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## Edgar Rice Burroughs: A Century of Tarzan™

When he published his first story in 1912, Edgar Rice Burroughs was thirty-six years old, had two small children, and was selling pencil sharpeners. For him, writing was a way to provide for his family after everything else had failed. In fact, he joked that he published his stories in popular fiction magazines because his writing was “just as rotten” as the rest of the stories in them, but more entertaining.

That first short story was called “Under the Moons of Mars.” Burroughs’s second, published the same year, was even more popular. “Tarzan of the Apes” and its iconic jungle man captured the public imagination. A hundred years — and countless adaptations as graphic novels, movies, and television series — later, Tarzan is a ubiquitous part of American popular culture.

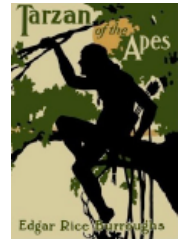


Edgar Rice Burroughs reading *Tarzan and the Lion Man* (1934).

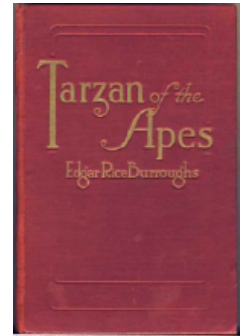
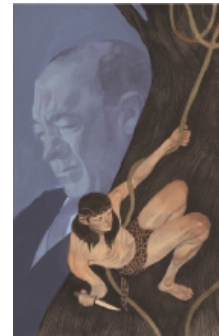
So when developing the *Edgar Rice Burroughs* stamp, art director Phil Jordan found himself negotiating the difference between a popular story and a classic. Because the issuance celebrates the centenary anniversary of Burroughs’s writing career and his best-loved character, Jordan wanted to feature both Burroughs and Tarzan in the design.

The Citizens’ Stamp Advisory Committee had already decided against a previous concept because it seemed too contemporary and cartoonish — too much like adaptations of the Tarzan story, rather than the novel itself. “The public concept began to feel like the movies and the serials,” Jordan suggests. “The book is something much more literate — much deeper, in many respects, than the movies ever were.”

Jordan turned to [Sterling Hundley](#), an award-winning illustrator who teaches at Jordan’s alma mater, Virginia Commonwealth University. After reviewing dozens of photographs of Burroughs to use as the basis for the stamp artwork, Jordan and Hundley settled on a portrait of the author reading one of his own Tarzan novels.



Dust jacket, *Tarzan of the Apes* (1914)



But finding a balance between that portrait and a portrayal of Tarzan was even more difficult. Hundley explains that in narrative art, the environment is vital. A scantily clad figure on a blank background is not recognizably Tarzan. On the other hand, a tiny stamp does not have much room for detail. “So of course I’m trying to tell the entire story of Tarzan in the beginning,” he recalls. But including the jungle and the apes that raised Tarzan proved too cluttered a composition.

At last Hundley decided that Tarzan is so famous that a few well-chosen details would be enough to identify him. A

*Edgar Rice Burroughs* (2012)

single vine evokes Tarzan's jungle surroundings, and the barely-clothed man swinging on it can only be Tarzan "speeding through the tree tops." His "shock of long, black hair" and his father's hunting knife complete the portrait of Tarzan as Burroughs described him.

In addition, Jordan made a direct connection to the original novel by using a typeface from the first non-serialized edition. The name "Edgar Rice Burroughs" on the stamp is in the same font as his name on that 1914 cover.

The final design marries a cultural phenomenon with its classic origin; and a literary genius with his greatest creation. One hundred years later, Burroughs's legacy is as vivid as ever.

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