

## **THE LEGEND OF TARZAN (2016)**

- Rated PG-13 for sequences of action and violence, some sensuality and brief rude dialogue
- \$180,000,000 budget
- 1 hr 50 min
- Directed by David Yates
- Produced by Jerry Weintraub, David Barron, Alan Riche, Tony Ludwig
- Dark Horse Entertainment, Jerry Weintraub Productions, Riche Productions
- There are at least 200 movies in the entertainment universe with Tarzan in the title.

## **QUICK THOUGHTS**

- Phil Svitek
- Marisa Serafini
- Demetri Panos

## **DEVELOPMENT**

- Warner Bros. had previously done the highly expensive "Greystoke: The Legend of Tarzan, Lord of the Apes (1984) a few decades earlier, which was only a modest success at the box office, and they were understandably nervous about embarking on another large scale version thirty-two years later
- An updated version of Tarzan had been in the works since at least 2003, with John August writing
- However, by 2008 it was reported that a different version co-written by Stephen Sommers and Stuart Beattie, that was said to resemble The Pirates of the Caribbean series was in development
- By 2011 Craig Brewer, who also rewrote a version of the script, was set to direct the film although this did not come to pass
- Instead David Yates was chosen to direct in 2012
- Other directors in the running included Susanna White and Gary Ross
- In April 2013 it was reported that the production was temporarily suspended due to budgetary concerns
  - "It's been a real struggle to match the vision with the money," says Yates, though he'd achieved that by the time the film finally went into production in February 2014. John Carter – another Burroughs property – didn't help his cause, with Disney's high-profile adaptation bombing in 2012. While, even in a dormant state, Tarzan retains wider cultural name-recognition than Carter, reviving him remains a risk in a world where the modern superhero blockbuster is all conquering. "I actually do think of this as a superhero movie," says David Barron (Yates' producer on this and his Harry Potter films). "Tarzan's senses are very finely tuned and he has this great physical prowess as a result of his upbringing. It's not a superhero movie like we're used to, though: we are treating it as a proper, grown-up Tarzan story based in reality." Yates insists this is "a modern, eco-Tarzan. His world is amazing, and it deserves to be represented properly, in a way that's really possible now, with that proper wallop of action and entertainment and scale."

- An official synopsis was revealed along with some crew, including director of photography Henry Braham, production designer Stuart Craig, editor Mark Day, and costume designer Ruth Myers as Yates' collaborators. Alexander Skarsgård was cast in the lead role of Tarzan alongside Margot Robbie as Jane, with other notable actors including Christoph Waltz and Samuel L. Jackson

#### **WRITING** (Adam Cozad and Craig Brewer)

- Avoiding the obvious route of the much-told origin story (although Yates says there are more early-Tarzan flashbacks than were planned, due to test audiences “longing for them”), screenwriters Adam Cozad and Craig Brewer introduce a Tarzan already living in England as John Clayton, Lord Greystoke. Plucking a thread from Burroughs which saw Tarzan, as early as second novel *The Return Of Tarzan* (1913), already undertaking diplomatic missions for European governments, *The Legend Of Tarzan* plunges him back into the Congo on a joint British-American operation to investigate the dubious activities of the Belgian King Leopold II
- The very first draft of the film was loosely based on two original [Edgar Rice Burroughs](#) novels, "The Return of Tarzan" and "Tarzan and the Jewels of Opar," but subsequent drafts evolved from that point to be a different take.
- “One of the reasons I liked the script, ultimately he saves her in the foreground story but in the background story she saves him. So it’s really about two human beings who save each other, in the totality of their lives.” - Yates
- Original Story by Edgar Rice Burroughs
- “One thing that was very important to me, and also spoke to David Yates, was the sweeping romance between John, or Tarzan, and Jane.” - Cozad
- "I was a huge fan of the books," Brewer recalls, "so I felt it was crucial to include certain characters and settings from Burroughs' classic tales, and, of course, that begins with Tarzan and Jane. But we wanted to ground the story in historical events surrounding King Leopold's occupation of the Congo, so it was interesting to involve them with people connected to that time and place." - Brewer
- The film is based on Dark Horse Comics

#### **STORY/CAST**

- **POINT OF DISCUSSION:** Jane & Tarzan relationship
- **POINT OF DISCUSSION:**
- **POINT OF DISCUSSION:** Kuba tribe
- On August 12, 2012, swimmer Michael Phelps was reportedly in talks to join the film to play lead as his debut to showbiz career
- On November 7, 2012, the studio was eyeing Tom Hardy, Henry Cavill and Charlie Hunnam to play the title role in the film
- On November 14, 2012, Alexander Skarsgård was added to the cast by the choice of director Yates, he'll play the title role, while Samuel L. Jackson was also being eyed to play Williams in the film
- On March 6, 2013, Yates wanted Jessica Chastain to play the female lead role as Jane Porter
- On September 26, 2013, Christoph Waltz was in talks to play as a villain in the film; he was later cast as a Belgian soldier named Captain Rom who attempts to capture Tarzan in exchange for a ransom in diamonds

- The studio had eyes on Margot Robbie and Emma Stone to play the female lead character Jane Porter
- Emma Watson, Sarah Bolger, Georgina Haig, Lucy Hale, Lyndsy Fonseca, Eleanor Tomlinson, Gabriella Wilde, Lucy Boynton and Cressida Bonas were all considered for the part
- On January 18, 2014, Robbie was confirmed to play the female lead as Jane in the *Tarzan* film along with Skarsgard, beating Stone to this role
- On June 4, Djimon Hounsou was set to play Chief Mbonga in the film
- On June 17, Osy Ikhile was added to the cast to play a supporting role but the character wasn't announced

### **ALEXANDER SKARSGÅRD (Tarzan/John Clayton)**

- [Alexander Skarsgård](#) said one of the main reasons he took this role was to impress his father. He said, "My dad is a massive Tarzan fan. Growing up, we had these VHS cassettes of the [Johnny Weissmuller](#) films and that was my introduction to the character. But those films are seventy years old and so much time has passed that I think mine is a fresh take. I'll never compete with Johnny Weissmuller, but I just wanted to impress my father. He was thrilled; he was more excited than I was."
- [Alexander Skarsgård](#) said his biggest fear in taking on the role was that his little brother, who was 7 years old, would think that Skarsgård "is a shit Tarzan." Skarsgård said his little brother looks up to Tarzan as "his ultimate hero," and he did not want to let his little brother down.
- Worked with Roisin McCarty, who's an amazing dialect coach
- Yates found Skarsgård to be the perfect Tarzan. He liked that he was born in Sweden but found a career in America, so "he has this wonderful quality of not quite belonging to one or the other" he said
- "What I like about Alex is his length, his tallness, his verticality. In reinventing Tarzan for a modern audience, I wanted this grace. I didn't want width, he needed to have a poise. He had to be an English lord, and he had to be this guy who could move through the jungle with real dexterity." - Yates
- [Alexander Skarsgård](#) joked that he would like Tarzan to be drastically different in the sequel because of the heavy workout and diet demands on him. He said, "We have an outline already in which Tarzan gains weight. Tarzan remains hairy and does not have eight pack abs. It has not action and Tarzan eats cake, lots of cake. I wrote it."
- [Alexander Skarsgård](#) was very nervous before starting his training, worrying whether he would be able to achieve the Tarzan physique. He said, "I've never done anything this extreme before and I was really nervous; it was a huge challenge. I didn't know how my body would respond to the intense training and diet. I had a very good trainer and nutritionist, [Magnus Lygdback](#), and I was extremely diligent and did everything he told me to do, and tried not to cheat at all. It was a lot of ab crunches and chicken cutlets to get that body."
- GETTING INTO SHAPE:
  - 8 months of training, a very strict diet. No sugar, no dairy products, no alcohol, six small meals a day, every three hours on the dot.
  - I had the pleasure of working with Wayne McGregor, who's one of the greatest choreographers in the world, and he was with us every day on set
  - Worked a lot with Pilates and yoga

- “Smoked fish, a lot of fish, chicken and steak. Fat was fine, but I wasn’t even allowed fruit, no sugar at all. And it drove me a bit crazy.” - Skarsgard
- [Alexander Skarsgård](#) revealed he was not very apprehensive about the skimpy costumes he had to wear as Tarzan. He said, "I don't want to disappoint the audience. It was important to me that before he met other people, the character never used to wear clothes. It would look absurd if a man raised by apes would suddenly start blushing and covering up. Tarzan would go naked, and so I had to as well. The jungle's very humid. I'm quite pleased I didn't have to wear any clothes."
- Director [David Yates](#) said that [Alexander Skarsgård](#) was always his first choice for the role of Tarzan. He said, "I knew it had to be Alex really early on. Finding a really good actor with a really good body is actually very tricky. Someone who can act very brilliantly, which Alex can, but also look fantastic without his clothes on, that combination is extremely rare and Alex has both those gifts. The Tarzan in my head was tall and vertical and had real length. I love Alex's verticality, his poise, his grace. It was always Alex for me. I went through the process of meeting other people, but it was only Alex in my mind. We basically built the role for him."
- [Alexander Skarsgård](#) revealed that he had to obtain the Tarzan physique twice for the film. The original shooting lasted eight months and he had to be in shape for that throughout. But six to seven months after the end of shooting, they went back to shoot for three days so Skarsgård had to go back on his training regime and diet for that. Skarsgård said, "I was on a strict diet and exercise plan for eight months to get in shape. It was really hard. I got called back again to do more filming months after wrapping up and I was like, 'Nooooo' because I didn't want to go back on the diet again."
- [Alexander Skarsgård](#) actively campaigned to keep Tarzan's iconic costume, the loincloth, in the movie. However, director [David Yates](#) vetoed him, and so the character wears long board shorts in the film. Skarsgård explained, "The way the script is written, it opens in London. He's Victorian and he's acclimated to life in London, and then he goes back to the jungle. David was like, 'It doesn't make sense. That little loincloth's got to go.'"
- [Alexander Skarsgård](#) conceived his characterization very much as that of a superhero. He said, "I see Tarzan as the original superhero. But he doesn't need a cape or gadgets or a mutation to be bad-ass. His superpower lies in his fists. It's about what's a human being capable of physically. It's someone who learns to work with the jungle and not against it. Producer [David Barron](#) concurred, saying, "I do see this as a superhero movie. He has great physical prowess and his senses are finely tuned as a result of his upbringing."

### **CHRISTOPH WALTZ (Leon Rom)**

- This movie marks the second time [Christoph Waltz](#) and [Samuel L. Jackson](#) were part of the same cast. They previously both appeared in [Django Unchained](#) (2012). They also appeared together in [Inglorious Basterds](#), although Jackson was only a narrator for a short sequence
- A real historical villain, during the late 1800s Leopold ruthlessly exploited the Congo for its rubber crop, resulting in mass enslavement and genocide. Modern estimates put the number of Congolese deaths attributable to his regime in the millions. With this as a context, you can hardly accuse the film of romanticising colonialism. “Obviously it’s a big exciting action film,” Yates’ Tarzan Alexander Skarsgård explains, “but this is the

reality that Tarzan comes back to in the Congo: an appalling situation that wasn't there when he was growing up."

- Outside Africa, Leopold was presenting himself to the world as a philanthropist, and when bankruptcy threatened, he appealed internationally for financial support. So Tarzan joins Williams on a fact-finding mission that quickly goes wrong. Leopold himself doesn't appear onscreen, but his dastardly interests are represented by the movie's principal villain, Léon Rom (Christoph Waltz). Both Williams and Rom are historical characters: Rom is thought to be an inspiration for the brutal Mr. Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's *Heart Of Darkness*; Washington a lawyer and Civil War veteran whose open letter to Leopold in 1890 hastened the end of his so-called Congo Free State.
- "I didn't know George Washington Williams' story until I started talking to people about this job," says Jackson, "but after that I read a lot. He was the first African American from the United States to go into the Congo and oppose the slave trade. He was an interesting guy." He's also a counter to the "white saviour" trope, by which white characters solve problems for people of colour: one more example of *The Legend Of Tarzan's* attempt to be culturally and racially cognizant.

#### **SAMUEL L JACKSON** (George Washington Williams)

- "He's a real character. Sam's character is based on this extraordinary man, George Washington Williams, a preacher-lawyer-soldier, and one of the first people to draw people's attention to what was happening in the Congo." - Yates

#### **MARGOT ROBBIE** (Jane Clayton)

- In late 2013—approached her about playing Jane, her first reaction was: Not for me. "There's no way I was going to play the damsel in distress," she says. But then she read the script. "It just felt very epic and big and magical in some way. I haven't done a movie like that."
- Speaking in an interview with *TV Week*, the Australian actress explained: "It's the 19th century (in the film) – if she's got a bit of weight on her, it's probably a good thing. I'm not going to look thin just for the sake of it."
- Margot Robbie has revealed that she refused to slim down to portray love interest, Jane Clayton, in adventure film *The Legend Of Tarzan*. Her methods of persuasion? Arguing that it would spoil the authenticity of the picture if her character was super-toned
- [David Yates](#) asked [Margot Robbie](#) to punch [Alexander Skarsgård](#) while directing their sex scene. He said, "It is an earthy moment of her enjoying sex with Alex. So I told her just slap Alex while you're making love. Give him a punch." Skarsgård said, "David wanted it to be primal and animalistic, so he egged us on. When you first meet them, they are very civilized and buttoned up. But the first sex scene is when they go back to the jungle." Robbie added, "We definitely got caught up in the moment."
- [Margot Robbie](#) dropped out of *A Bigger Splash* (2015) to do this film instead

#### **DJIMON HOUNSON** (Chief Mbonga)

- Know for *Gladiator* and *Blood Diamond*

#### **EASTER EGGS / TRIVIA**

- This film is dedicated to the memory of Jerry Weintraub, who died of a heart attack on July 6th, 2015. This was his last film

- During the 20th Century the lost, ape-raised English lord was ubiquitous. His creator Edgar Rice Burroughs alone wrote more than 40 novels and short stories about the loinclothed jungle adventurer between 1912 and 1947. Other authors (among them Fritz Leiber, Philip José Farmer and Andy Briggs) later wrote even more. There were comics, cartoons, stage plays and radio serials. And there were movies: at least 90 between the silent era and today. The most popular series, which began with Johnny Weissmuller in the title role in 1932 and ended with Mike Henry in 1968, ran to 28 films.

### **DIRECTING (David Yates)**

- Then someone who'd read it in my office said 'I really think you ought to read this, because it's not what you think.' Reluctantly, I opened the page, and then I couldn't stop turning the pages, and there was something about this human being who didn't really know where home was. He didn't know if it was in the jungle, or in his country estate in England, and he was stuck between the two, which I found really compelling. And there was something about the themes in the movie, that were beautiful, about reconnecting with the environment, reconnecting with animals, understanding animals, understanding that the environment was being threatened. This old-fashioned, iconic character was somehow connecting with present-day values that were very relevant and very important, and very 'now.' But more than anything, it was fun, it was moving, it was romantic, it was exciting, it had all the colours that the Potter movies, for me, would have. I thought 'fuck, this is the first time I've read a script that I really want to go see this movie.'
- "David had a very specific vision, but was very open to my suggestions, so it was immensely gratifying to have the feeling of being heard. He had the monumental job of bringing all the different strings of the production together and tying them into a beautiful knot, and I wanted to do everything I could to support that. He is the sweetest person you could ever imagine. He gets everything he wants that way." - Waltz

### **PRODUCTION/CINEMATOGRAPHY (Henry Braham)**

- Known for Golden Compass, Nanny McPhee, Flyboys
- "There's a palette that shifts throughout the movie, so it gives the eye enough change and shift, and it works hopefully in the right emotional way with what's happening on screen." - Yates
- TARZAN YELL: There's an element of Alex, it's made up of many elements. Alex is an element of it.
- All of the footage captured with the actors was shot on soundstages
- Working waterfall constructed at Leavesden in the UK and areas of the jungle, prairie and even a huge pier actually built by hand
- The principal photography on the film commenced on June 30, 2014, at Warner Bros. Studios in Leavesden, Hertfordshire, UK
- The filming had begun on the day announcement was made for the expansion of the studio
- Filming wrapped the same year on October 3
- Making Africa seem authentic was especially important to the filmmakers since the film was shot in England, except for six weeks in Gabon filming background without the cast
- A working waterfall and a 100-foot-long collapsible pier were assembled at Warner Bros. Leavesden studios

- According to *The Wall Street Journal*, shooting the film in Africa would have made the budget even higher
- Filming took place for a total of 70 days
- In 2012, Warner Bros. sent scouts to cross Africa at the equator, in search of locations for the film. Director [David Yates](#) was so amazed by the images they brought home, he hopped on a plane to see things for himself. For four days, Yates sat with his nose pinned to the window. The Gabon National Parks team flew him over the most remote parts of an ancient forest to show him spots like the canopy breaking for immense granite outcrops, breathtaking waterfalls and black rivers reflecting the sky like a mirror. Upon returning home, he revised the script to include the incredible features he had seen.
- The film was shot in the U.K. at Leavesdon. Once principle photography was complete, cinematographer [Henry Braham](#) flew to Gabon to capture the awesome landscapes, because Yates wanted to give his film an authentic backdrop. A specially made mount for six high resolution camera was built to capture incredible 160 degree panoramas that appear in the film. Braham flew over the forest for hours each day in search of the perfect moment.
- Though African history was important to the production, Yates didn't shoot in Africa itself. Playing the part of the Congo is his old Harry Potter stomping ground, Leavesden Studios (new Jane Margot Robbie, when Empire meets her on set, is excited to learn that we're standing on Hagrid's Hill). Only some plate shots, to "wrap Gabon around the sets", Yates says, were filmed on location
  - There's something fitting about this. The films of the '40s, '50s and '60s were similarly shot on studio back lots, with the more exotic animals slotted in via stock footage. But they were B-pictures through and through, lacking anything close to the budget Yates has to facilitate some extraordinary production design. "The old films were always a bit under-realised," says Yates. "This time we've got the resources, even though we're only in Watford!"
  - Another difficulty, says Yates, was the thickness of the undergrowth in the rainforest. 'It's hard to get a camera angle or a view or a perspective.
  - 'It's difficult to capture it in a properly cinematic way.' It was better, he felt, to imitate 'the majesty and power' of the jungle back in Watford.
- A specially made mount for 6 high resolution camera was built to capture incredible 160 degree panoramas that appear in the film. Hollywood ace pilot, Fred North, flew the director of photography, Henry Braham, hour upon hour in search of the perfect moment
- So when Christoph Waltz holds Margot Robbie captive on a paddle steamer heading down the Congo River, the actors and the boat are in a 250x250ft tank in Leavesden, while the passing scenery is of Gabon, filmed some months later with a very complex six-camera rig suspended from a helicopter as it flew over the Ivindo River

## VFX

- GORILLAS:
  - They don't actually exist, they're drawn from something that was a mixture of a chimpanzee and a gorilla, but they're bigger.
- FIGHTING GORILLA BROTHER:
  - We had a stunt stand-in who would be the gorilla. In a big suit, for the physical interaction. Alex had to throw a punch, he'd literally be fighting with thin air. Or a

ball on the end of a stick. We didn't do any motion capture, the apes are completely CG.

- "The emotional stuff was tough because it was basically a tennis ball on a C-stand. And I had to pretend that this tennis ball was an old beautiful elephant that I've known since I was a little child. And so that was quite interesting when you're standing there like, 'Oh, my old friend,'" he said, mimicking his caressing an elephant trunk." - Skarsgård
- While the flora may be physically present, the fauna – including thousands of wildebeest which stampede through the colonial town of Boma at the film's climax - are entirely digital. Which is less of a surprise than the fact that Yates and his team have avoided the performance-capture approach, even for the apes
- "I didn't want to tie myself into human performances," explains Visual Effects Supervisor Tim Burke. "We don't need our animals to do things that are unnatural for them, as they did in *Life Of Pi* or *Dawn Of The Planet Of The Apes*. Our creatures are in their natural habitat." Again, rather appropriately, the film is using something akin to those old stock-footage-animal-insertion techniques, albeit in a vastly more sophisticated manner. "We've been capturing a lot of reference at wildlife parks in Gabon and in this country," Burke continues. "We've been photo-scanning real animals. It's all been about creating a library of performance."
- Alex had lots of time with a gifted choreographer called Wayne McGregor. But the swinging stuff was very challenging, and we explored how we would deliver that in a number of ways, and ultimately we had to take a digital route with it. So that's a CG version of Alex Skarsgård swinging through the jungle, because to get that momentum and those arcs, and that sort of shape, we put Alex on the wire, we put stuntmen on wires, we put the most gifted circus performers on wires, and no matter how we shot it or covered it, it was always difficult to get a really beautiful, graceful, theatrical sense of movement. So ultimately even though we shot those other versions with people on wires, and we did extensive testing, ultimately we decided in the end, the most effective way of keeping the sort of romance and poetry of a man who felt at peace within the jungle environment, the best way was to do that digitally.

#### **EDITING (Mark Day)**

- Known for *Harry Potter*, *Ex Machina*

#### **SOUND/MUSIC (Rupert Gregson-Williams)**

- Known for *Over the Edge*, *Bee Movie*, *Click*, *Hotel Rwanda*

#### **PROMOTION**

- As part of the promotion for the film at the 2016 MTV Movie Awards, [Alexander Skarsgård](#) presented an award without his pants and wearing just a shirt, jacket and tight white underwear, showing off his muscular legs that he developed for the role of Tarzan. He said on stage, "Me Tarzan. I gotta give the fans a little skin," making a nod to his scanty costume in the film.

#### **BOX OFFICE**

- Domestic Summary
  - Opening Weekend: \$56,887,531  
(#2 rank, 3,561 theaters, \$10,819 average)
- Widest Release: 3,591 theaters



- In Release: 6 days / 0.9 weeks
- Warner Bros. set the film a release date for July 1, 2016, in traditional formats as well as 3D and IMAX 3D
- *Variety* deemed, given its \$180 million budget, that in order for the film to break even, it will have to earn at least \$400 million at the box office
- In the United States and Canada, *The Legend of Tarzan* opened alongside *The BFG* and *The Purge: Election Year* and was projected to gross to \$25–33 million in its opening weekend
- It opened Friday, July 1, 2016 across 3,561 theaters and 6,700 screens and grossed \$14 million on its opening day, including \$1.4 million in IMAX showings
- In its opening weekend, buoyed by positive word of mouth, the film grossed a better-than-expected \$38.49 million, of which IMAX contributed \$3.9 million, and \$45.6 million over its four-day Independence Day holiday frame, finishing second place at the box office behind *Finding Dory*, but first among new releases
- However, despite its opening numbers, *Deadline.com* called it a dud due to the film's lofty budget. It's better than result came in as a result of its A- CinemaScore indicating that audiences liked the film in spite of receiving overwhelmingly negative reviews from critics
- Internationally, *The Legend of Tarzan* will receive a scattered released pattern in order to take advantage of the competitive landscape and surrounding the ongoing 2016 Euro Cup soccer tournament
- Jeff Goldstein, Warner's executive vice president of domestic distribution told *The New York Times*, "This property has always really been about the international opportunity."

## RECEPTION

- IMDB: 7.1
- RT: Tatometer 35% based on 159 reviews, with an average rating of 5/10
- The site's critical consensus reads, "*The Legend of Tarzan* has more on its mind than many movies starring the classic character, but that isn't enough to make up for its generic plot or sluggish pace."
- On *CinemaScore*, audiences gave the film an average grade of "A–" on an A+ to F scale
- Manohla Dargis of *The New York Times* gave the film a positive review, stating "What makes it more enjoyable than a lot of recycled stories of this type is that the filmmakers have given Tarzan a thoughtful, imperfect makeover."
- In his review, Peter Travers of *Rolling Stone* stated "At least it's watchable. In summer, baby, that's high praise."
- Peter Debruge of *Variety* gave the film a negative review, stating "A talky and mostly turgid attempt by British director David Yates to build on the epic vision he brought to the final four *Harry Potter* movies via another beloved literary hero."
- Jordan Hoffman of *The Guardian* criticized the film for its story and writing, stating "Committed performances aren't enough to save this film from uncomfortable colonial optics, uninspiring CGI and tedious plotlines."

## SEQUELS

## FINAL THOUGHTS