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 **SAMUEL L
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HE, TARZAN

EXCLUSIVE ALEXANDER SKARSGÅRD
ON CONQUERING THE JUNGLE, HIS
LOVE OF ENGLAND, AND WHY HE
KEEPS TAKING HIS KECKS OFF



“
Every single
muscle
is there for
a reason
”

PHOTOGRAPH (left and cover) by Michael Friberg / Corbis; by Getty Images

ALEXANDER SKARSGÅRD'S TURN AS TARZAN IS SURE TO IGNITE CONSIDERABLE EXCITEMENT, SAYS **ROBERT PIPER**, WHO FINDS THAT THE NATIVE SWEDE TAKE PREPARATIONS FOR HIS AFRICAN ADVENTURE VERY SERIOUSLY INDEED



“
The iconic image of Tarzan is all the vine swinging – and there was quite a bit of that

of a lot movement and yoga, and Pilates, and obviously weightlifting as well,” says Skarsgård. In case you missed the sickening six-pack in the image opposite, the results certainly speak for themselves.

The new movie takes place many years after Tarzan has left Africa behind; he returns to the Congo to serve as a trade emissary, unaware that he is a pawn in a Belgian captain’s (Christoph Waltz) deadly plot. “It was important for me to be nimble and agile and flexible – so that when Tarzan returns to the jungle, it’s kind of a natural habit – and he reconnects with it,” Skarsgård explains.

The character of Tarzan first appeared in Edgar Rice Burroughs’ novel *Tarzan of the Apes* back in 1912. It was a heroic tale of man adopted and brought up by an ape. It was a story that evoked the imagination of millions worldwide – and over time morphed into a whole host of comic books, TV shows, stage plays, video games, and, of course, movies.

No less than 43 (yes – 43!) live action movies featuring Tarzan have been made since 1918, making Tarzan one of the most popular characters in Hollywood history. Of course, younger generations wouldn’t necessarily be aware of this legacy – and even the new movie has been more than a decade in the making, with initial talks beginning back in 2003.

“The iconic image of Tarzan is obviously the vine swinging – and there was quite a bit of that,” Skarsgård explains. “But I can’t take credit for all of it – we had a trapeze artist come in who did some incredible things that I would never have been able to pull off.

Of course, computer-generated imagery (CGI) has really stepped up over the past ten years. One of the biggest advancements has been 3D scans of actors’ bodies – and applying them to the bodies of stuntmen. “It’s amazing what they can do nowadays with technology,” says Skarsgård. “It was quite a trip when I watched the movie, and I saw that it was me doing stuff that I would never actually be able to do. It was pretty awesome,” he continues.

“There are flashbacks in the movie to how Tarzan and Jane met in the jungle when they were teenagers. Margot (Robbie) and I shot

those scenes, and they had two teenagers come in to shoot the same scene. Then they morphed our bodies and de-aged us so it’s actually Margot and I but as teenagers, which was also quite surreal to watch.”

The PR machine has long been whirring in the build up to the movie. At this year’s MTV Music Awards, Skarsgård and *Tarzan* co-star Samuel L Jackson took to the stage to announce a category. Skarsgård came on stage with his top half in traditional black tie, and his bottom half in, well, underpants: “I don’t know – I just wanted to do something different. The image that people have of Tarzan is obviously shirtless, so I wanted to do a little twist on that,” he continues. “Shirtless is considered to be very sexy, but if you do top but no pants, then it’s not nearly as sexy.” We suspect that the wolf-whistling teenage audience may have disagreed with him on that one.

In 2013, he took part in the Walking With the Wounded South Pole Allied Challenge – alongside Prince Harry. The charity is dedicated to helping wounded members of the military. “It was just such an amazing opportunity; it’s an absolutely incredible charity. I was in the military myself, in Sweden – I was a sergeant in the Royal Navy,” he continues. “When this opportunity presented itself – to ski into the South Pole with 12 veterans that were all wounded in Afghanistan and Iraq – I was really excited.”

Skarsgård also utilised his prior military experience for his role as Sgt Brad Colbert in the mini-series *Generation Kill*. “There were so many similarities between what I did and what Sgt Brad Colbert did – both of us were sergeants, both were leaders. So I could obviously draw from that in finding the character,” says Skarsgård.

He got his first big break in the original *Zoolander* film. “I was incredibly surprised, I wasn’t even technically working over here [in the US]. My dad was an actor and he was shooting a movie out in Los Angeles – and I was here on vacation with my family just hanging out really. My dad’s manager just asked me at dinner one night. He was like

“
Skiing in the South Pole with Prince Harry for Walking with the Wounded was incredible

‘Oh, you’re an actor, and you’ve done a couple things; do you want me to send you out on an audition here in Hollywood?’”

The part that really catapulted him, though, was that of Eric Northman, in the hit HBO series *True Blood* – a role that he played from 2008 until 2014. “I met with Alan [Ball], before my audition for *Generation Kill*, a couple months before. Then didn’t hear anything for eight months, so it was one of those where I assumed that it had gone to someone else,” says Skarsgård. But then, while he was filming *Generation Kill*, he got a call from Ball that would change the course of his career forever.

Skarsgård was born in Sweden and still remembers his roots. “If I ever have a break I go to Stockholm. My family is all in south Stockholm, so whenever I have time off I try

to go there,” he says. After growing up in Sweden and serving in the military, he went to the University of Leeds. “I had a really amazing time at Leeds,” the actor reveals. “It was right after my military service, and I wanted to go to England. I had so many friends in London; a lot of Swedes go to London after college to you know, kind of have that year abroad. London is such a cosmopolitan big city, but I went to Leeds because I wanted the real English experience – somewhere where there aren’t tonnes of tourists or lots and lots of people from Sweden that I know.”

The days of anonymity for Skarsgård are coming to an end, though – as *Tarzan* is sure to propel him into the celebrity stratosphere. ■

The Legend of Tarzan is in cinemas from 6 July. See our interview with co-star Samuel L. Jackson on p56.



THE KING OF THE JUNGLE: [clockwise from opposite] Months of prep paid off for Skarsgård when it came to putting on his *Tarzan* ‘costume’; wearing a few more clothes in *True Blood*; in the South Pole for Walking with the Wounded; with his girlfriend Alexa Chung at this year’s CFDA Fashion Awards, Show in June.



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