

More Rare Than A Jewel of Opar

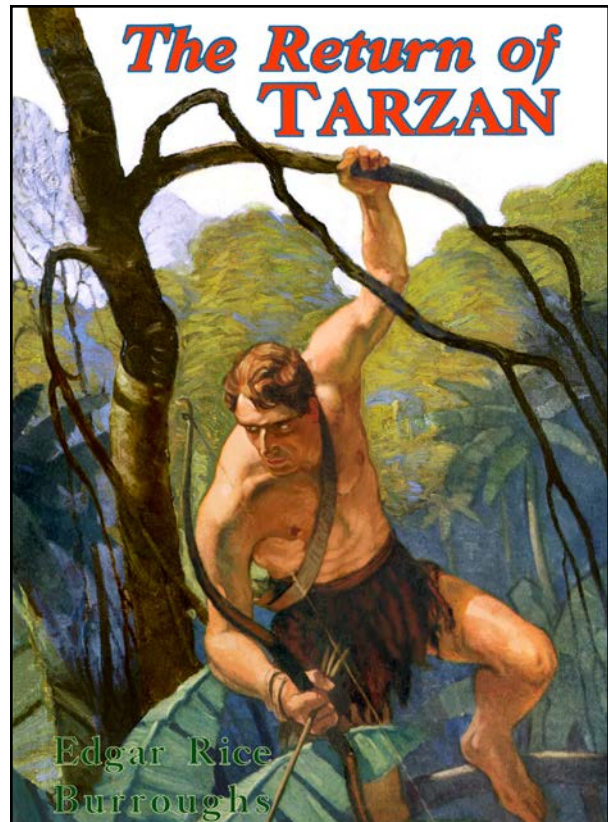
The Return of Tarzan First Edition Dust-jacket Reconstructed

The dust jacket for *The Return of Tarzan* is the most rare of all the Burroughs first edition jackets. In spite of a known six printings and a total run of 15,000 copies, almost all dust jackets for this book seem to have vanished into thin air. Even the Burroughs Memorial Collection at the University of Louisville lacks an original. In 1972 Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc. bought a Fine copy of *Return* in jacket from a collector, but that copy was stolen several years later. The only other copy positively known to most collectors is privately owned and was unavailable for reproduction reference.

In the 1980s a facsimile first edition jacket was offered for sale by an enterprising fan. The reproduction was purported to be a photograph of an actual jacket kept locked in a safety deposit box by another collector. Unfortunately, the facsimile was revealed to be a hoax when it was shown that the price mark on the spine stated \$1.35 and the actual price was known to be \$1.30 as recorded in Reverend Henry Hardy Heins' *The Golden Anniversary Bibliography of Edgar Rice Burroughs* in 1962. The copy was a faded construction made from reprinted sources. Most attempts to create a reproduction first edition jacket for *Return* have had to use either A.L. Burt Company or Grosset & Dunlap reprint editions for templates and elements.

In February, 1999, shortly after I began my project to reconstruct all the ERB first edition jackets, Robert B. Zeuschner suggested that I try to create a new facsimile for *Return*. He sent me a copy of the hoax construction for a template and I used a scan of the cover painting as it appeared in the Russ Cochran *Edgar Rice Burroughs Library of Illustration* in the hope of creating something more faithful to the original jacket. I changed the price mark to the correct amount. The text on the back of the jacket used the same copy as the A.L. Burt reprint since I believed that it was very likely taken from the McClurg printing. There was no text on the jacket flaps.

Only a few of my reconstructions were completed when I decided to get a dealer's room table at the 1999 Burroughs Bibliophiles Dum-Dum held in Tarzana, CA that August. I was happy to find the reproductions were enthusiastically received by many collectors, largely due to the resolution of the cover art, their rich, accurate color and the sharpness of the type. However, one collector, who had knowledge of the rare McClurg *Return* jacket, critiqued mine saying that the back cover copy was not quite right, but



he wouldn't tell me what the correction should be. The late Clarence B. "Bob" Hyde, long-time ERB fan and collector who had also seen the jacket some years previously, stepped up and told me that he had made a diagram of the spacing and color, font size and wording of the back cover blurb and spine for his own use. He promised to send me his notes when he got home from the convention, which he did, and I used that description to revise my reconstruction, sending him a copy for his help and to check that everything looked as he remembered it.

The jacket remained in that state for three years though I was still bothered by the fact that it was impossible to confirm its fidelity to the original. Then, in November 2002, Burroughs scholar and collector Robert R. Barrett found a trimmed back cover panel for the jacket inserted in a first edition of *Return* he had purchased on eBay. He contacted me immediately and was kind enough to send it to me so that I could make a copy of it and use it as a source for a more definitive reconstruction of the blurb. The type font was clearly identifiable as was the color, weight and size of the box border around the text. Of particular interest

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was the typo of “virture” for “virtue.” This was the small, but important, difference between the McClurg and the Burt copy. I was then able to reset the type in Recut Caslon, which I re-created digitally, to match the hand-set original.

Soon after Barrett’s discovery, and his article about it in *The Burroughs Bulletin* #55, images of the privately-owned jacket, badly faded and torn, were released and the spine typography spacing and style could be more accurately replicated. The scan also showed that the jacket had trimmed flaps, similar to those on the jacket for *Tarzan of the Apes (TOA)*. The cut-off corners are not “price-clipped,” as we usually think of such trims, but were cut to make it easier to hand-fold the jacket onto the book at the bindery.

For the cover of the jacket I continued to use the reproduction of the N.C. Wyeth cover painting, which Hulbert Burroughs bought from the Graham Gallery in 1964 and which is now part of the ERB, Inc. collection. I felt that using the painting would make for a much clearer image than the original, blurry printing. One collector controversy around the jacket involved the fact that some reprint editions show cloud-like forms in the sky background below the titling. Early Burt jackets show no such forms or show them only very faintly. The forms show somewhat stronger in the Grosset & Dunlap reprints. The painting itself has no clouds and we now know that they are not present on the McClurg first edition jacket. We have to conclude that what appear to be clouds are simply artifacts left from the original engraving process and the wear of the electrotype plates.

In January 2014, an A.C. McClurg copy of *The Return of Tarzan* was offered for sale by a San Francisco book seller. The book was wrapped in a facsimile dust jacket, beneath which appeared to be a Near Fine condition first edition jacket. Edgar Rice Burroughs, Inc. offered to purchase it after it was authenticated by Robert Zeuschner. Photos of the jacket were published on the web and, through digital enlargement, I was able to confirm the typeface of a minor element, the price mark on the spine. Due to the instability of the red ink used in 1915 the mark had been badly faded on the previous reference scan. I was then able to correct the typeface I had previously used for that element. The jacket had been well protected over the years, and was not sunned or faded. The paper color is white, just like that used on all other McClurg jackets except the TOA. While I was in the process of upgrading my reproduction, another issue came to light.

In March 2014 I was contacted by illustrator Thomas Yeates about a possibility that the N.C. Wyeth cover painting for *Return* had been retouched at some point between its printing on the McClurg jacket and the painting’s appearance and subsequent acquisition by Hulbert Burroughs. This was a subject which had been discussed privately between several collectors and ERB art fans for years, but Yeates was passionate about it. He had brought it to the attention of ERB fans at large when he was producing a three issue comic book version of the novel for Dark Horse Comics in 1997 and had the editor pose the question on the back of issue #3. Though I had looked at the painting numerous times, I had never doubted that it was any different from what was on the jacket. Because many of the Burt and G&D reprints used the same printing plates as the McClurg it can

be reasonably assumed that what we see on those jackets is the same image as on the first edition jacket, barring plate wear and problems with registration. The problem is that it is hard to find a clean, in-register copy of the jackets for either reprint. My own copy of the Burt jacket is out of register and very soft in the facial area. I decided to purchase from the Burroughs Collection at the University of Louisville a scan of the very first printing of the painting on the cover of *New Story Magazine* from August 1913 containing the third installment of *Return*. When I received it I was immediately certain that the painting, as it now exists, had been muddled in some way, that the eyes and torso in particular were different now than when the painting had been photographed in 1913.

The story of how the suspicion was substantiated is a long one — too long for this article — but it became apparent that if I wanted to continue to use the reproduction of the painting as the cover I would have to repaint those parts of the Tarzan figure to match more closely the image on the *New Story Magazine* and what I could see on the enlarged, but too soft for reproduction, images of the ERB, Inc. jacket. I put my reproduction on hold, made it unavailable on my web site, until I was finally able to find, of all things, a sharp, in-register jacket for a wartime Madison Square edition which gave me the detail I needed. Over 100 hours of investigation, comparison and digital painting went into creating a clean retouching of the Wyeth painting to achieve maximum fidelity with the first edition jacket.

I sent the results of my study and reconstruction to Jim Sullos, president, and Cathy Wilbanks, archivist, at ERB, Inc. to get their opinion and we discussed it over a long conference call. They were impressed with the detail that I had gone into to prove my, and Thomas Yeates’, point and they passed judgment on my reconstructed painting by saying that what I had sent them matched what they saw on the jacket in their possession. That was good enough for me and I put the new reproduction back up for sale.

After 100 years of speculation about the most rare of all ERB dust-jackets, much has been resolved. I have to thank the enthusiastic collectors who have helped make the reproduction a reality. They prove once again that ERB collectors are supremely generous with their time and resources. Without their help this restoration would never have come about.

The mystery of the painting remains, as does the mystery of the rarity of the *Return* first edition dust-jackets, but I am confident that I have finally restored this jacket to its most accurate representation. The only thing better would be to use a high-resolution scan of the ERB, Inc jacket itself. But that jacket is locked away for safe keeping and any possible handling, scanning or photography of it is going to be severely limited.

Anyway, who knows? Maybe you’ll find one of the 14,998 missing jackets in a little out-of-the-way bookstore and pick it up for a song.

If you are interested in what might have happened to the N.C. Wyeth painting, you can find out more here:
> [The Wyeth Report at Recoverings.com.](#) <