

*Introduction to the Bison Books Edition*

PAUL COOK

By the time Edgar Rice Burroughs (1875–1950) published *Tanar of Pellucidar* in 1929, he was already well established as one of America's most beloved writers of popular fiction. His career as an author began in 1911 after a series of failed business ventures compelled him to turn to his first love, writing. Burroughs first found success when he sold *Under the Moons of Mars* (later entitled *A Princess of Mars* for book publication in 1917) to *All-Story* in 1912, in which he introduced the first of his major heroes, John Carter. Tarzan, perhaps Burroughs's greatest character, also made his initial appearance in 1912, in *Tarzan of the Apes*.

For about two decades Burroughs managed to write four to five books a year, most serialized in pulp fiction magazines such as *All Around*, *All-Story Magazine*, *All-Story Cavalier*, *The Blue Book Magazine*, and *New Story* to name just a few. To the chagrin of his editors—but not his legion of readers worldwide—Burroughs was interested in a variety of fantastic landscapes and gallant heroes, and he jumped about in his storytelling, first writing about Mars, then about Tarzan and Africa, then going back to Mars, then Africa again, and so on. He published all of his novels in serial format first, and such was their success that they almost immediately came out in book form. A. C. McClurg Publishing would publish most of Burroughs's books from 1912 (*Tarzan of the Apes*) to 1929 (*The Monster Men*). Burroughs's work also found quick success in foreign markets and in translation. His popularity was further boosted by the invention of cinema. Among the earliest full-length movies ever

made was the silent *Tarzan of the Apes* in 1918, starring Elmo Lincoln. (There would be forty-eight Tarzan movies in all and a 1970s television series starring Ron Ely, who would go on to play Doc Savage, another pulp-era hero.)

Burroughs wrote stories in his Tarzan and Mars series exclusively from 1912 to 1921, when, after writing the stand-alone novel *The Mucker* (a contemporary picaresque tale about a scoundrel who leaves America on a murder rap only to fight an isolated community of Japanese samurai on a Pacific island), he began his third great series, the Pellucidar stories. The first tale was *At the Earth's Core*, followed by *Pellucidar* in 1923. *Tanar of Pellucidar* was published in 1929 and was Burroughs's thirty-third book overall. It was, as was the case with just about every other Burroughs book, an instant hit with his readers. The Pellucidar series continued with a Tarzan novel, *Tarzan at the Earth's Core*, in 1930, and then with *Back to the Stone Age* in 1935 and *Land of Terror* in 1939. The series concluded with *Savage Pellucidar* in 1944 when Burroughs was sixty-nine and a war correspondent living in Hawaii.

One outstanding feature of all of Burroughs's series is that each of the novels in them can really stand alone. Few have cliff-hanging endings that absolutely *require* the reader to buy the next book to see what happens. This is particularly true of the Pellucidar novels. Each book is essentially complete, with the main plot elements wrapped up nicely (although every now and then there appear a few minor loose ends that eventually need to be dealt with).

The Pellucidar series begins with *At the Earth's Core* wherein David Innes and Abner Perry take a giant borer down through the earth's crust to see what they can see. When they discover that their incredible machine cannot turn around and return them to the surface, they continue, breaking through at a depth of five hundred miles into Pellucidar, a world within our world, on the inside of a hollow shell with a perpetually glowing central sun. Pellucidar is, for the most part, a late Pleistocene world

INTRODUCTION

vii

replete with saber-toothed tiger-like *tarags*, woolly mammoths called *tandors*, bears called *ryths*, massive crocodile-like creatures known as *labyrinthodons*, a few nasty *hyaenodons*, and atavistic ape-men. The regular humans of Pellucidar are ruled by a repugnant race of reptilian creatures called Mahars until these creatures are later subdued by Innes and Perry.

Early in *At the Earth's Core* Innes falls in love with the primitive but entrancing Dian the Beautiful, who is promptly abducted. Innes goes after her, and the chase is on. This is indeed the template for quite a number of Burroughs's novels (particularly after 1930 when his writing seems to lose some of its joie de vivre), which are filled with all manner of kidnappings, pursuits, daring rescues, and breathless escapes. Through it all, whether on the Moon or Mars, in the future or distant past, or inside the earth or on its surface, we get to see the strange imaginary lands and near-mythic heroes and heroines Burroughs has created.

Stories of a hollow Earth were not new to literature. Tales of heroes venturing into the underworld in search of truth or the meaning of life (or even of a beloved, as in Orpheus and Eurydice or Dante Alighieri) are as old as humankind. Such a tale is called a *katabasis* and the Pellucidar series is one. The Pellucidar stories, however, owe less to Gilgamesh and Odysseus than to the works of Edgar Allan Poe (*Hans Pfaal* and the short story "Ms. Found in a Bottle") and Jules Verne (particularly *Journey to the Center of the Earth*). While these books detail journeys in underground labyrinths, the first hollow Earth story was written by Ludvig Baron von Holberg in 1742. It was a social satire called *Journey to the World Underground*. Later on, the hollow Earth story gets embellished by a hole either at the North or the South Pole (or both) that leads directly to the inner Earth. (A side note: Tarzan travels by zeppelin to Pellucidar in *Tarzan at the Earth's Core* by entering into a hole in the ocean at the North Pole.)

The narrative formula that Burroughs uses for *Tanar of Pel-*