

# The GRIDLEY WAVE

CONTACTING THE WORLDS OF EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

## TARZAN REAL TO REEL: HITS AND MISSES

Burroughs Bibliophile **George Fahy** went surfing last August and found AMC's "Real to Reel" website with some Tarzan movie anecdotes you may not have heard. Their title was "Hollywood and Vine: Investigating Tarzan" (also the name of the Canadian-filmed documentary which is still being aired on AMC). In other news *Smithsonian* magazine's next issue (March, 2001) will feature an article on ERB entitled "Tarzan the Eternal," illustrated with photos from the Burroughs Memorial Collection. In last month's newsletter we reported that Roy & Dela White had donated a letter from Doug Fairbanks, Jr. Make that "Senior!" Thanks!

... "Ye Editor"

### HOLLYWOOD REAL REEL



A champion yodeler as a child, Weissmuller invented the Tarzan yell in his first film. An MGM sound

technician augmented his bellow with a variety of effects, including a hyena's yowl played backwards, a camel's bleat, the pluck of a violin string and an opera singer's high C, all timed a split second apart to create the final call. At Weissmuller's request, a tape of his trademark howl was played at his 1984 funeral, as his coffin was lowered into the ground.

In addition to Weissmuller, seventeen men slipped into the loincloth (though its length fell like Fifth-Avenue hemlines under the prudish eye of the Production Code). And Jane? "I don't think Tarzan would have been as happy without her," says Vanessa Brown, who played the athletic lovely in "Tarzan and the Slave Girl" (1950). While Enid Markey, star of "Tarzan of the Apes" (1918) and "The Romance of Tarzan" (1920) appeared as the first screen Jane, Maureen O'Sullivan is best known for the part, which she played opposite Weissmuller. The fine-boned nineteen-year-old brunette (and future mom of Mia Farrow) first arrived in Hollywood from her native Ireland trumpeted as the "next Janet Gaynor." When parts didn't trickle in, she took some very "un-Janet-like photos" and was proposed for "Tarzan and His Mate" (1934).



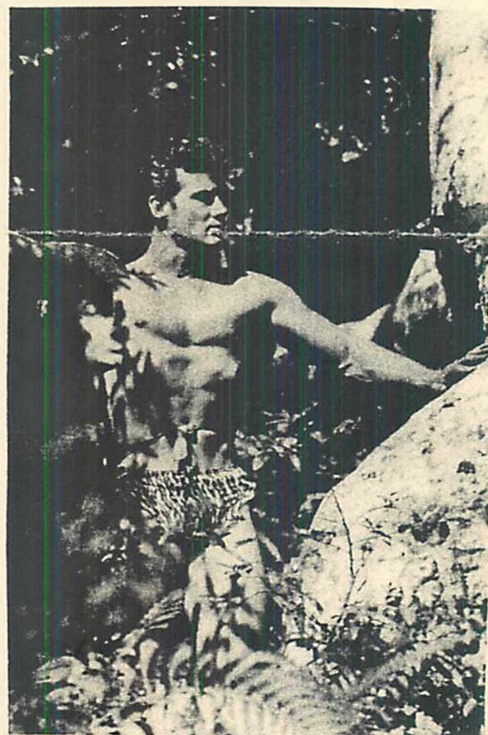
In 1939, "Tarzan Finds a Son!" introduced a curly-topped kinder-savage named Johnny Sheffield, who

won the part of Boy in a nationwide search, and went on to star in eight films. While the Hays office tolerated Tarzan and Jane cozily sharing a treehouse, it said ixnay to an illegitimate child. Hence, Find not Has; a speedy jungle adoption was arranged.

Never fading in popularity, the Tarzan films guaranteed their stars overnight fame. Says former-Jane Eve Brent: "When I did Tarzan's 'Fight for Life' (1958), it was the biggest thing going. I was the toast of Hollywood." When Brent traveled to her hometown of Fort Worth, Texas, shortly after the film's opening, she couldn't even leave her house, as stampedes of fans pawed outside for a glimpse of the latest jungle queen. But Brent received more than lifelong recognition. The blonde beauty even bears a scar on her leg from the time Cheeta the chimp chose her for his mate. "He was just being friendly," she laughs. "Or really friendly I should say." Nearly eight decades since Elmo Lincoln was lionized, the lure of Tarzan persists. Just what is it about this tale of a man with a beautiful mate and a woefully limited vocabulary? "I think part of the appeal today is that so much in life is mechanized or bureaucratized," muses Brown. "Everything we do is for money. But everything Tarzan did was because it was the right thing to do." And what syllables

would Tarzan ascribe to his psycho-socio-cultural impact? Well, let's return to one of the first, profound onscreen "words" of the great Johnny Weissmuller. To wit: "Hungawa!"

Below: Did you know that **Steve Reeves** almost got to do Tarzan on a 1952 TV series? The pilot was called "Kimbar: Lord of the Jungle" but it folded before the first episode was aired. This photo is from Steve's scrapbook.







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Foreword by  
Maureen O'Sullivan

*Edgar Rice Burroughs' "Tarzan" on Screen and Television*

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