

The GRIDLEY WAVE

CONTACTING THE WORLDS OF EDGAR RICE BURROUGHS

Actor Johnny Sheffield Dies at 79

Johnny Sheffield, best known for playing the part of “Boy” to Johnny Weissmuller’s Tarzan in three MGM and five RKO movies, suffered a fatal heart attack on 15 October at his home in Chula Vista, CA. Born in 1931, he died at age 79, the same age as Weissmuller when he passed away.

Johnny’s father, British actor Reginald Sheffield, spotted an advertisement in *The Hollywood Reporter* that asked, “Do you have a Tarzan Jr. in your backyard?” Johnny, who had already acted on stage, including Broadway, was chosen, at age 7, out of more than 300 candidates for the part of the adopted son of Tarzan and Jane in 1939’s “Tarzan Finds a Son!” He would reprise the part in seven more films, ending with 1947’s “Tarzan and the Huntress,” Weissmuller’s second-to-last movie as the ape-man. While Weissmuller would go on to play “Jungle Jim” in 13 features for Columbia (1948-1954), Johnny Sheffield took on the starring role of “Bomba, the Jungle Boy” in 12 Monogram Pictures films from 1949 to 1955. His father then created, produced,



Johnny Sheffield at his table in the dealer’s room during the 2000 Dum-Dum in Grandville, MI.

and directed a TV pilot, “Bantu the Zebra Boy,” starring Johnny, but they could not find a sponsor. Soon after, Johnny left the film business. His father passed away in 1957, which may have had something to do with Johnny finding a new direction to his life. Later Johnny would say that he was not interested in the public aspect of film stardom, such as dealing with the adulation of fans.

Johnny earned a business degree at UCLA, then moved to Yuma, AZ, where he worked for a large company that farmed various crops. There he met and married his wife of nearly 52 years, Patty, in 1959. He went into the real estate business in Malibu and Carmel, then spent many years working for the Santa Monica Seafood Company, which imported lobsters from Mexico, as well as becoming a building contractor.

After decades out of the limelight – with the exception of a couple of interviews – Johnny Sheffield met his fans for the first time in 2000, with a notable appearance as guest of honor at the Dum-Dum in Grandville, MI. We also had the pleasure in meeting his wife, Patty. It was she who had the sad duty of notifying the news media of the loss of her husband.



Johnny Weissmuller, Johnny Sheffield, and Johnny Weissmuller, Jr. posing together on 23 March 1945. (AP file photo)



Johnny Sheffield as leading man in “Bomba and the Jungle Girl” (1952), with co-star Karen Sharpe. (Numerous “Bomba” photos are at <http://www.briansdriveintheater.com/johnnysheffield.html>.)

The Gridley Wave #337 ♦ October 2010

Published monthly for The Burroughs Bibliophiles as a supplement to *The Burroughs Bulletin*. © 2010, The Burroughs Bibliophiles, Inc. Edited by Henry G. Franke III, 318 Patriot Way, Yorktown, VA 23693-4639, e-mail BurroughsBibliophiles@gmail.com. Editor Emeritus, George T. McWhorter.

Tarzan of the Chameleons

Bibliophiles member Jim Hadac alerted us to this National Geographic Daily News item by Christine Dell'Amore posted online on 2 September (news.nationalgeographic.com/news) that reported the discovery of a new species of chameleon named for Tarzan:

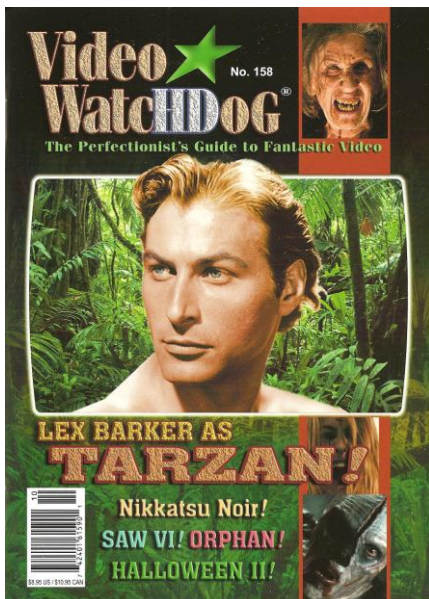
Five-inch-long *Calumma tarzan* was recently found in a tiny patch of forest on the Indian Ocean island of Madagascar, a new study says, published in the journal *Salamandra* in August 2010. The new species' name has multiple roots. For one thing, the chameleon's habitat – in what locals call the Tarzan Forest, in the central eastern highlands – is near the village formerly known as Tarzanville (recently renamed Ambodimeloka, meaning “place in the curve”). For another, the team thought naming the new species after the vine-swinging “ape man” might be a good way to “promote the conservation of this species and of course of the forest that it's living in,” according to study leader Philip-Sebastian Gehring, an evolutionary biologist at the Technical University of Braunschweig in Germany. After all, “Tarzan stands for a jungle hero and fighting for protecting the forest,” Gehring said. The Tarzan chameleon was found on a 2009 night survey in eastern Madagascar. Scientists immediately recognized the reptile as unique from other chameleons, due to its flat, spade-like snout.



The color-changing *Calumma tarzan* lizard is typically yellow or green, but adopts a striped yellow-and-green pattern when stressed. (photo by Frank Glaw)

Rampant deforestation – which has accelerated throughout Madagascar since a 2009 political coup – has turned the chameleon's habitat into a patchwork of isolated forest fragments, some no bigger than a soccer field. Combined, the fragments account for just about four square miles. The study team believes that the Tarzan chameleon will be added to the ranks of critically endangered species. Even so, the team found up to 60 chameleons in one fragment alone, suggesting the new species can survive in the remaining pockets – and that the Tarzan chameleon could still come out swinging. (Also visit news.mongabay.com/2010/0831-tarzan_chameleon.html.)

Lex Barker: “The Pure Hero”



Video Watchdog #158 (September/October 2010) features an extended article titled “Lex Barker as Tarzan: Keeping the Pure Hero Alive” by Frederic Lombardi, with the front cover also featuring Barker. This 18-page piece covers all five movies starring Lex Barker, and includes a number of B&W and color photographs. The article was prompted by the recent Warner Archives release of all five films (which we announced in *GW* #332). *Video Watchdog* “covers horror, science fiction, mystery, *film noir*, animation, exploitation, sleaze, martial arts, fantasy of all kinds, and European and Asian art and action cinema.” The cover price for this digest-sized magazine is \$8.95. This issue can be ordered online at www.videowatchdog.com. An \$11.00 charge includes First Class shipping in the U.S., while the overseas sale price is \$14.00; payment can be made by credit card or PayPal. You can also phone (513) 297-1855, or mail to P.O. Box 5283, Cincinnati, OH 45205-0283.