



## John Carter and the Gods of Hollywood

*Michael D. Sellers*

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How did Disney's film become a calamity of historic proportions? Michael Sellers, a Hollywood filmmaker himself, saw the disaster approaching and fought to save the project — but without success. In *John Carter and the Gods of Hollywood*, Sellers details every blunder and betrayal that led to the doom of the motion picture — and that left countless Hollywood careers in the wreckage.

*John Carter and the Gods of Hollywood* examines every aspect of Andrew Stanton's adaptation and Disney's marketing campaign and seeks to answer the question: What went wrong? It includes a history of Hollywood's 100-year effort to bring the film to the screen, and examines the global fan movement spawned by the film.

## John Carter and the Gods of Hollywood Details

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## **From Reader Review John Carter and the Gods of Hollywood for online ebook**

### **Khanada says**

I had the privilege of reading this book before it was released, when it was still in edit mode. I was so impressed with the detail and thoroughness of the book and how it was well balanced in its approach. Hollywood and filmmaking have always been a huge fascination for me, and the drama around John Carter and its struggle at the box office is quite a tale. I also love the many great references offered so that the reader can refer to articles and such to back up all of the details that are presented.

John Carter, in my opinion, should have been a huge box office success. For most people who weren't watching the drama unfold as closely as I was, this book will give the details that explain precisely what occurred and why things fell into place as they did.

Regardless of whether you're a John Carter, or Edgar Rice Burroughs fan, if you have any interest in the politics of Hollywood, if you're film student, marketing student, or in any way involved in filmmaking, production, etc., or if you are simply curious about such things, then I highly recommend this book.

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### **Robert Greenberger says**

Michael Sellers brings his passion for all things Barsoomian to this analysis of how Disney botched the John Carter film. The book carefully lays out the history of Edgar Rice Burroughs, his John Carter stories and the influence it has had on writers and filmmakers ever since. He carefully documents from a wide variety of sources and boils it all down into easily digestible analysis. As a study of modern day Hollywood gone awry, this is fascinating.

The book is devoid of original reporting which would have made the later chapters more informative. Sellers seemed content to thoroughly datamine the public sources from print and online without once trying to get director Andrew Stanton or anyone associated with the film to look back and talk about what happened, confirming or rejecting his analysis.

Additionally, the current edition is said to have seriously cleaned up the errors from the first. There were still typos galore (McDonalds, not macdonalds) and missing words. Additionally, block quotes needed to be set off for easier reading comprehension.

Still, a valiant effort and a worthwhile read.

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### **Ku says**

I recommend this book to people who are interested in transforming a book into a movie. This book is about the process of how the John Carter of Mars novels by Edgar Rice Burroughs were made into a big budget Hollywood film, and examines the process and its aftermath.

The book has three distinct parts. First, background story on Edgar Rice Burroughs, which is interesting (I've never read ERB) and essential to understand the rest of the story.

Second part was my favorite, as it talks about the artistic process & decisions that gets made in transforming words & ideas into a movie.

The third & final part of the book is organized to show the marketing decisions that Disney made to promote this movie.

Note: this book was self-published & the eBook edition has many formatting issues & could have used better editing. However, the story is so compelling that I had no trouble over-looking the shortcomings.

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### **Michael Burnam-Fink says**

Michael Sellers has done something impressive with this book. He's made the disastrous marketing campaign and boardroom politics that sabotaged *John Carter* nearly as thrilling as one of Edgar Rice Burrough's planetary romances.

Sellers has an ax to grind. He's the man responsible for [thejohncarterfiles.com](http://thejohncarterfiles.com), the amazing fan-trailer, and as longtime Barsoom fan, he's using this book to push for sequels. Just because he has an agenda does not necessarily mean that his facts or interpretations are wrong, despite his CIA background\*.

Sellers starts by contextualizing the 100 year history of the Barsoom books and attempted film adaptations, and their impacts on modern science fiction. Then the story moves into one about an expensive and complex movie that had its executive support cut out from it when it needed it most. Despite costing \$250 million to make, and director Andrew Stanton taking more time than typical for reshoots, the film was completed within its budget and schedule. The Hollywood rumor-mill blew the scale of into an 'out-of-control rookie filmmaker' narrative to feed its unending lust for schadenfreude. Early promotional material was lackluster; dusty desert shots instead of the lush living world of Barsoom. A name change, from 'John Carter of Mars' to 'John Carter', poisoned the opinion of elite early opinion makers and stripped the film of its 100-year pedigree. The marketing team was replaced twice, and never devoted its full attention to the movie, using lackluster trailers and spots. And finally, just 10 days into the theatrical run, Disney killed its own film by labeling it a bomb, writing down losses, and pulling Asian distribution.

All of this is true, you can check the footnotes and the media links (although David Iger would probably tell you a different story). But what sealed the deal for me were the numbers that Sellers pulls. Compared to its Spring 2012 peers, *The Hunger Games* and *The Avengers*, *John Carter* had orders of magnitude lower presence on Facebook, Twitter, and in the industry press. This doesn't even account for the mind-boggling qualitatively superior marketing effort, in terms of engagement and multimodal tie-ins, for the other movies. Sellers describes *John Carter*'s marketing effort as "something an intern would do in 5 hours a week at a Burbank Starbucks", and he'd know, having set up a better marketing effort with [thejohncarterfiles.com](http://thejohncarterfiles.com) in his spare time using only public resources.

This book won't tell you how to sell a blockbuster. Mostly, it's an amazing picture of a trainwreck. I disagree with Sellers' categorization of *John Carter* as a misunderstood classic; I think it was a strictly average action-adventure flick that needed more of a heart. But that said, this book is a fascinating look inside Hollywood, and the first and last word on the *John Carter* story. A movie that had great potential was killed because

nobody had the vision or courage to stick their neck out and save it.

\*Sellers actually is a retired CIA agent. But that's just a joke, please don't drone me, bro.

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### **David Hoggan says**

I didn't see John Carter when it first came out, in spite of the fact that my friend Kerry Conran, director of Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow, was originally attached to the project, and my acquaintance, Andrew Stanton, ended up directing it. I suppose I was suckered in by the negative press and inept marketing on the part of Disney Studios that Michael Sellers addresses in the book. When I was actively pursuing a career in Hollywood around 20 years ago, I used to read "insider" books like this quite frequently, and now revisiting the genre in Gods of Hollywood, I remember now why I enjoyed stories of film industry politics and machinations so much. If you're interested in learning how a mainstream film is made and marketed (or at least how it should and should not be marketed), then Sellers' book delivers. He's admittedly a fan of Edgar Rice Burroughs and had a huge stake in the success of the film as a fan. Based on what I read, I ended up seeing the film and am now a convert. While not perfect, Stanton's film did indeed get the short shrift from Disney for a confluence of reasons. I'd have scored the book more highly, but the Kindle edition is laden with typos & grammatical errors, almost as if its publication received the same level of neglect as the film whose story the book tells.

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### **Dustin says**

I read this over the weekend because the top intereted me. Why did the quarter-billion dollar John Carter movie fail in theaters. Short answer: advertising, or the lack thereof. I've saved you from having to read through most of this book.

I won't say the book is badly written, because it's not, but there are quite a few parts that feel very repetitive because the author has one real point to make and makes it several times. I will say that the book did feel like an extended blog post and I don't think the author's obvious bias (he was a John Carter blogger before the movie came out) helps the book.

I'm hoping that in a few years someone from the inside of the production will be able to give us a better look into the the rise and fall of John Carter, but until then this should serve as a substitute.

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### **Norman Felchle says**

I'm torn between two and a half stars and three...but I'll go with three for the writer's passion. Then again...his passion isn't always a good thing. He admits he's a fan, but that's only half of it. He worships Edgar Rice Burroughs as if he were an unassailable god-genius of literature and all must submit to his perfection or suffer dire consequences.

The book is also repetitive and, in places, tedious.

It feels overlong by a third (it's 348 pages).

Another minor annoyance is the seeming lack of an editor. At times words are left out of sentences , words are repeated (like "were were") , wrong words are used...and once, a zero was used for an "o"

In short, the whole book can be pretty much summed up as, " ERB is a genius. The movie wasn't perfect, but it wasn't bad. If it had been marketed better it would have done better. There should be another movie"

348 pages is a long way to go for that...maybe I should've gone with two stars.

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### **Ben says**

Good when it's talking about the business decisions and inept marketing choices surrounding the film, less so when Sellers is talking about himself, his website and the film's supporters - could there be a sequel as some fan-made Facebook page has 10,000 likes (answer: No).

There's plenty wrong with John Carter as a film, and also Stanton's production (for example; his decision to film using the vastly more expensive film stock rather than digital, largely because it would be "cool") - none of which Sellers wants to really discuss, he's solely concerned with the marketing (or lack thereof).

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### **Adam Turoff says**

Long, comprehensive, exhaustively researched and mind-numbing account of how John Carter of Mars was mis-marketed, mis-managed and mis-handled by Disney, and was eventually still-born/murdered by the studio before becoming the biggest write-down in Hollywood history.

Clearly, Disney sabotaged the project, pursuing an ever-changing agenda between green-lighting the project, playing executive musical chairs, changing the release date, and providing only the lightest token marketing of the film.

Unfortunately, Sellers spends too much time blaming Avatar, Star Wars and 300 for strip-mining the Burroughs oeuvre, and spends very little time or thought investigating how John Carter doesn't play well to a modern audience anymore (given that it is 100 year old pulp fiction), or how Stanton's film was technically brilliant but the story telling was clearly lacking.

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### **James says**

Just as John Carter the film, which was actually very entertaining, was derailed by poor advertising and general mismanagement by Disney studio bigwigs, this book, which contains nuggets of insight into the world of film distribution and marketing, is marred by indulgent writing, too many rhetorical questions that we already know the answers to, and a horrendous lack of copy-editing, thus spelling and grammatical errors abound. It's overlong too. Still, it explained a lot about how a £250million dollar movie can be left to die by the studio that made it.

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### **Rusty says**

Well, I'm now an expert on what went wrong with Disney's, John Carter. Go ahead, ask me anything.

Did the giant Disney mega-flop, John Carter, fail due to things that had almost nothing due to the movie itself? I think so.

The book, written by a huge fan of the series of books written by Edgar Rice Burroughs more than a century ago, tells a pretty entertaining and hard to believe, even if it is all true, tale of how a movie that was a quarter of a billion dollar investment, was abandoned by the studio that was funding it years before it was to be released.

Sellers book starts with a bit of a love letter to the pulp novels, and the comic books from the seventies, and that part drags on a just a tad longer than I'd have preferred, but once the history of the efforts to get the books brought to the screen begin, it was captivating reading.

The gist of the tale is this: The Disney Exec that greenlit this movie did it at Andrew Stanton's request. This exec bought the rights once they became available and handed the reigns over to Stanton (who directed megahits Finding Nemo and Wall-e - although Wall-e was yet to be released at the time). Stanton was given a blank check to do whatever he wanted with this franchise.

Stanton put his heart and soul into it for five years, but just after this Disney exec got the ball rolling on the project there was a change of philosophy at Disney and the exec was fired. Stanton was the number 2 guy at Pixar and the no one was eager to nix a beloved project from Disney's new golden goose.

So, they honored the agreement, but then went on a strange and hard to understand trail of bizarre decisions that undercut the movie years before the release date. Stanton had a script that he said would take \$250 million to turn into a movie. He was given the okay. He wanted to make this live action movie the same way that Pixar made theirs, reworking scenes and story elements right up until the very end... so he scheduled extensive reshoots from the outset, assuming he'd need them.

Disney had never dispelled the rumor that the budget was around \$150 mil, so when people got wind of the actual budget, the assumption was that it was an out of control production. When the planned-for reshoots were conducted, everyone assumed it was because the first rough cut was a disaster... people were putting these clues together and piecing together a narrative that was making folks worry that this was leading to the next Waterworld or Ishtar... a flop of unparalleled proportions.

That change of philosophy that Disney was undergoing that I mentioned earlier? It was the shift from being a content creator to a content distributor. Pixar was being run independently, Marvel was purchased in 2009, and negotiations for the purchase of LucasFilm was well underway while John Carter was being made. Disney was competing with itself, Star Wars is the grandchild of John Carter of Mars, they target the same audience... the braintrust at Disney was starting to view this movie as a conflict of interest. They were interested in buying existing film franchises, not creating them.

I can't lay out the whole argument that this book makes in a short post, but I have to admit that when looking at the details of how many times this movie was made a scapegoat for other things (like the 200 million dollar loss Disney put on its shoulders 10 days after it was released - which many insiders believe was actually the cumulation of several other unprofitable projects that were all bundled and thrown at the feet of this movie) it's hard not to take this account seriously.

Anyone like me, who saw the movie and thought it was pretty good, and noticed that the movie did make back its production budget worldwide, will find this fascinating. Highly recommended.

I took off a star for a couple of reasons. Tons of typos litter this book. Sometimes passages go on for way too long, or a point is driven home to the point of exhaustion. But believe me, it's readable. I read this straight through for the most part. Really hard to put down.

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### **Jeremiah says**

This book is a bit of a mixed bag, but ultimately is an important one. I somewhat felt that the author padded out the book with more context than was necessary about the history of Burroughs and of the John Carter series. There was some information that I did not know already (that ERB had tried to get a comic strip made with King Features and it fell apart, only to have Flash Gordon coincidentally appear soon after) that was interesting, but did not have much bearing on the central problem that the book illuminates.

His documentation of the many failures that turned what should have been a summer blockbuster into a movie with an undeserved reputation as the biggest flop of all time is thorough and while repetitive at times, very detailed.

I remember waiting and waiting for John Carter to get even something as minimal as the Prince of Persia marketing treatment from Disney and it didn't even get that. This book explains the cascade of poor decisions that dug the film into a giant hole...and shows how even minimal effort by \*fans\* outclassed the marketing actions of the "professionals" at Disney.

As I said, the book repeats some information more than necessary and tends to constantly sum-up the same series of events, but other than that, it is important for fans of John Carter to realize that the movie did not fail on its own merits--it failed because one bad decision after another knocked its legs out before it ever had a chance to stand.

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### **Vic Heaney says**

I first read the wonderful series of books by Edgar Rice Burroughs about John Carter of Mars (which he wrote before he got round to Tarzan of the Apes) when I was a small boy. They occupied my father's bookshelves which I was devouring at the age of 10 or so. My brother still remembers me excitedly telling him how great the books were and he became a fan too - and still is.

John Carter first arrived in print 100 years ago but Burrough's imagination was so stupendous that filmmakers have felt unable, until the arrival of the digital age, to bring the books to the screen - although this has not prevented the extensive strip-mining of the books for such cinematic efforts as Flash Gordon, Star Wars and Avatar, all of which were heavily influenced by John Carter.

John Carter fans, who were legion, because these books dominated the paperback market for decades and are regarded as the basis for the whole science fiction market, have waited patiently all this time for a film company to be a) capable and b) willing, to put John Carter into the cinemas.

So imagine our excitement when, a very few years ago, we heard that Disney (?) had decided to do just that. And imagine our disappointment as it became obvious before the film came out that, despite spending \$250 Million in production, Disney seemed to have no interest in promoting the film or supporting it in any way. Imagine our amazement when we saw the film in the cinemas (in my case both the 2-D and 3-D versions - 2-D best in this case) and found it to be excellent, if not perfect, only to find that Disney publicly wrote off the film (after 11 days!) before it had even reached some of its major markets and while it was still in its first run at major cinemas - would you go to see a film which the manufacturing company had publicly labelled a flop? Despite all this the film brought in \$300 million worldwide and when it came out on DVD it immediately headed the ratings.

But Disney have no interest in producing what should have been a trilogy because they have in the meantime bought the Star Wars franchise, which would be compromised by having the story which it copies coming out of the same company at the same time.

This very detailed book by Michael D Sellers, who is not only an author but a film producer himself as well as, interestingly, an ex-CIA operative, explains all the unfortunate political decisions and sheer incompetence, especially on the marketing front, which led to this long-awaited film being so publicly branded as no good, despite the fact that it is quite excellent. It also reveals the strong fan-based movement keeping alive the idea that it should be turned into a trilogy, and why the trilogy would indeed make money.

I commend this book to readers

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### **Richard Guion says**

I spent more time reading this book than I spent watching the movie John Carter! It is a good recap and analysis from both a fan and business perspective about why the movie was so reviled by the press and Disney itself. John Carter's failure at the box office was a perfect storm of events: Dick Cook getting fired after green lighting the movie, Rich Ross and the new Disney marketing department never fully realizing how to sell the movie, a series of disastrous trailers in the US that never explained who John Carter was to the audience. Other failures were not including Dejah Thoris front and center in the marketing, and perhaps the biggest blunder of all, just calling the movie "John Carter" without the "of Mars" in the title.

The author Michael Sellers tried to help Disney on his own dime, by creating a blog and his own movie trailer that won kudos from Andrew Stanton. He tried to give Disney advice about how to market it properly, but he was ignored, partially because he wasn't an insider, and partially because Disney was putting all of its chips in the Avengers basket.

I think if you are a real fan of Edgar Rice Burroughs and wanted to know how this movie tanked at the box office, it's a good read. It made me relive my own fervent anticipation for this movie. I skipped over certain parts of the story I was already familiar with, like the creation of Tarzan and JC. I recommend reading this and then watching John Carter again.

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### **Nigel Mitchell says**

First of all, I never saw "John Carter." I thought it looked interesting, but I heard a lot of bad buzz, so I

ignored it. Only after reading this book did I realize what a mistake I had made. This book gives a thorough overview of the John Carter franchise, the production of the movie from concept to world premiere, and the aftermath of loyal fans left begging for a sequel which never comes. Besides the tragic story of a good movie sabotaged by its own studio and bad publicity, I found this book an absolutely fascinating insight into the inner workings of Hollywood. Makes you realize the movie itself is rarely the reason for success or failure. Return to Barsoom!

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