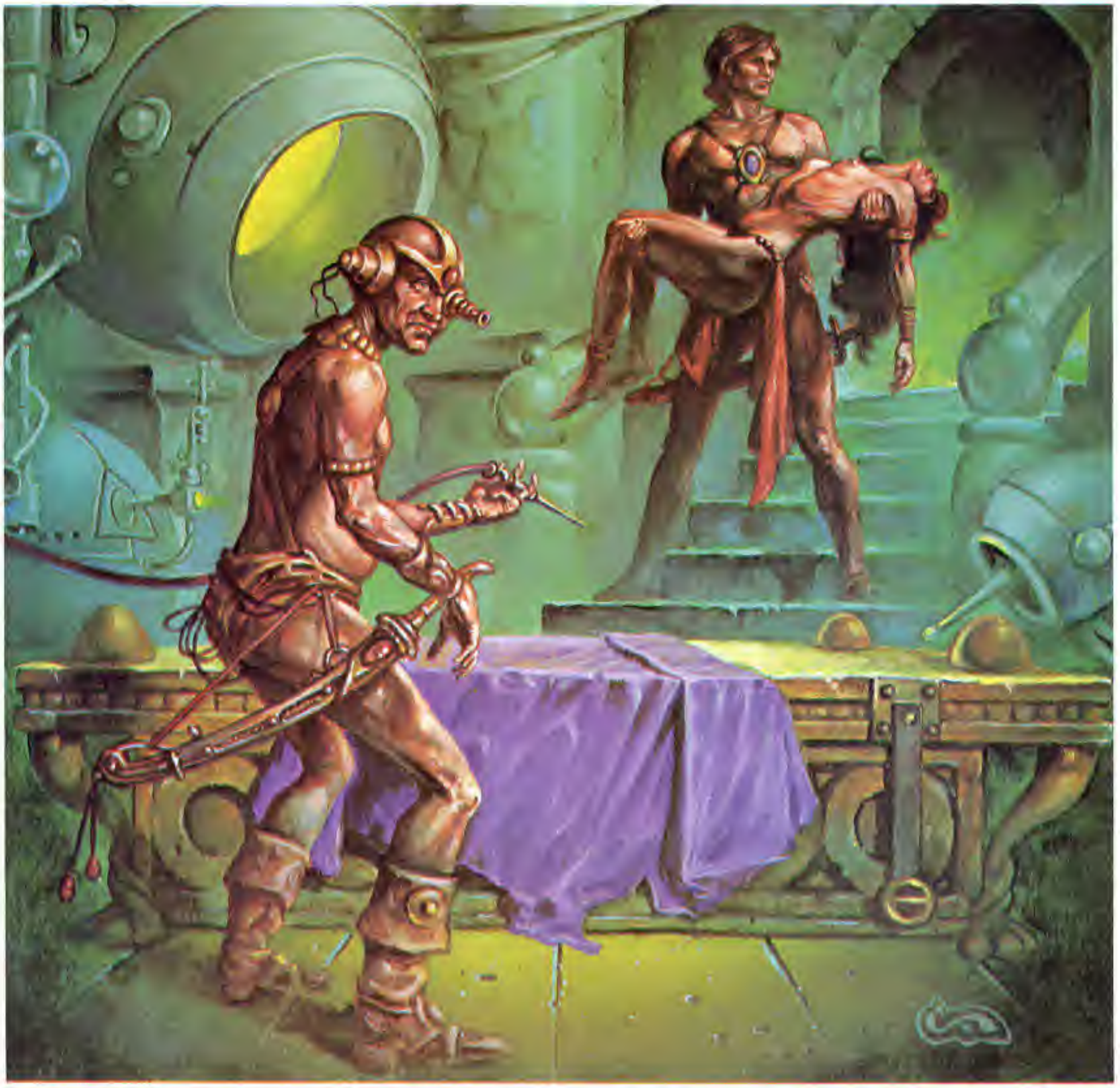
Jump to the angry red planet. Grumpy green Martians up to *here*! Ten, twelve, fifteen feet high. With tusks no less. Funny ears. No hair. Six limbs.

Lots of room for excitement there, plenty of swordplay and adventure. Hmm, but kind of lacking in the potential for (to put it delicately) love interest. Read carefully. Burroughs seemed to be edging in that direction for awhile, but he couldn't quite bring himself . . .

Green folks had their limitations; bring in some *red* ones.

Convenient, too, that nobody wandered around Mars (they called it *Barsoom*) overburdened with bulky clothes. In fact, the custom tended more towards going around in the buff.

Burroughs's Martians didn't much favor anti-weapons laws. In fact it was customary to keep at least a longsword and a shortsword handy, not to mention a little pigsticker concealed here or there in case of emergency, and if you aren't outfitted



with any togs, you might find it handy to deck your body with an assortment of straps, hooks, scabbards, and the like.

Frees up the hands for more urgent tasks, don't you see?

So, bring on the *red* Martians. We start off with a prisoner of the grumpy green giants, one Dejah Thoris, who turns out to be the daughter of the biggest Jeddak (emperor) on the whole planet. John Carter, intrepid earthman and hero of Burroughs's Martian novels, tells us about this princess: "...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 skin was of a light reddish copper color, against which the crimson glow of her cheeks and the ruby of her beautifully molded lips shone with a strangely enhancing effect."

Okay. Got some more?

"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."

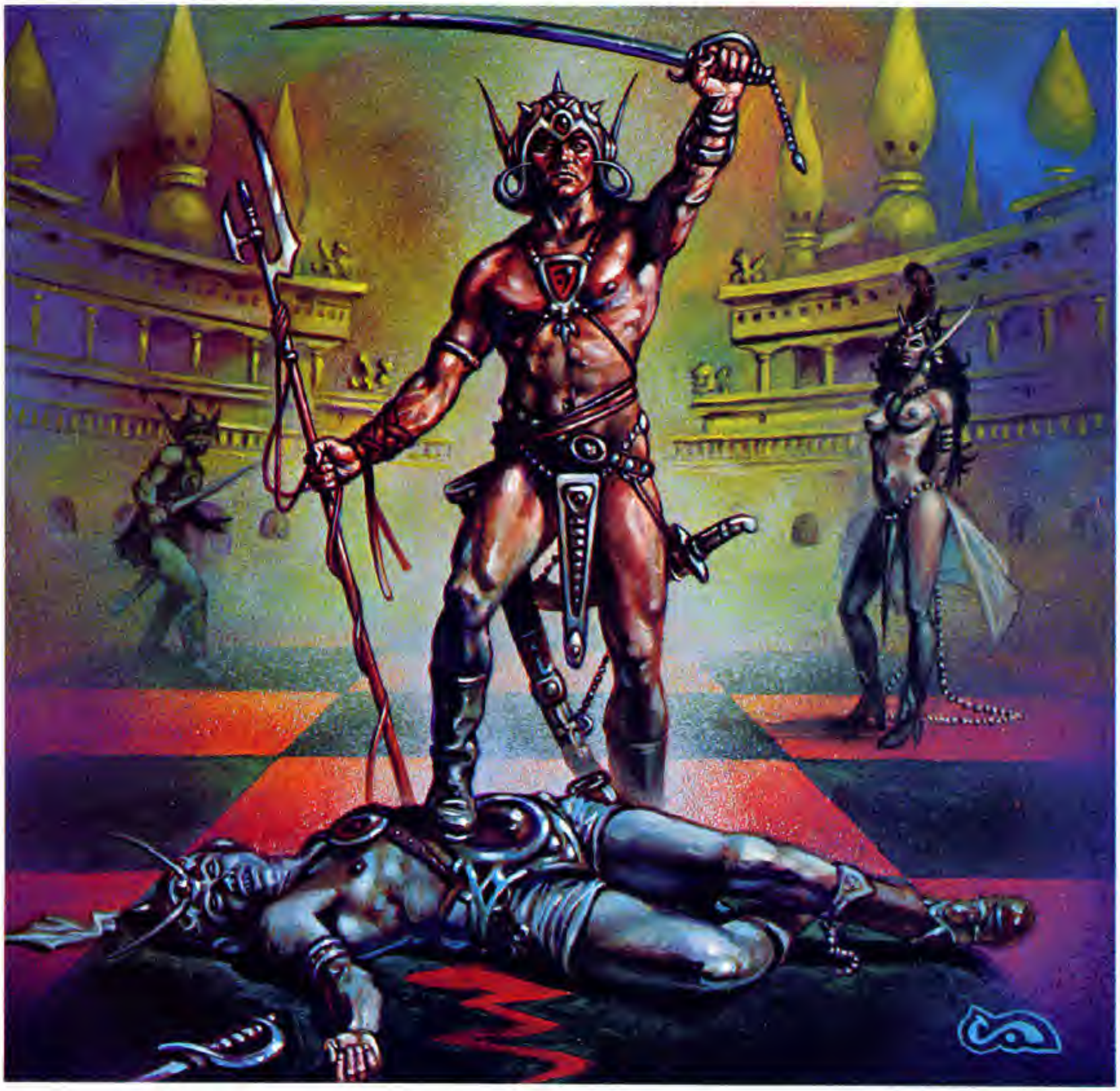
You betcha, pal!

Ed provided Barsoom with a complete history, geography, zoology, botany, economy, technology. The works. At no time forgetting to keep the landscape well populated with gorgeously undraped women, most of whom he generously furnished with perfect and symmetrical figures.

Well, why not?

Not only did he scatter the landscape with

The Chessmen of Mars



green folks and red folks, but also (in due course) with yellow, black, and white folks; plus plant-men, six-limbed giant apes, rats, dogs, and horses. Plus some bizarre, ucky creatures something like a cross between a crab and a tick, that specialized in riding around on the shoulders of a race of headless, brainless humans.

Not to mention ray-powered "fliers," aircraft that swooped or zoomed or wobbled their way through the thin Barsoomian atmosphere while sword-plying soldiers swarmed their decks and polished up their grapnels and belaying pins.

Those green nomads of the dead sea bottoms also had some advanced weapons—rifles that fired radium bullets, guided by radar sights, with a range of miles, and with solar detonators. Funny to think of those gigantic ginks with radium-powered rifles at their disposal, fighting it out with broadswords.

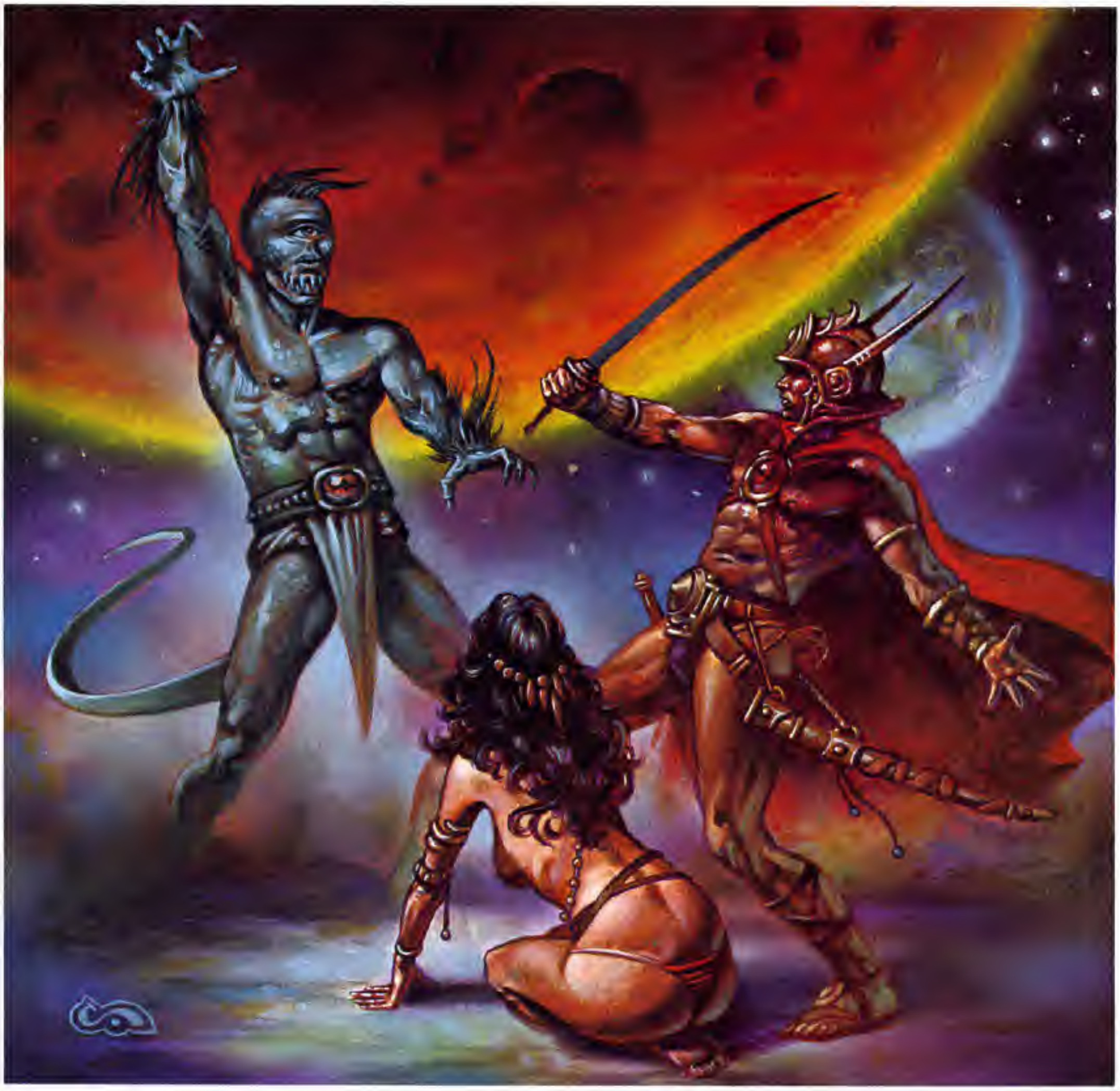
Or is it? Ever see a photo of a U.S. infantryman walking guard duty over an atomic howitzer with a fixed bayonet on the rifle on his shoulder?

One thing about the s*x in Burroughs's Barsoomian books (or for that matter, in any of his others)—there's nothing explicit there that could turn an Iowa schoolmarm gray, even in 1912.

Nothing explicit.

But there was plenty below the surface, and not too far below the surface at that.

You have to judge any creative work against the milieu in which the author/art-



ist/whatever worked. You just don't expect Rembrandt and Dali and Lichtenstein to do the same work. You don't expect the same kind of script from Euripedes, Ben Jonson, and John Carpenter.

So what kind of world was it that Burroughs worked in?

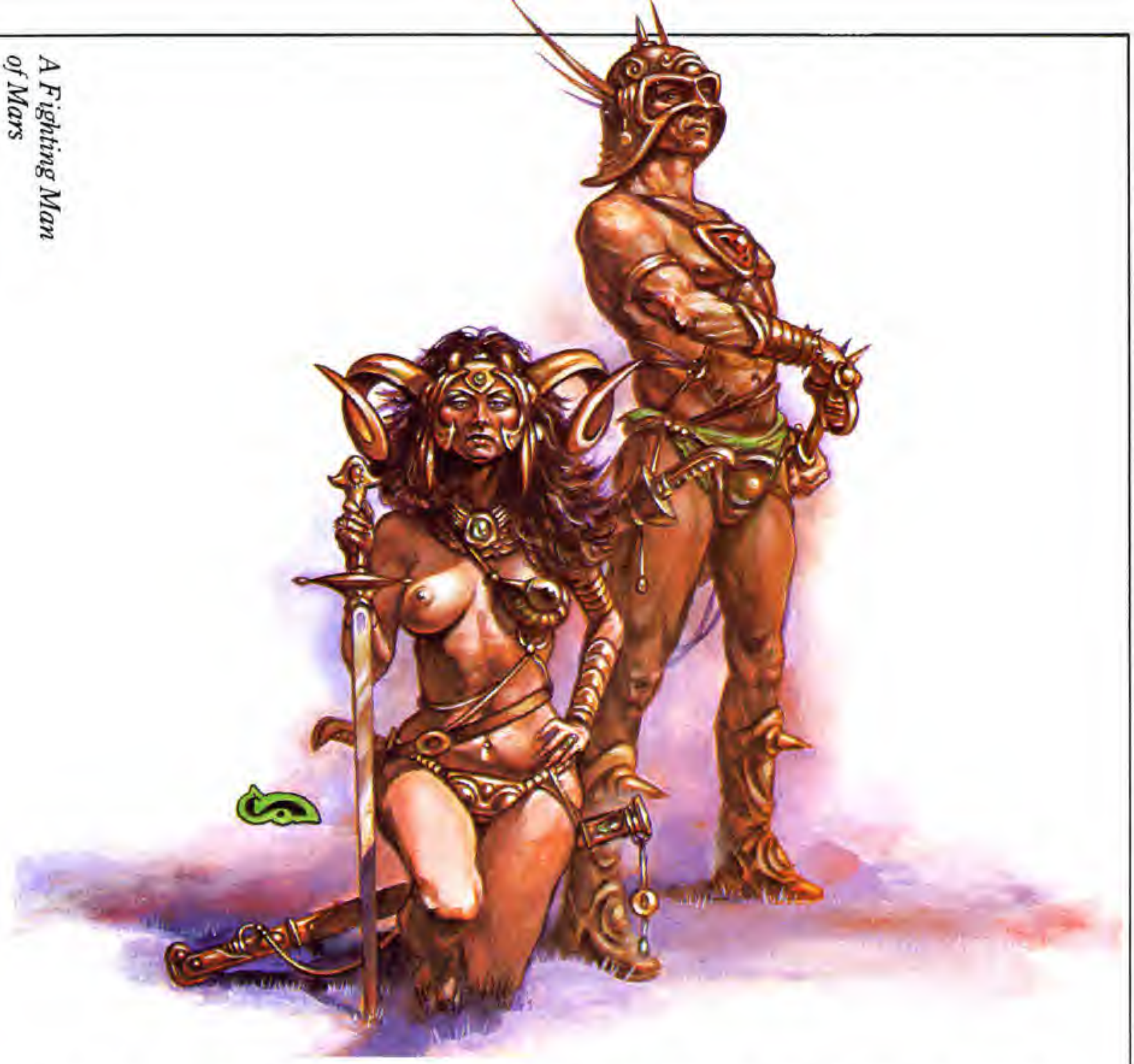
He started writing "Under the Moons"/*A Princess of Mars* in 1911.

It wasn't exactly the Victorian age any more. The old lady had been dead for ten years. Her son Edward, that notorious rakehell and perennial Prince of Wales, had reigned for nine years and then he, too, died. *His* son Georgie had just come to the throne when E.R.B. was dreaming up Dejah Tee and Johnny See.

But who gives a damn about who was king of England anyhow? Burroughs was a Chicago boy, American to the marrow. Fatso Billy Taft was president of the U.S., and Teddy Roosevelt, who had handpicked Taft as his successor three years before, was preparing to hand*un*pick him and resume the presidency.

Tops-in-pops music that year ran the gamut from Irving Berlin's "Alexander's Ragtime Band" to "Woodman, Woodman, Spare that Tree!" There was also "Parade of the Wooden Soldiers" and "Oh You Beautiful Doll."

Hottest book of the year was Clarence Mulford's *Hopalong Cassidy*. Hottest tickets on Broadway were "The Blue Bird" and "Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm." And in San Francisco the board of censors closed some



A Fighting Man of Mars

thirty-two motion pictures, including *The Black Viper* and *Maggie, the Dock Rat.*

Thing is, during that age of Victorian repression—which was when Burroughs was raised, albeit before he wrote—when they put pants on piano legs and wore flannel bags to bed so their limbs would not be exposed, s*x didn't cease to exist. Little boys and girls wondered where they came from, and even if their elders told 'em about fairies and cabbages, the little ones must have figured out something better or eventually there would have been no more little girls and boys.

Contemporary books like *My Secret Life* and *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and later books like *The Other Victorians* tell a very different story than the sanitized "official" version put out by the upper crust. But even the "acceptable" literature of the day was jammed with sublimated sexuality.

Old Sir Henry Rider Haggard, greatest of the grand Victorian romancers, was full of it. Look at his books: *She, King Solomon's Mines, Montezuma's Daughter,* and scores of others. They're full of nudity, of gloriously shining women, sweaty, muscular men, love-goddesses and love-slaves.

And along came Ed Burroughs who poured *his* frustrations and repressions into *his* stories, and out came naked princesses and supermacho warriors in leather harnesses.

In between volumes of the long Barsoomian saga, Burroughs worked away at other books, turning out Tarzan novels and westerns and more science fiction like *The Moon*

Maid and *The Land That Time Forgot* and the Amtorian saga, about one Carson Napier who travels to Venus and discovers a planet of beautiful princesses, monstrous creatures, and leering villains. And the splendid Pellucidar series, *At the Earth's Core* and its sequels, the adventures of David Innes of Connecticut in the strange timeless region that lies 500 miles straight down through the crust of the planet. (Would you believe that it's full of beautiful women who don't wear much clothing?)

But science fiction fans in Burroughs's day put Barsoom at the top of their reading lists. And Burroughs's day was a long one. "Under the Moons of Mars" was the first story Burroughs ever sold, and the first to see print. Followed by *Tarzan of the Apes* and all the rest. But *Llana of Gathol*, the tenth and final Martian novel, was the *last* of Burroughs's works to be published before he died in 1950.

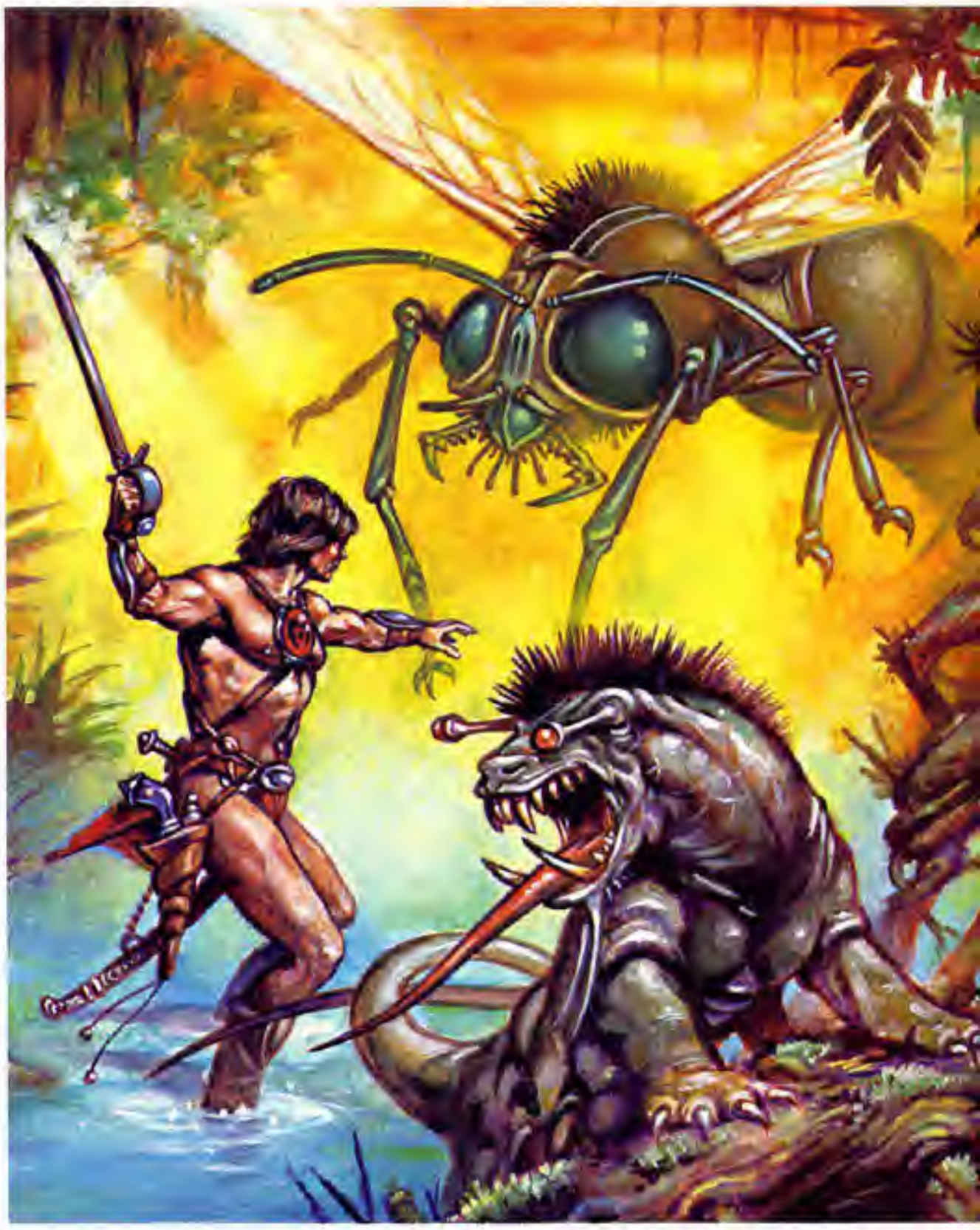
He opened his act with Barsoom, and he closed it the same way. Make what you will of that.

All of the Martian novels have their moments—moments that sizzle and live in the reader's mind, that illustrators have loved for decades. The earliest Burroughs illustrators: Frank Schoonover, J. Allen St. John, the distinguished N.C. Wyeth, the famous Hal Foster. And the later ones: Reed Crandall, Al Williamson, Frank Frazetta. The strange, surrealistic Mahlon Blaine, whose drawings in the Canaveral Press editions of the 1960s are like nothing else you've ever seen.

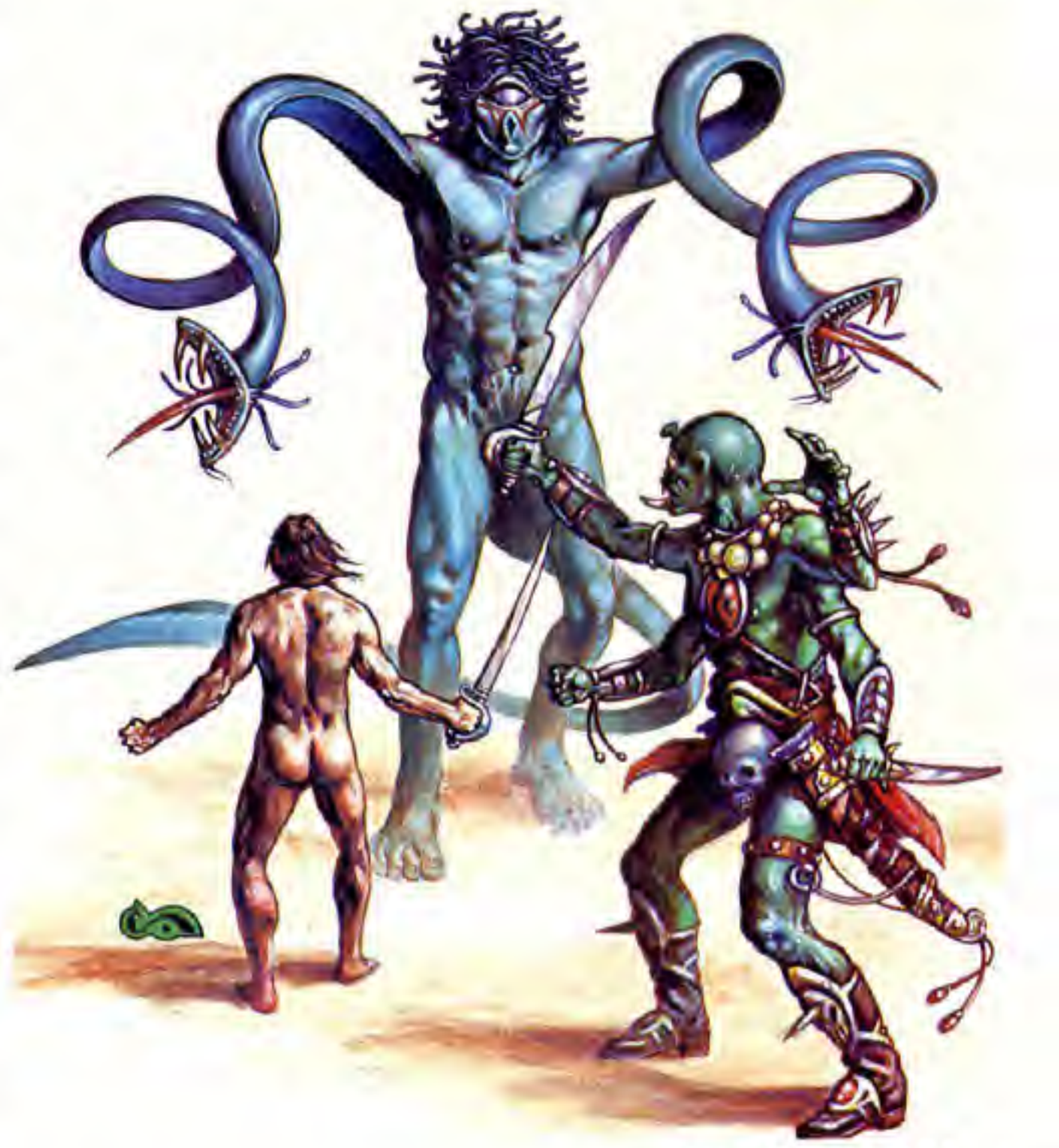
Hey, and this guy Caldwell is good! His paintings capture much of the color and the spirit of exoticism that pervade the Barsoomian books. But I think, beyond that, that Caldwell expresses the sexuality that runs through Burroughs better than any earlier illustrator.

In those earlier days, of course, there was a question of what an illustrator could get away with. I'm sure you've seen cover paintings from the 1940s and fifties or even later with bits of drapery, hardware, or anything else handy—conveniently intervening twixt viewer's eye and character's anatomy.

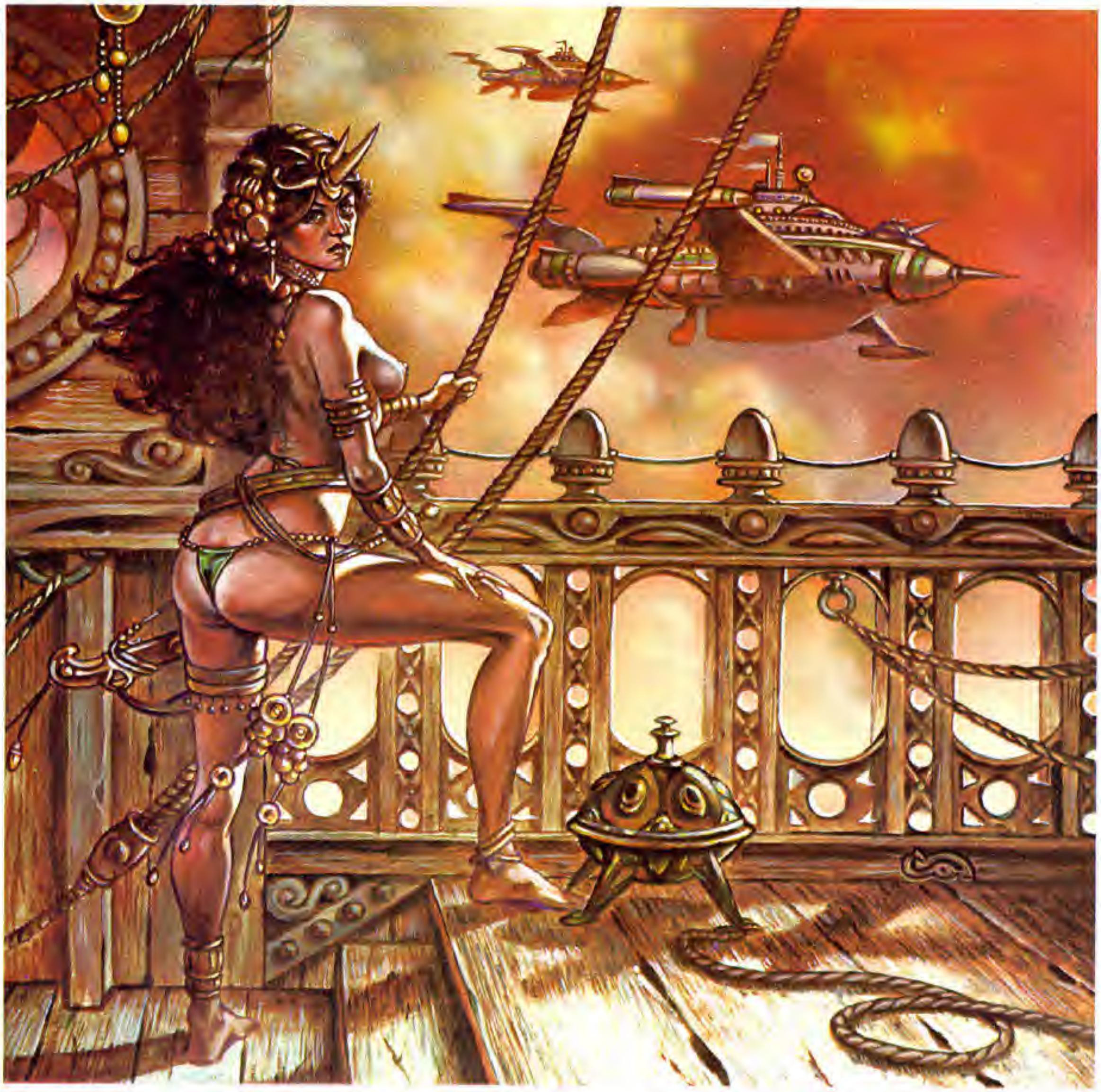
Virgil Finlay, one of the greatest of the



The Warlord of Mars



The Gods of Mars



Llana of Gathol

pulp illustrators, used to send up screens of shimmering bubbles to protect his audience from the sight of so much as a corrupting nipple. Even the great Frank Frazetta, working in the 1960s and seventies, suffered an occasional attack of fig leaf syndrome.

But Caldwell portrays human anatomy pretty much as Ol' Ma Nature sculpted it. I would like to direct your attention in particular to Caldwell's portrayal of Thuvia (she's the lady with the six-legged lion) and Llana (the babe on the deck of the Barsoomian air-ship).

Well, all right, there's some exaggeration there. It's a t&a show.

Yup. But that's part of Burroughs.

Burroughs wasn't all slash-and-hack. And while his love scenes are cloaked in the genteel and flowery talk of his day, behind the scenes lurked the kind of things Caldwell brings into the open.

Gar-damn, those are lusty, fleshy folks in those books. You can bet they didn't come home from a hard day on the arid plain to talk about flower arranging and then bed down by ones.

Come on!

Three cheers, say I, for Clyde Caldwell. Let the Puritans paint mother hubbards over their copies of the pix.