

	8/16 THU	for March 15-22	8/16 FRI	8/17 SAT	8/18 SUN	8/19 MON	8/20 TUE	8/21 WED	8/22 THU
	4:45 7:25	ACADEMY AWARD WINNER! BEST FOREIGN FILM <b>A SEPARATION</b>	5:30 8:15	2:50 8:15	2:50 8:15	5:30 8:15	5:30 8:15	5:30 8:15	5:30 8:15
TINKER TAILOR SOLDIER SPY ENDS TONIGHT!	6:25	GLENN CLOSE <b>ALBERT NOBBS</b>	4:45	4:45	2:15 4:45	4:45	4:45	4:45	4:45
SUNSET BLVD ENDS TONIGHT!	4:00	GEORGE CLOONEY <b>THE DESCENDANTS</b>	7:15	2:10 7:15	7:15	7:15	7:15	7:15	7:15
KILL LIST ENDS TONIGHT!	9:10	<b>TIM &amp; ERIC'S BILLION DOLLAR MOVIE</b>	9:45	9:45	9:45	9:45	9:45	9:45	9:45
COMING SOON: IN DARKNESS, CRAZY HORSE, FOUR LOVERS, FOOTNOTE, WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT KEVIN CINEMA PACIFIC FILM FESTIVAL DISORIENT ASIAN AMERICAN FILM FESTIVAL									

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# Confederacy of Dimwits

On Mars, no one can hear you think

**JOHN CARTER:** Directed by Andrew Stanton. Screenplay by Stanton, Mark Andrews and Michael Chabon, based on the book *A Princess of Mars* by Edgar Rice Burroughs. Cinematography, Daniel Mindel. Editor, Eric Zumbrunnen. Music, Michael Giacchino. Starring Taylor Kitsch, Lynn Collins, Mark Strong, Ciarán Hinds, Samantha Morton, Willem Dafoe and Dominic West. Walt Disney Pictures, 2012. PG-13. 132 minutes. ★★☆☆☆

**J**ohn Carter didn't show up without baggage. That's a nice way to say that for months, people have been talking more about the story (and money) around the movie than about the movie itself — a tactic that sometimes works out just fine (hello, *Titanic*) and sometimes doesn't. When *The New York Times* is making *Ishtar* references while Monday-morning quarterbacking a film's weekend take, it's relatively safe to assume the pre-release gossip hits home.

But *John Carter* — no longer *John Carter of Mars*, which was the manned-up version of *A Princess of Mars*, the name of the Edgar Rice Burroughs tale on which the film is based — will slip right through the cracks precisely because it's neither *Ishtar* nor *Titanic*. Too science-fictiony to play to a mainstream audience and too mainstream to develop a real genre fanbase, *JC* is a film that tried to have it both ways and landed smack in cultural nowhereville.

John Carter (Taylor Kitsch, of *Friday Night Lights*), a Confederate soldier and excellent fighter, is hunting gold in Arizona when a peculiar encounter sends him to a different dry landscape: the rugged brown surface of Mars, called Barsoom by its natives. Barsoom is in the middle of its own civil war, which might be notably relevant for a Confederate soldier — but perhaps that relevance was lost in a

previous draft of the screenplay. On Mars, Carter befriends/impresses a four-armed and well-animated species, the Tharks, and makes the acquaintance of a wise warrior princess, Dejah Thoris (a very earnest Lynn Collins). Bad, superpowered fellows led by Matai Shang (Mark Strong) have been mucking about in Mars' conflicts, and Carter's arrival — and subsequent side-choosing — changes everything. Naturally.

*John Carter's* charms include John's initial exploration of Mars, which he does by leaps and bounds once he gets used to the different gravity; a space-dog named Woola that wins over everyone whose heart is not yet turned to cynical stone; the airships of Barsoom, which look like glittering metal dragonflies; and every moment in which Kitsch, who broods like nobody's business, cracks a smile.

That smile is all too rare in the film, which slowly becomes a mishmash of underwritten characters, underdeveloped notions and nicely executed effects. Too much stuff is crammed into *JC's* plot: Dejah is supposed to marry the human bad guy, Sab Than (Dominic West)! There's unrest among the Tharks! Sab Than has a cool, evil, mobile city! There's also a nifty magical power source called the Ninth Ray that you'll just have to accept for whatever it is (save your questions about the other eight rays for Wikipedia).

*John Carter* would like to have big ideas — something about finding where you belong and fighting for what's right, not hogging the planet and not abusing power — but the movie leaves no room for them. You can still have fun without a lot of thoughtfulness, of course, but with its frequently too-ponderous tone, *John Carter* makes even that complicated. **EW**

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