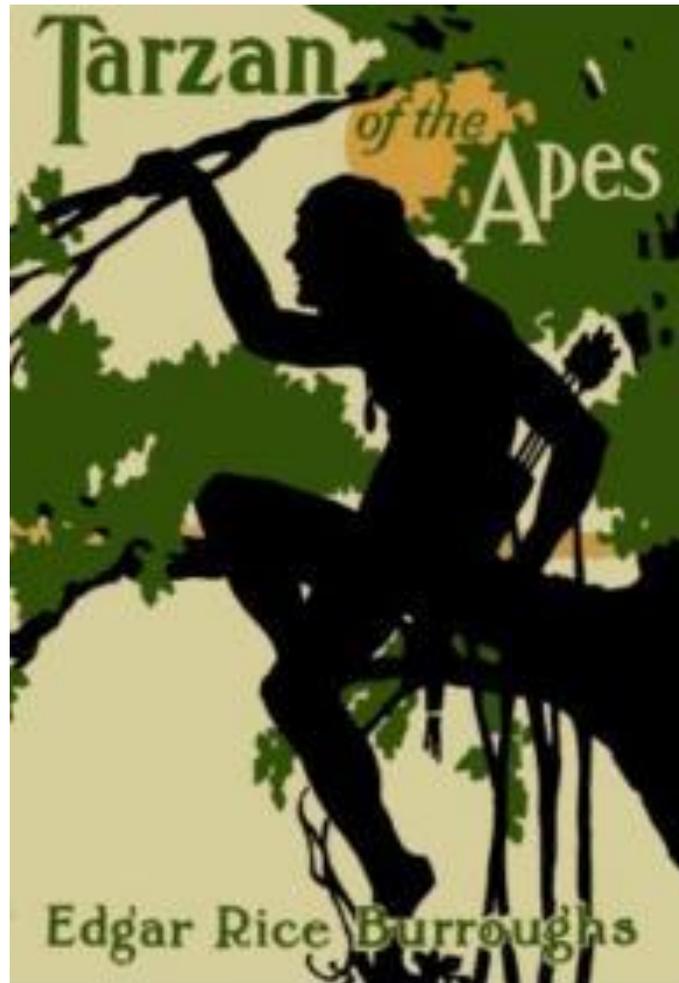


BOOK DISCUSSION KIT



*Tarzan of the Apes*

by Edgar Rice Burroughs

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## Summary

Deep in the heart of the Congo a baby boy, left alone in the African jungle after the deaths of his parents, Lord and Lady Greystoke, is adopted by an ape. Protected by his savage foster mother, the boy is raised to manhood, learning the secrets of jungle life without ever seeing another human being. When civilization begins to threaten the jungle, even he is not immune to the craft and guile of the outsiders.

## Author Information

Edgar Rice Burroughs was born September 1, 1875 in Chicago, Illinois. The son of a Civil War veteran, Burroughs attended military academies and enlisted in the 7<sup>th</sup> U.S. Cavalry after failing the entrance exam for West Point. He served for two years before being discharged in 1897 due to a heart condition.



Working a series of intermittent low wage jobs left Burroughs plenty of time to read popular pulp fiction magazines. Amazed that people were paid for writing what he considered "rot," Burroughs began writing his own stories. Targeting his work for these magazines, Burroughs sold his first story "Under the Moons of Mars" to *All-Story Magazine*. This tale would later become the novel *A Princess of Mars*.

Burroughs went on to write numerous other science fiction and fantasy adventure novels. They were set on Mars, Venus, the Moon, various lost islands and even a hollow earth. Eventually though, they were all eclipsed by his most famous creation, Tarzan the Ape Man. Burroughs even named his California ranch Tarzana after the jungle lord.

Following two failed marriages, Burroughs was living in Hawaii at the time of the attack on Pearl Harbor. Though he was too old to serve in the military, he applied for permission to report on the war from the field. Permission was granted, and in his late sixties, he served the U.S. as one of the nation's oldest war correspondents. After the end of the war, Burroughs returned to California where he suffered from ill health. He died of a heart attack in Encino, California on March 19, 1950, leaving behind a legacy of almost seventy novels. The Burroughs crater on Mars was named in his honor.

## About the Novel

First serialized in *All-Story Magazine* in 1912, *Tarzan of the Apes* was published in book form in 1914. Though it can be read as a standalone work, it became the first of more than two dozen novels featuring Tarzan, several written by others in the years following Burroughs' death.

Burroughs planned to capitalize on the overnight cultural sensation Tarzan represented. He wanted to give the public more of Tarzan in every medium, including movies and a syndicated comic strip. Experts tried unsuccessfully to talk him out of the scheme, arguing that the public could only take so much at one time and the different media would merely compete with each other. Burroughs believed the public appetite for Tarzan was insatiable, and went forward with his plans. In the end sales figures proved him right. The public couldn't get enough of the jungle lord, making him one of the first franchised characters in history, eventually appearing in print, on stage, on radio and television, in film and in video and computer games.

## If you like this novel, you may also like...

*King Solomon's Mines* by H. Rider Haggard

*Call of the Wild* by Jack London

*The Jungle Book* by Rudyard Kipling

The Doc Savage stories, primarily written by Lester Dent

## The complete Tarzan series:

1. *Tarzan of the Apes* (1912)
2. *The Return of Tarzan* (1913)
3. *The Beasts of Tarzan* (1914)
4. *The Son of Tarzan* (1915)
5. *Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar* (1916)
6. *Jungle Tales of Tarzan* (1917)
7. *Tarzan the Untamed* (1920)
8. *Tarzan the Terrible* (1921)
9. *Tarzan and the Golden Lion* (1923)
10. *Tarzan and the Ant Men* (1924)
11. *The Tarzan Twins* (1926)
12. *Tarzan, Lord of the Jungle* (1927)
13. *Tarzan and the Lost Empire* (1928)
14. *Tarzan at the Earth's Core* (1929)
15. *Tarzan the Invincible* (1931)
16. *Tarzan Triumphant* (1932)
17. *Tarzan and the City of Gold* (1933)
18. *Tarzan and the Lion Man* (1933)
19. *Tarzan and the Leopard Men* (1935)
20. *Tarzan's Quest* (1935)
21. *Tarzan the Magnificent* (1936)
22. *Tarzan and the Forbidden City* (1938)
23. *Tarzan and the Foreign Legion* (1947)
24. *Tarzan and the Tarzan Twins* (1963)
25. *Tarzan and the Madmen* (1964)
26. *Tarzan and the Castaways* (1965)

## Historical Overview

The Progressive Era in the United States was a time characterized by rapid change. The old world society of the Victorian period and the Gilded Age was giving way under the onslaught of technological innovation, scientific discovery and the new wealth of powerful industrialists. The sudden changes led to increasing class conflicts.

Labor unions were on the rise, trying to bring better working conditions to the poor. Muckraker journalists added fuel to the fire, exposing corruption and reporting scandals among wealthy businessmen. Women fought for the right to vote, while temperance leagues thought to better society by banning alcohol. Other reformers sought to improve education, streamline politics and government and limit the influence of the richest members of society.

The sinking of the *Titanic*, in 1912, brought the sharp class divisions into the public eye. Accusations of preferences given to first class passengers and locked gates blocking escape out of steerage (later discovered to be true during explorations of the wreck), called previously accepted social norms into question. At the same time, Jim Thorpe, a Native American athlete was stunning people worldwide with his performance at the summer Olympics in which he won the first ever gold medals for both the decathlon and the pentathlon. His seemingly effortless victories in event after event called assumptions of race into question as well.

The world was continuing to shrink as explorers reached the darkest corners of the world, including the South Pole. Faster and faster transportation was becoming available with the advent of the automobile and airplane industries. A series of wars began in the fractured Baltic States, and interlocking and overlapping treaties were signed, entangling the entire western world in a complex set of alliances that would lead a few years later to World War I and the end of the era.

## Historical Events of 1912

- Jan 11 Norwegian Roald Amundsen reaches the South Pole five days ahead of British explorer Robert Scott.
- Feb 3 New rules are set for U.S. football, shortening the field to 100 yards and awarding 6 points for a touchdown.
- Feb 12 China becomes a republic following the abdication of the last Manchu emperor.
- Mar 12 Juliette Gordon Low organizes the Girl Guides, later known as the Girl Scouts of America.
- Mar 23 The Dixie cup is invented.
- Apr 14 The *RMS Titanic* collides with an iceberg and begins sinking in the North Atlantic.
- May 7 The Pulitzer Prize is established at Columbia University.
- Jun 4 Massachusetts passes the first minimum wage law in the U.S.
- Jul 27 Native American Jim Thorpe is awarded the first Olympic gold medals for the decathlon and pentathlon.
- October The first installment of "Tarzan of the Apes" is published in *All-Story Magazine*.**
- Oct 8 Montenegro declares war on Turkey, kicking off the 1st Balkan War.
- Dec 18 The discovery of Piltdown Man is announced. It is later revealed to be one of science's greatest forgeries.

## Discussion Questions

1. What qualities does Burroughs believe one should find in a "true man"? How does Tarzan demonstrate these qualities?
2. Does Burroughs portray Jane as Tarzan's equal? Are there any ways in which she is better equipped for life in the jungle than he is? Are there any ways in which he is better equipped for life in civilization than she is?
3. One of the themes of Tarzan is the argument of "nature versus nurture." In the character of Tarzan, Burroughs seems to be arguing that "blood will out," with Tarzan's noble heritage overcoming his feral upbringing. Is this true of all the characters in the story? Is innate nature always more important than how a character is raised? What incidents in the story argue for either viewpoint?
4. *Tarzan of the Apes* is often seen as an evolutionary fable. How does Burroughs depict the evolution of modern, 'civilized' humans?
5. Throughout the story Burroughs contrasts the jungle and the lives of the apes with the 'civilized' world and lives of humans, specifically white humans. Which do you believe is more civilized? How is white society in the story more like a jungle? How is jungle life more civilized?
6. One of the themes of the tale is the difference between killing and murder. How is this depicted in the actions of the various characters and their respective tribes? Using this distinction as a guide, who is the most savage?
7. While Burroughs' work is often criticized for its depictions of different races, it is usually excused due to its age. Frequently, the savagery of the African tribes is explained away as the prevailing view of the period. However, is this cut-and-dried assessment truly accurate? Are there examples of both savagery and civilization on both sides?
8. One reviewer of the book wrote: "Tarzan is trapped uneasily between the civilized and the savage worlds. In this context he implicates two issues, one obvious--man's control over nature, the other less so--the effect of civilization on mankind." [BrothersJudd.com] Does civilization makes people stronger or weaker? What do you think Burroughs believed? What examples in the story support or disprove this idea?
9. At the time *Tarzan of the Apes* was first published, the western world was beginning to question many of the assumptions of the earlier Victorian era, such as economic and social class divisions as well as colonization and colonialism. How do these questions show up in *Tarzan of the Apes*? Does Burroughs seem to express an opinion on these issues?