

INTRODUCTION

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Before Jurassic Park there were Burroughs's jungles; before Princess Leia there was Jana, the Red Flower of Zoram; before the Dyson sphere there was Pellucidar; and before the Terminator there was Tarzan.

I was very young when I first discovered that people could encounter dinosaurs. My family had come to Australia with very little money, but when my electrician brother built me my own three-valve radio, I was able to migrate away from the family radio and television and listen to whatever I wished. This included serials like *Superman*, *Space Patrol*, and *Tarzan*. In one episode of *Tarzan*, an earthquake shatters the side of a mountain, and to everyone's surprise some of the huge shapes that had at first been taken to be boulders start to walk. Dinosaurs were again alive and on the move. For weeks after that episode I dreamed of seeing live dinosaurs—from a safe distance, anyway.

A couple of years later I discovered that dinosaurs might actually be living beneath our feet. The movie of Jules Verne's *Journey to the Center of the Earth* introduced me to the idea of subterranean worlds. It was about then that I realized that you do not have to be a slave to radio and television programming, or to movie distributors: the public library allowed me to read whatever I liked, whenever I liked. There I discovered the novels of Tarzan's adventures, including his trip to the earth's core.

On one level, *Tarzan at the Earth's Core* is a fast-moving ad-

venture story, but it was the concepts behind the setting that really made me sit up. Here was a world without time. The “star” that provides light at the core of the earth never dims, moves, or sets. Thus, time is ill defined for those who live in Pellucidar and is measured only by the period it takes to become hungry or tired. The inhabitants are patient because no one can think their time is being wasted when there is no time to waste. Here is, effectively, a scaled-down Dyson sphere, even though Dyson spheres would not be proposed by Freeman Dyson until 1960. The wildlife ranges from alarming to nightmarish, which made me wonder how anything living there could survive long enough to grow as large as the author claimed. Dinosaurs populate the story, which pleased me immensely, but some of them had evolved intelligence. My initial reaction to this was, “Steady on, chaps; that’s not playing fair.” The reptilian Horibs were as intelligent as humans but were also faster and stronger. Just how were human beings meant to be superior if not through their intelligence? Are people superior only when served up with mint sauce and a nice dry red? When the spear-carrying Horibs are shot down by humans with rifles in chapter 15, I felt no sympathy for those particular Pellucidar locals. My sense of fair play did not extend to anything that might look at me and think “dinner,” no matter how superior it may be.

When I grew a bit older and went to high school, I discovered that Pellucidar had some rather serious theoretical problems. For starters, gravity does not work the way Burroughs describes it. Every man, woman, dinosaur, and saber-toothed cat would fall straight off the surface and plunge into the tiny sun at the earth’s core as far as Sir Isaac Newton was concerned. Further, evidence from the seismic monitoring of earthquakes suggests that the interior of the earth is definitely not hollow. Generally speaking, high school was a time of disillusion for me. The Mariner 2 spacecraft discovered that Venus is not a steamy tropical paradise but is hot enough at ground level to melt lead, has way too much atmosphere, and has no Venusians. Next came the news from Mariner 4 that Mars has too little

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atmosphere, way too many craters, no canals, and no Martians. Thus it was that I lost interest in Mars, Venus, and dinosaurs at the center of the earth and joined a schoolboy rock band.

Being in a band meant girls were more likely to take me seriously, which might lead to dating. Thinking about dating raised another problem with the world of Earth's interior. In *Tarzan at the Earth's Core* Jana had always struck me as quite a handful, and even the fantasy of asking someone like her for a date was beyond contemplation. She was physically superior to me in every way and was, at best, liable to treat a spotty teenage rock singer with complete disdain. Worse, most of her peers would be inclined to regard someone like me as dinner rather than a dinner date. So as sources of adventure, romance, speculative ideas, and even erotic fantasies, the settings of my childhood dreamworlds were being replaced by guitars, dances, coffee lounges, and even the occasional girlfriend.

When I returned to science fiction and fantasy a decade or so later, I became interested in its history. My research brought a few shocks. For a start, I learned that the hollow Earth concept was more deeply rooted in folklore than I had suspected. Hell, Hades, and the Underworld had long been places where those who had led less than blameless lives were sent after they died, and those places tended to be located under the earth's surface. Characterization of subterranean worlds reached the pinnacle of sophistication in William Reed's *The Phantom of the Poles* (1906), in which he claimed that the earth was not only hollow but that where the North and South Poles ought to be there were instead a couple of huge holes. The northern and southern auroras were reflections of the escaped light that lit up the inner world, and some exploration ships were said to have inadvertently sailed into the place without realizing it.

My problems with the physics of the scenario were not adequately explained, so Reed's theory was of little interest to me as speculative science. On the other hand, his hollow Earth was not only like Pellucidar, it was Pellucidar. When the first of the Pellucidar novels appeared in *All-Story Weekly* in 1914, eight

years had already passed since *The Phantom of the Poles* had been published. *Tarzan at the Earth's Core* (which ultimately came about midway in the Tarzan series of novels) appeared in 1930, nearly a quarter of a century after *The Phantom of the Poles* was published. I have never been able to determine if Verne inspired Reed or Reed inspired Burroughs, but certainly what had once been a fantastically original world and concept for me wasn't at all. The idea had been well established before *Tarzan at the Earth's Core* was written.

What, then, is it like to return to this book in the twenty-first century? The language is florid, the attitudes are blatantly politically incorrect, and the antagonistic approach to nature in general and animals in particular comes as quite a shock. On the other hand, as entertainment the novel is surprisingly modern in structure. The plot moves quickly and is evenly spaced with exciting incidents and suspense. Tarzan approaches the Pellucidar of 1930 rather like the first Terminator approaches Los Angeles in 1984. Both sweep aside the rules of behavior and perform impressive feats of strength in their various conflicts with the locals. Both Tarzan and the Terminator bring out a guilty pleasure in many people living in civilized societies because while one's society can be a great source of security, it can also be restrictive to the point of frustration and even injustice. I suspect that much of the popularity of both Tarzan and the Terminator comes from their ability to do whatever they like and to brush aside the authorities.

Tarzan himself as a concept is certainly more realistic than the hollow Earth, and the idea of a human raised by animals has deep roots. In classical antiquity we have the mythical founders of Rome, Romulus and Remus, and even the demigod Miletus being raised by animals. Over the past four hundred years numerous reports tell of children raised by bears, wolves, apes, monkeys, gazelles, and even pigs, but these children are not decent and dignified chaps like Romulus, Remus, and Tarzan. The reports of real-world feral children suggest that humans take on the characteristics of the animals that raise them, including