

Tarzan Finds a Son!

US : 1939 : dir. Richard Thorpe : M.G.M : 90 min
 prod: Sam Zimbalist : scr: Cyril Hume : dir.ph.: Leonard Smith
[John\(ny\) Sheffield](#)
 Johnny Weissmuller; Maureen O'Sullivan; Ian Hunter; Frieda Inescourt; Laraine Day;
 Henry Wilcoxon; Henry Stephenson; Morton Lowry

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Boy look! Herd of sequels stampeding this way! **Umgawa!**

Source: Those Endearing Young Charms

Movies on TV and Videocassette 1988-89
review:

"Jane and Tarzan adopt an abandoned child (whom they cleverly name Boy) and bring some new life into the series. *** "

TV Times Film & Video Guide 1995 review:

"The fourth of former Olympic swimming gold-medallist Johnny Weissmuller's six Tarzan adventures with Maureen O'Sullivan as his mate, Jane, is by far the most logical of the bunch. The African location footage was among the best used in a Hollywood picture at that time and underwater footage - shot in Florida - of Tarzan, his new-found orphan son and a baby elephant, adds to the fun. It fairly zips along, thanks to the energetic directing of Richard Thorpe, who after 33 years became the longest-serving director in the history of M.G.M (he was also responsible for "IVAN-HOE" earning a reputation as the studio's "one-take" specialist. *** "

Variety Movie Guide 1993 review:

" "TARZAN FINDS A SON" carries more credulity and believable jungle adventure than the long list of preceding TARZAN features. Tarzan and the missus save a baby in plane that crashes in the jungle. Tarzan is proudly teaching his accepted son the jungle lore when a searching party arrives to establish the death of the baby, who has come into heavy inheritance. Ian Hunter and Frieda Inescourt are out to grab the inheritance for themselves, and start plotting death of Tarzan and snatch of the youngster. Johnny Weissmuller athletically runs and swims through as the ape-man in okay fashion. Maureen O'Sullivan is the jungle wife, and gets in some good dramatic work in battling against herself to give up the youngster. Tarzan's boy, little Johnnie Sheffield, does nicely and performs his athletic chores satisfactorily."

The M G M Story comment:

"Infrequency paid off again for the Tarzan series when "TARZAN FINDS A SON" emerged almost three years after the last Johnny Weissmuller-Maureen O'Sullivan epic. Other studios produced lesser Tarzans in the interim;

the big crowds were waiting for the big one and,



as before, MGM gave it to 'em:

Jungle man experiments with new ballast on his vine-swinging forays...
Source: *The MGM Story*

more lions, elephants, monkeys, crocodiles and hokum than presented by any competitor, folks! Plus Johnny Sheffield as a jungle foundling (Tarzan and his mate somehow failed to reproduce) following his adopted Dad through every swimming and vine-swinging stunt. Cyril Hume' screenplay was directed by Richard Thorpe and produced by Sam Zimbalist, with

Ian Hunter, Laraine Day, Henry Wilcoxon, Frieda Inescort and Henry Stephenson featured."



Tarzan Finds - somebody else's - Son
Source: A Pictorial Guide to the Talkies

Those Endearing Young Charms note:

"The first of the **Tarzan** films for Johnny Sheffield also introduced the boy to film audiences. In it Johnny is adopted by Tarzan and Jane after the plane he was traveling in from Europe crashes in the jungle. The boy is trained in the life and ways of the jungle and leads a happy existence until a safari arrives to take him back to England."

[no listing in "Halliwell's Film Guide", "Leonard Maltin's Movie and Video Guide 1996", "Speelfilm Encyclopedie", "The Critics' Film Guide", "The Good Film and

Video Guide", "Rating the Movies (1990)", "The Sunday Times Guide to Movies on Television", "The Time Out Film Guide", "Video Movie Guide 1993" or "The Virgin Film Guide"]

Radio Times reviews:

"Continues a festive presentation of films featuring the legendary jungle couple, starring Johnny Weissmuller and Maureen O'Sullivan. When a plane crashes near Tarzan's jungle home, the only survivor is a baby boy. Tarzan and Jane decide to educate him in the ways of the jungle."

"Tarzan and Jane protect a boy from evil relations who want to kill him and inherit his money."

"One of the splendid MGM **Tarzans**, starring the popular Johnny Weissmuller as the Ape Man and lovely Maureen O'Sullivan¹ as Jane. Forbidden to produce children outside wedlock by the new film censorship code, the couple find a boy whose parents were killed in a plane crash, and begin a jungle version of a custody battle! It's a cleverly scripted and generally satisfying tale for young and old alike. "Boy" was played by tousle-haired Johnny Sheffield, who hardly left the jungle thereafter – when he grew older he started in a movie series of his own, starting in 1949 with "**BOMBA THE JUNGLE BOY**". Incidentally, the original ending to the movie had Jane dying, because O'Sullivan wanted to get out of her **Tarzan** contract, but she was persuaded to do two more of them and the ending was reshot. Edited [*sic*] for scenes containing animal cruelty. *** "

"Adventure starring Johnny Weissmuller and Maureen O'Sullivan. Tarzan and Jane rescue a boy, the sole survivor of a plane crash, and decide to educate him in the ways of the jungle. *** "

What's on TV review:

"Boy (Johnny Sheffield) is the only survivor of a plane crash. Johnny Weissmuller and Maureen O'Sullivan raise him as their own, but soon his scheming relatives turn up. "Ungower!" is the all-purpose catchword and, it seems, the closest the film-makers could come to an African

¹ Sexism in film reviews: to whom is Maureen O'Sullivan supposed to be "lovely"? And Weissmuller not?

language. This loincloth yarn also takes in Cheetah having fun with some face cream and Boy getting into trouble with everything from a rhino to a giant spider. 33 ”



Tarzan hate critics!

Source: Radio Times

The full list of **Tarzan** titles is so phenomenal (and the quality of production so mediocre) that most published film guides duck the task of rating them individually, as you see.

To place it in time, 1939 was the year that M.G.M. hit pay dirt with its most expensive production to date – “**THE WIZARD OF OZ**”. It was also the year the studio released its most hyped production to date – “**GONE WITH THE WIND**”. If early casting ideas on both films had been realised they would have faded from memory rather sooner. It was the year public TV broadcasts began in earnest in the US. And incidentally, Germany invaded Poland.

After just three films in seven years, O’Sullivan wanted out of her Jane role. The story as I heard it is that she and Weissmuller, while on a European promotional tour, had been received by Pope John in the Vatican, and that he had privately expressed dismay at the lasciviousness of their scanty screen costumes, the impropriety of their heathen jungle nest. Perhaps the catholic O’Sullivan took it more to heart. At any rate, in this fourth title her costume has become scrupulously demure, she has no underwater foreplay with the jungle man (Johnny Sheffield does) and a baby is literally slung into Tarzan’s arms by a passing ape to prevent the necessity for any conjugal rites. Immaculate conception, Hollywood style.

The intention was to kill Jane off in this film – a touching parting scene with Boy still remains – but fans reacted with outrage at the announcement, and the ending was rehashed to keep the family unit intact. Tarzan the lone parent would have been an amusing departure from type, but time and again in this series, the studio scriptwriters resisted any temptation of original thought. So O’Sullivan remained on board for two more films, and then the studio itself tired of the series, and sold the franchise – with Weissmuller, Sheffield and a new Jane – to RKO, who wrung every last penny from it with increasingly desperate titles promising – but never delivering – steamy jungle eroticism.

One interesting, if slight, theme of the Weissmuller **Tarzans** was their posture on big game hunting. It’s commonplace now to deplore the slaughtering holidays of heavily-armed white men, but that wasn’t the general view in the 1930s by any means, and Africa was often portrayed by the cinema as a kind of giant theme park full of moving targets. At the start of this film, Boy’s parents stare down from their plane at poorly-focussed stock footage of stampeding wildlife, and the husband idly remarks it would be “a good place for hunters”. But a few minutes later Tarzan and Jane are visibly distressed when an elephant shot by hunters limps into camp to leave its young in their care, before trudging off soulfully to the elephants’ graveyard. No question where the audience sympathies are being pointed on that score. And yet the producers saw no moral objection to pitching a panther, a leopard and several hyenas into a small clearing together in order to film the ensuing melee. A curious contradiction.

The plane crashes, then, and a squawling baby is pulled from the wreck by some chimpanzees, one of which promptly delivers it to Tarzan. Jane asks him to name the child, and Tarzan helpfully suggests "Elephant", but they settle finally on "Boy".

See also "**BADKONAK-E SEFID**" and "**BASHU**" - both recent Iranian films, and subject index under **ARAB WORLD / MIDDLE EAST**.

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