

THE GREAT MOVIE SERIALS

THEIR SOUND AND FURY

JIM HARMON AND DONALD F. GLUT

Take a nostalgic trip back to Saturday afternoon and remember your local cinema any year from the 1930s to the 1950s. Thrill once again to the spine-tingling adventures of Dick Tracy, Terry and the Pirates, Tarzan, Flash Gordon, The Green Hornet, The Shadow, The Perils of Pauline, and all the other super-heroes and archvillains of by-gone days.



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**Jim Harmon
and
Donald F. Glut**



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Dedication

This book is especially dedicated to our friends,

Kirk Alyn

and

Spencer G. Bennet,

and to Buster Crabbe, Roy Barcroft, Adrian Booth, John English and William Witney, Howard and Theodore Lydecker, George Plympton, Jean Rogers, Dave Sharpe, Dale Van Sickel, Linda Stirling and Tom Steele without all of whom the sound serial could not have existed as we knew and loved it; and finally to

Alan G. Barbour

to whose research and private publications the authors are outrageously indebted.

Preface

It is certainly an honor to have this excellent book on serial films dedicated to me and to be given such extensive coverage in the sections on Superman, Blackhawk, and my other "chillers."

Jim Harmon and Don Glut are completely dedicated "buffs" and their tireless enthusiasm for their avocation has resulted in this thoroughly researched volume which might easily be called *An Encyclopedia of the Serial Era*.

As one who actively participated in the making of the last of these exciting "cliffhangers," I can testify to the accuracy of the author's information. Don and Jim were just youngsters when the films they discuss so authoritatively were first shown, so they are to be doubly congratulated for catching the spirit of the serial years while faithfully recording the minutest details.

This book, like Harmon's other books and articles on various aspects of show business, will arouse the reader's nostalgic memories. Fond recollections of long-past Saturday afternoons at the movies will flit through his head. He will again experience the same excited anticipation for next week's solution to this week's terrible dilemma.

I wholeheartedly recommend this book to buffs, collectors, and all those who retain pleasant memories of serial motion pictures.

It is also a privilege to have this opportunity to salute each of you who recalls favorably my small contributions to that thrilling era.

KIRK ALYN
Hollywood, California

Acknowledgments

The authors wish to thank the following people who lived through the wonderful era of the cliffhangers, either as creators or audience members and who have shared their memories with us:

Forrest J Ackerman (editor, *Famous Monsters of Filmland* magazine), Dave Amaral, Richard Alexander (the last surviving classic villain of the "B" Western), Richard Alexander (animator extraordinary, Superman serials), Kirk Alyn ("Last of the Serial Kings," so invulnerable he eats curry at nine in the morning), The Kirk Alyn Fan Club (Box 1362, Hollywood, California 90028), Dick Andersen, the late Bart Andrews (stuntman), the late Roy Barcroft (best of the bad men), Alan G. Barbour (editor, *Screen Facts*, *Serial Quarterly*, *The Serial* limited edition publications, Box 154, Kew Gardens, New York 11415), Spencer G. Bennet, Larry Byrd, Ed Connors, John Cooper, (*Hero Hobby* magazine), Alan Copeland, the late Kenne Duncan, Buster Crabbe, Ray Craig, Skip Craig, William K. Everson, Gene Fernete, Jack Gold, M. C. Goodwin, Alex Gordon, Richard Gulla, John Hagner (*Falling for Stars* magazine), Jim Harmon's Radio Heroes Society (serial-related radio characters, P.O. Box 38612, Hollywood, California 90038), Ron Haydock (writer, actor, star of Batman parody film, *Rat Pfink*), George Henderson (publisher, *Captain George's Whizzbang* and *Comic World*, 594 Markham St. Toronto 5, Canada), Judd Holdren, Eric Hoffman (owner of one of the world's largest information libraries on serials and other

popular culture media), Larry Ivie (*Monsters and Heroes* magazine), Al Kracalik, Kalton C. Lahue (author, *Continued Next Week* and *Bound and Gagged*), Woody Langley, Dan Leavitt, the late Howard Lydecker, Ferris Mack of Doubleday, Robert Malcomson (*Those Enduring Matinee Idols* magazine), Ken Maynard, Chuck McCleary, Rick Mitchell, Lloyd Nesbitt, Olive Stokes (Mrs. Tom) Mix, Kris Neville, Bill Obbagy (President, American Bela Lugosi Fan Club), James Pierce (movie and radio Tarzan), Bob Price, Kane Richmond, Robert M. Rosen, Gene Roth, Mike Royer (associated with Russ Manning in illustrating the *Tarzan* newspaper comic strip), Sam Sherman, Jim Schoenberger (President, The Cliffhangers Club), Tom Steele, International Tom Steele Fan Club, (P. O. Box 4334, North Hollywood, California 91607), Glenn Strange (who followed Boris Karloff in the role of the Frankenstein Monster, but who was also one of the most dependable villains in Westerns and serials), Bill Warren, and Jim Warren (Warren Publications, *Spacemen*, *Screen Thrills Illustrated*, *On the Scene presents Superheroes*, *Wildest Westerns*, etc.).

J.H. and D.F.G.

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A Note to the Reader

Movie serials were the best action films of any kind ever made.

The scenes of action in many major motion pictures, especially ones in recent years, do not approach the professional skill and excitement of movie serials, especially those of Republic Studios, and especially during the very brief Golden Age of 1939 to 1942. The A pictures had more spectacle, yes. Serials could not afford massive armies pitted against one another. But the spectacles of major films borrowed on the skills of serial-makers. The classic example may be the fact that the burning of Atlanta and other spectacles in *Gone with the Wind* were actually directed by second unit chief, B. Reeves Eason, who directed Tom Mix's only talking serial, *The Miracle Rider*.

Boris Karloff received his early training in silent and talking serials. Jennifer Jones and Carole Lombard got early exposure in serials. Due to the tight *caste* system of Hollywood, the stars of the serials were, for the greater part, locked into the B market, but Buster Crabbe, Kirk Alyn, and Ralph Byrd could easily have carried major productions, and came off well when they did appear in them.

The greatest shortcoming of serials was a lack of such story values as characterization and credibility. In areas that other B films always scrimped on, such as special effects and musical scores, serials did very well.

With a new generation of film enthusiasts who have only a minor interest in plot (they have seen every conceivable plot on television since they were born), there is a new interest in

serials as well-made films and only secondarily, we believe as “camp”—something so old and corny it is funny. Some serials are not funny at all. They are good films.

Strangely enough, many writers on the history of films seem literally unaware that there were serials made in the sound era, or completely dismiss the talkies. The silent era has been well documented, especially in the books of Kalton C. Lahue. We are offering the first essentially original text history on primarily the *sound era* serials, with coverage of the silents only where it is pertinent to the grasp of the over-all subject. Publishing delays of several years prevent this from being the first book of *any* type on sound serials.

Silent serials differed from the later talkies in two major ways (beside the lack of a soundtrack, of course): they were made for adults as well as children, and their plots were much more complicated. The first factor influenced the second. Early talking serials such as *King of the Kongo* retained the complex plotting of the silents. By the forties and *Perils of Nyoka*, the plots were basic but serviceable. By the late forties and *The Purple Monster Strikes*, the plots had become absolutely mindless, far underestimating the intelligence of even young children. Only the action remained. There was always the *action*.

In this work, we have discussed many films, both serials and related short subjects and full-length features. We have tried scrupulously to refer always to serials as either serials or chapterplays. Feature films that are complete in one showing of over an hour are referred to as features. Television series and television episodes are properly identified.

The source materials for serials—often comic strips, or more rarely radio programs or books—have been discussed because they are pertinent to screen adaptation, and because, we feel, that those interested in these serials will be interested in the parent source as well.

While this is primarily intended as a book of nostalgic entertainment, we believe it can also serve as a reference work. To help the reader avoid extensive cross-checking, certain facts have been repeated. You will read that John Hart not only played Jack Armstrong on the serial screen, but did only one season as the Lone Ranger on television more than once.

As a collaborative team, it is Donald F. Glut who has the greater personal interest in serials and information on them, and Jim Harmon who has had a wider background in general writing. However, we hope that neither Glut nor Harmon will be subjected to immediate mob action if somewhere in this mass of names, dates, and facts there may prove to be an error. Rather than treating us to your outrage, please correct our ignorance so we may use the new information for any future editions.

Meanwhile, we have done our best.

Jim Harmon
Donald F. Glut
Hollywood, 1972

THE GREAT MOVIE SERIALS
Their Sound and Fury

I

The Girls *"Who Is That Girl in the Buzz Saw?"*

THE PERILS OF PEARL

The headliners of the early silent serials were primarily pretty young women, who engaged in breathtaking perils and a seemingly endless list of situations designed explicitly for their slow, drawn-out elimination.

In the early part of the twentieth century, when women had not yet attained the freedoms they enjoy today, the motion picture serial primarily featured girls in the leading roles doing business at once risky and risqué. A woman who would be out of place puffing on a cigarette in the opening decades of this century would, on the other hand, reap no scorn for plunging off the side of a cliff in a careening touring car. Nor would she be whispered about behind her back for pumping her railway handcar into the cowcatcher of an onrushing locomotive, or hanging with tiring fingers from the top of a high building and slipping . . . slipping . . . slipping . . .

And as did the male serial stars of later years, these heroines managed to thwart the masculine baddies despite every obstacle, triumphing over the mysterious doings of their masterminding archenemies in the last episode. In many instances, the situations endured by these seen but not heard chapterplay queens were *more* spectacular than those encountered by the men. And certainly, they were more original, since during that era of movie-making the perils were still new and fresh to the screen. It was only in later years that the cliffhangers presented an end-

less catalogue of car crashes, warehouse explosions, and falls from cliffs, the solutions to which were always predictable.

These serial queens, although naïve in trusting their unknown enemies, were brave and rugged. Despite the apparent glamour, they underwent their trials and overcame them. Perhaps these silent serial queens were living proof, as reported by men of science and medicine, that females are actually better suited for strain and hardship than men. We might, then, re-evaluate our definition of the “weaker” sex.

The very first movie serial ever made starred a girl as the one to fall under the evil gaze of the villain and become the victim of his devious machinations. It was *What Happened to Mary?*, made in 1913 by the Edison Company. A slightly overweight Mary Fuller starred in this virgin serial. She portrayed an innocent young girl (as were all serial queens) with a sizable inheritance. Naturally, the money was coveted by the villain who devised a number of ways to dispose of Mary and gain the inheritance for himself. (This was a standard plot in silent chapterplays.)¹

Serials of this period differed considerably from the later chapterplays, primarily in their endings. While the standard serial episode ended with a cliffhanger—a climactic scene in which the hero or heroine is apparently killed or slated for imminent death, the name coming from the standard scene of the star hanging by slipping fingers from the edge of a cliff—those of the early silent chapterplays were relatively complete stories, connected by a central though sometimes hard to discover plot. Mary would then find herself in some dangerous situation concocted to get her life and money, would somehow be rescued, and then, after the suspense had been relieved, the end titles would flash on and the chapter would fade out. Apparently, Thomas Edison and other serial producers either felt that audi-

¹ Featured in the cast was Charles Ogle, who played the Monster in Edison's version of *Frankenstein* made in 1910.

ences would not have a sustained interest in the story or characters to make them come back a week later to find out how Mary and her kind would somehow regain consciousness and chew through their bonds before the log upon which she lay fed the whirring buzz saw, or else they just never thought of the cliffhanger ending.

Some of the things that happened to Mary included her pursuit by the bad guys to a window, from which she escaped on a makeshift rope of joined bedsheets. If that weren't enough, Mary continued fleeing to safety to the very doors of the Salvation Army. Such a heroine should know it was not always the smartest thing to be overly courageous, but found nothing wrong with waiting behind a screen for a crook to rob an office safe, then to engage him in a brief struggle, and hold him at gunpoint until the police arrived.

What Happened to Mary? was a success, due to its uniqueness, however far it was from any semblance of art. But just as Edison's production of Edwin S. Porter's *The Great Train Robbery* brought the "story" to film-making, so did this episodic curiosity give birth to a type of entertainment that would flourish for forty-three years, and leave countless fans clamoring for more even today (there was more: a sequel, *Who Will Marry Mary?* in 1913).

It was the following year, however, that the serial motion picture was really established. In 1914, the chapterplay which, although differing substantially from most of the serials ever made (especially those of the talkie era), *The Perils of Pauline* was produced. What is most remarkable is the fact that, although the production is more like the serials abandoned soon afterward and is extremely primitive in all respects, *The Perils of Pauline* remains today as the one serial the average man knows by name. Say the word "serials" to most anyone walking down the street and (aside from the enduring folk humor about

Post Toasties) you will most frequently hear something to the effect of, "Oh, you mean like *The Perils of Pauline*?"

The star of this eclectic serial was a pretty, wide-eyed young woman, who covered her natural red hair with a blond wig on the screen. She was an actress who looked good in both formal gown and dirty dungarees . . . Pearl White, who is now regarded by film historians as *the* Serial Queen. Just as the *Perils of Pauline* has become the most famous movie serial of all time, so does Pearl White remain in memory as the most famous star of cliffhangers.

In the first chapter, "Through Air and Fire" (although chapter numbers and titles were given only after the serial's reissue), Pauline was left a fortune to rival that of her predecessor Mary by her late guardian. Pearl, pure and honest, trusted everyone including the not-to-be-trusted Koerner (played by eye-shifting Paul Panzer). Koerner then attempted to steal the inheritance through a series of extravagant schemes—the perils. His first try at doing away with Pauline was to send her adrift in a sky-climbing balloon which took her high over the Hudson River to the Jersey Palisades. The girl was saved from death by her ever-faithful, though chaste, boyfriend, Harry Marvin (played with sincerity by Crane Wilbur), who was always nearby when the perils arose. Rescued from the danger of Air, she had yet to experience the Fire to justify the chapter title. Pauline was kidnapped, then trapped in a burning building. She was left for dead until heroic Harry arrived just in the nick of time and saved her. Again, the chapter closed *after* the resolution of the perils instead of ending with the apparent death of Pauline.

Pauline's perils, although centered around the villain-wants-inheritance theme again, seemed a set of unrelated stories with equally dissimilar locations and casts of supporting villains. In the second installment, "Goddess of the Far West," Pauline went to Montana to forget the perils of the balloon and the

flames, but found anything but relaxation. She was again kidnapped by Koerner's thugs and spirited off to an Indian reservation. In this second chapter we were given reason to speculate as to the schooling, or lack of it, the people responsible for the serial's title cards had before getting jobs in the film industry. Misspelling a word is one thing, but creating a new word with an hilarious new meaning is another. Thus, imperiled Pauline was not described in the titles as being in danger of her "immortal soul" . . . but of her "immoral soul." The oversight failed to attract the attention of director Louis Gasnier, whose efforts in this serial were exciting and remain nostalgic—but certainly not artistic or entirely adequate.²

Assisting Gasnier with the directing of some of the Pearl White serials was a young man named Spencer Gordon Bennet, who would one day be known as the most prolific action director in the motion picture industry.

In "Goddess" the Indians, attempting to dispose of the "immoral" Pauline who now wore the traditional attire of a squaw, were carrying on like savages. They were dressed in full war costume and hooting from their place at the top of a canyon. Then they rolled a huge boulder down the canyon wall to splatter Pauline, who was helplessly waiting below. Luckily, Harry Marvin was nearby, and, with a rope, yanked the distraught Pauline away from the crushing chunk of rock.

Koerner's vast legions of cutthroats to keep Pauline in peril ranged from the more subtle gangsters to the more spectacular savage and warring (1914) Indians and related types. Pauline, always believing in the "benevolent" Koerner, was subsequently

² William K. Everson, in "The Silent Serial," published by Allen G. Barbour in *Screen Facts*, first issue, 1963, stated: "PERILS was sloppily constructed and badly directed by one of the worst directors the movies have ever known, Louis Gasnier. (Not surprisingly, though, he kept working steadily, and was busy turning out mediocrities for Paramount well into the thirties, at a time when such former giants as D. W. Griffith and Herbert Brenon were pointedly ignored by Hollywood.)"

almost killed in an airplane, the wing having been cut by her unknown enemy; nearly blown up as her ship was destroyed by a maniacal pirate; nearly drowned in a sinking submarine; and nearly poisoned by the fatal bite of a viper, placed in a basket of flowers by a gypsy woman. (Gypsies in silent films were invariably cast as thieving, conniving, kidnapping villains, as were Mexicans and other low-pressure minority groups.)

In another episode, "The Floating Coffin" (a favorite chapter title of the later sound serials), Pauline and Harry took a boat ride across the lake and encountered engine trouble. Of all places for the boat to stall—and coincidence was one of the things serials were made of—Pauline and her beau found themselves in the United States Navy's firing range, right on target. The Navy opened their guns, riddling the small boat with bullets. This time all seemed lost, as Harry, who usually rescued Pauline from her predicaments, was also in the *same* predicament! But Pauline was a quick-thinking girl, and had thought quick enough to bring her faithful dog along for a boat ride. Writing fast, Pauline tied a note to the dog's collar and told the canine to swim to safety with the message that saved their lives.

It was only in the last chapter, not surprisingly, that Pauline discovered the true evil nature of Koerner, and with the help of Harry Marvin defeated him, leaving the two virtuous characters free to marry. Harry had been as pure as Pauline through all her dangers, and now his honor would be rewarded with a home life in the most conventional of suburbs (he must have asked himself if it was worth it).

The Perils of Pauline had come to an end. But Pearl White continued to star in the type of film she had become identified with—the chapterplay, all of them being shot in Ithaca, New York, and Fort Lee, New Jersey.

In 1915, she made a similarly titled serial, *The Exploits of Elaine*, a better chapterplay than *The Perils of Pauline*. It

featured an unknown or mystery villain called the Clutching Hand, the prototype of all the Scorpions and Crimson Ghosts and Captain Mephistos of the future. The next year, Pearl battled another titled villain in *The Iron Claw*.³ This chapterplay boasted all the trappings of the mysterious Orient—dagger-throwing Chinese assassins, secret passageways, staring eyes, and other yellow perils. Both the Clutching Hand and Iron Claw were played by the menacing actor Sheldon Lewis, whose villainous silent movie roles included a version of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* in 1920.

Most serials of the talkie era—even some Westerns—incorporated some element of science fiction into their themes. In this sense, *The Exploits of Elaine* was prophetic, bringing into the plot a weird ultrascientific device whose beam was fatal, in the ninth chapter, appropriately named "The Death Ray." Episodes with titles such as "The Frozen Safe," "The Poisoned Room," "The Vampire," "The Blood Crystals," and "The Devil Worshipers" give an idea of only some of the terrors and perils faced by Elaine. The tenth episode actually saw Elaine killed—literally. This was a condition which most serials threatened, but which never became actualized. Elaine's friend, Craig Kennedy the scientific detective, must have been reading Mary

³ These villains proved durable. In 1936 Stage and Screen made a sound serial called *The Clutching Hand* starring the ever-popular cliffhanger star Jack Mulhall as Craig Kennedy, assigned to stop the villain of the title. The Clutching Hand was attempting to secure for his own greedy ends the secret for a new process for manufacturing gold. Detective Kennedy was to get the secret for the good of the U.S.A., never stopping to consider that his own heroics might *destroy* that same company and his own salary by upsetting the national—and world—economy. Luckily, the formula turned out to be a phony.

The Iron Claw was remade by Columbia in 1941 as a fifteen-episode production starring hero Charles Quigley and heroine Joyce Bryant. The Iron Claw, a diabolical villain out to steal a hidden trove of, again, gold, not only wore the glove-like device which gave him his name, but also facial bandages, dark glasses, and a pulled-down hat that made him look more like the Invisible Man of Universal Features.

Wollstonecraft Shelley's *Frankenstein*. The chapter was called "The Life Current." And Kennedy used his own invention to restore Elaine to life so that she could endure the perils of four more installments.

Pearl White continued making serials until 1923. During those years she encountered a vicious ape man in *Plunder* (1923), and various henchmen and traps in chapterplays like *The Black Secret* (1919) and *Pearl of the Army* (1916). In the latter serial, she fought a black-masked criminal, The Silent Menace, in hand-to-hand combat. After the struggle, the stronger male pushed Pearl out of the window, ending another of her perilous chapters.

Despite the long list of Pearl White serials, it is with *The Perils of Pauline* that her memory truly remains.⁴

With the success of Pearl White in silent serials, many other actresses with a yen for action and thrills began starring in cliff-hangers and falling victim to their own 1920s perils. Helen Holmes preferred serials that involved railroad settings. In one of these, also starring Helen Gibson, *The Hazards of Helen* (1915), a title designed to capitalize off *The Perils of Pauline* with a total lack of subtlety, Helen saved a freight train by

⁴ As some of Pearl White's serials were later remade in sound, so was her classic that first presented her to theatre audiences. A later talking version of *The Perils of Pauline* starred Evalyn Knapp as the girl of perils, which included attacking jungle cats and bombing airplanes, plus the evil workings of a sinister Oriental villain. The cast of this twelve-chapter epic included Pat O'Malley, William Desmond, Robert Allen, James Durkin, and the Satanic-looking John Davidson. It was written by Ella O'Neill and directed by Ray Taylor. The production was rated "Excellent serial" by *Motion Picture Herald*. A highly fictionalized biography of Pearl White, starring Betty Hutton, titled appropriately *The Perils of Pauline*, was made in color by Paramount in 1947. And in 1967, in the color Universal feature *The Perils of Pauline*, Pamela Austin starred as Pauline with Pat Boone her loyal and wholesome beau. This latter film tried in vain to recapture the flavor of the original and to capitalize on the then-flourishing "camp" craze.

shooting at a semaphore from a locked room. In another installment, she found herself tied in classic fashion to the railroad tracks as the train came ominously nearer. The serial had an unbelievable list of one hundred nineteen chapters! Ruth Roland, whose serials exploited the grandeur of the great outdoors, became entangled with more spectacular perils. She was once rescued from the top of a freight train by her boyfriend who swooped down in his biplane and dropped her a rope ladder. Another time, Ruth was on the roof of a freight car that had broken free of the train and was speeding along the tracks to a sheer drop-off.

All seemed lost until her boyfriend, true to form, swung down with a rope—à la Tarzan—and saved her from the plunging doom, leaving the train car to fall off into space. Yet in another cliffhanger, Ruth Roland slid across two mountains on a rope hung over a wire, which joined one peak to the other. Then the wire . . . snapped! Ethlyne Clair found herself carried away by one of the screens first werewolves, *The Wolf Devil*, in the serial *Queen of the Northwoods* (in 1929) directed by Spencer G. Bennet and Thomas L. Storey. This might not have been a werewolf in the standard movie tradition. But it did comply with some species of werewolf in legend and superstition wherein a man masquerades and acts like a canine. This villain dressed as a wolf, complete with an all-concealing wolf's headpiece to disguise his real identity, and mysteriously commanded a pack of snarling wolves. After the Wolf-Devil disposed of Ethlyne's boyfriend, he chased her to the top of the stairs, into a room, approaching like a bloodthirsty beast. The window being her only way to freedom, the girl climbed outside where she hung over an even worse type of death. Below was the villain's yelping, salivating pack of hungry wolves.

None of the girls could keep the wolf from the door forever. By the 1930s and the advent of sound, men had taken over doing the heroics in cliffhangers.

QUEENS OF THE JUNGLE

Republic Pictures made the first sound serial to star a cliff-hanger queen. It was *Jungle Girl* in 1941. The studio had decided to try something new—new to talkies that is, since serials had tended to cast male leads in the chapterplays of the 1930s. Republic had plans to return to the old proven formula of placing a pretty heroine amidst the terrors created by some scheming mastermind, this time in a jungle locale. But now the archfiend would attempt more than merely pilfering the hapless girl's inheritance. And in at least one example, that arch-enemy would be another girl.

The serial queen had returned with the added quality of sound. Before we could only see the heroine face apparent doom and watch her pretty countenance contort with a silent scream. Now there was the added realism of actually hearing her shrieks as she neared the jagged flesh-hungry teeth of the revolving buzz saw.

The first Republic serial to star a girl in the lead was set in the familiar jungles of Africa. It was very loosely based on a 1932 novel, *Jungle Girl*, written by the creator of Tarzan, Edgar Rice Burroughs. Republic retained the title of the book for their serial, then went about in their usual manner and changed things according to their own discretion. The hero of the novel, American physician Gordon Kin who battled a nutritional deficiency existing in a lost jungle civilization, was ignored. Instead, Jack Stanton (played by Tom Neal), a typically heroic white hunter, was substituted for the serial role. The *Jungle Girl* herself was given the name of Nyoka—a name which would eventually become famous through a second serial and a long series of comic book adaptations, totally ignoring the Burroughs origin.

Nyoka, the *Jungle Girl*, was portrayed in the serial by one of

the sexiest-looking actresses ever to battle evil on the chapter-play screen, young and dark-haired Frances Gifford. Frances was completely enticing in her tailored leopard-trimmed jungle minidress and boots. It is not surprising that many fathers, who would otherwise have preferred staying home to listen to Joe DiMaggio going to bat on the radio or to putter around the garden, personally took their children to the theatre for fifteen consecutive Saturdays to see each installment of *Jungle Girl*.

Nyoka "Meredith," as Tarzan of the Apes, was raised in the wilds of Africa. Her father was a physician who was forced into self-exile because of the actions of his criminal and identical twin brother, Bradley (both portrayed by Trevor Bardette). He then joined forces with a jungle medicine man named Shamba (Frank Lackteen) and an American crook, Slick Latimer (played by Gerald Mohr, who bore an uncanny resemblance to real-life public enemy, John Dillinger). Together, they stopped at nothing to get at an invaluable diamond supply. But Nyoka, with the help of Jack Stanton and his humorous sidekick Curly Rogers (Eddie Acuff), managed to thwart the trio of villains, but not before barely escaping from hazards like plunging into a seemingly bottomless chasm, killed by poison darts, incinerated in a jungle fire, and crushed by a smiling gorilla (played unconvincingly by Emil Van Horn).

Jungle Girl was an exciting serial, directed by the greatest team of action directors, William Witney and John English. The chapterplay's forte lay in the stunting Dave Sharpe did for Frances Gifford. If he had been too embarrassed to dress as Nyoka and swing through the trees, the *Jungle Girl* would have been less impressive on the screen. For the footage of Sharpe doing his acrobatics from vine to vine and limb to limb were better, more spectacular, than those performed in the higher-budgeted Tarzan features made by Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

The serial was well received by audiences, but died prematurely with no chance of future theatrical or television revivals

due to copyright complications.⁵ But Republic looked toward that future when the studio decided to film a sequel to *Jungle Girl*. Since it was Republic that created the name Nyoka, they were within their rights to do another serial using that name, but not basing the character on the Burroughs novel. In this way, they would have all rights to the serial, and not have to pay royalties to Burroughs. The second chapterplay was the 1942 *Perils of Nyoka*, a title which recalled the silent days of cliff-hanging. Directed solely by William Witney, this fifteen-episode serial lavished in increased production values, making *Perils of Nyoka* far superior to *Jungle Girl*, and possibly the best jungle serial ever made.

Nyoka had a new serial, a new last name ("Gordon") and a new actress to portray her on the screen. Kay Aldridge was striking, full breasted, yet somehow boyish, slightly out of character every time she called "Fahther!" She wore the more civilized garb of a female big game hunter. Apparently, the *Jungle Girl* no longer made her own clothing, but purchased it down at the local African trading post.

Also, the *Jungle Girl* was given a new boyfriend and defender, Dr. Larry Grayson, portrayed by Clayton Moore years before he donned the black mask as television's Lone Ranger. Larry and his superior, Professor Campbell (Forbes Murray), had acquired an ancient papyrus which told how to locate the lost Tablets of Hippocrates. There is only one person who can translate the inscriptions on the papyrus—the queen of the jungle, now going under the new name of Nyoka Gordon.

⁵ The contracts made between Republic Pictures and the various sources from which they made many of their serials often resulted in legalities stating that certain productions could not be shown after a particular date. Therefore, the Republic serials like *The Lone Ranger* (1938), *The Lone Ranger Rides Again* (1939), *Drums of Fu Manchu* (1940), *Adventures of Red Ryder, King of the Royal Mounted* (1940), *King of the Mounties* (1942), *Captain America*, and *Haunted Harbor* (1944) have been unfortunately withdrawn.

INT. PROFESSOR CAMPBELL'S STUDY-DAY

NYOKA *holds the ancient papyrus, reading aloud and translating from same. Gathered around her are* DR. LARRY GRAYSON, PROFESSOR CAMPBELL *and* TORRINI, *supposedly an ally of hers.*

PROFESSOR: What does it say, Nyoka?

LARRY: Can you translate it?

NYOKA: Yes. (*beat; reads aloud then*) The first section tells of the Golden Tablets of Hippocrates on which are inscribed medical secrets—including the cure for a dread disease.

PROFESSOR: Undoubtedly that refers to Cancer.

NYOKA (*reading aloud*): When Egypt was conquered by the Romans these tablets together with a vast store of treasure were removed and hidden away.

TORRINI: Does it say where?

NYOKA: Not exactly. But it tells a way to find out. We must go to the Lair of the Eagles and after penetrating to its far end we will come to the Tunnel of the Bubbling Death.

PROFESSOR: Tunnel of the Bubbling Death! Weird sort of name, isn't it?

NYOKA: Passing through the tunnel we will then reach the Ancient Valley of the Tauregs.

TORRINI: Tauregs?

PROFESSOR: Originally they were cave dwellers.

NYOKA: Within the Taureg Caves there is an inscription which points the way to the Golden Tablets of Hippocrates.

LARRY: And the priceless medical knowledge to aid humanity.

TORRINI: Of a certainty, Doctor. But many dangers lie ahead of us.

Within a very short while their expedition into the Arabian desert was underway, with Nyoka all the while searching for her missing father, Professor Gordon (portrayed by elderly and lean Robert Strange).

When news of the Campbell expedition reached the area, another female, the wicked Vultura (played by luscious

Lorna Gray, later known as Adrian Booth) and her band of converting-by-the-sword Arabs, stole the papyrus. Together, Nyoka and Larry made their way into Vultura's temple. But Vultura had an ace up her robes—a furious, yet comical gorilla named Satan (again, Emil Van Horn), who attacked them, pulling the pillars that supported the temple, tearing down the building on Nyoka and Larry, and ending Chapter One, "Desert Intrigue."

Only their quick reflexes—and a broken wall providing an exit—permitted Nyoka and Larry to escape the falling debris which could have made the shortest serial on record.

Perils of Nyoka continued through a total of fifteen weeks, presenting more than the standard jungle fare. There were frequent slashing sword battles between Larry and the savage Arabs. And many of the cliffhangers were placed in elaborate and imaginative settings, with powerfully directed furious action, extremely effective lighting, and quick cutting to liven the pace. In Chapter Three, "Devil's Crucible," Nyoka plunged down toward a bubbling, steaming pool of molten lava, luckily falling to a stone ledge at the beginning of the next episode. Chapter Four, "Ascending Doom," took Nyoka and Professor Campbell on a moving floor, rising toward a ceiling of stalagmite-like spikes, until Larry rescued them the following week. In the sixth installment, "Human Sacrifice," Nyoka learned the whereabouts of her lost father—or father. But her knowledge had come too late. For she had been captured, bound, and was being lowered by a crude apparatus into a fiery pit. And the chieftain carrying on with the execution was her father, suffering from the amnesical loss of memory so frequent in popular entertainment of the 1940s. Again, it was Larry who saved Nyoka, by roping her Lone Ranger fashion and pulling her to safety. Among the other perils undergone by Nyoka, the Jungle Girl, was a plunge off a cliff in a chariot, being burned at the stake like a witch, and tied beneath a descending, swing-

ing bladed pendulum, a contrivance that would have gladdened the heart of Edgar Allan Poe.

Supporting Vultura in her schemes were the Arab killer Cassib (Charles Middleton, "Ming" himself) and a youthful, dark-haired Torrini (played by Tristram Coffin, whose name was misspelled in the album cast as "Tristam"). Torrini appeared to be an ally of Nyoka and Larry until later revealing his true allegiance to the exotic ruler. In the tenth chapter, "Treacherous Trail," Torrini had tried kidnapping Nyoka and Larry. When his station wagon plunged off the side of a cliff and exploded, it seemed evident that all three had met a violent death. But Nyoka and the young doctor managed to escape from the car before the catastrophe occurred.

In the final episode, "Satan's Fury," Vultura had escaped to her temple with the discovered and stolen Tablets of Hippocrates. But Nyoka and Larry were after her and broke into the wicked lovely's lair. The wrestling match between the two girls, their naked legs entwined, had something for everyone. Satan the gorilla went berserk and hurled a spear during the fight at the Jungle Queen. But the weapon whizzed by its intended victim and thudded with fatal impact into the shapely body of Vultura. Larry blazed away time after time with his gun at the ape, but finally the monster was stopped only by a dagger thrust from Nyoka. Outside, the rest of the expedition finished Vultura's Arab hordes. The shock of all these events restored Gordon's mind. The wonder is it didn't cost his daughter hers.

Perils of Nyoka has outlived *Jungle Girl*, since it was not based on the Burroughs' book. It was rereleased years later as *Nyoka and the Tigermen*. And a feature version, *Nyoka and the Lost Secrets of Hippocrates*, can be seen on television. The latter title was one of a package of twenty-six Republic serials re-edited to one hundred minute full length movies sold to television in 1966.

Kay Aldridge, after her role as Nyoka, continued her serial

career with Republic, making two more chapterplays, *Daredevils of the West* in 1943 and *Haunted Harbor* the next year. While the locales for these two productions were nowhere near Africa, they did present Kay with an equally dangerous set of perils. *Daredevils of the West* was a twelve-episode adventure, starring Allan Lane (later "Rocky" Lane) and featured Eddie Acuff, who had appeared in *Jungle Girl*, again as a sidekick. The serial, involving a war between competing stagecoach lines, presented the usual Western cliffhangers, several of which involved death by fire. *Haunted Harbor* (rereleased as *Pirate's Harbor*), based on the story by Dayle Douglas, and starring Kane Richmond, was the story of hidden treasure, a giant mechanical sea monster that rose from the water with steaming breath, and a hero wrongly accused of murder. In various episodes of this one, Kay was nearly speared to death, trapped in a burning truck, and squashed as an automobile tumbled down a hillside to fall on top of the vehicle containing her and Richmond. As her male counterpart Tarzan had learned, the "Jungle Girl" discovered civilization could be a jungle itself.

Republic Pictures attempted a revival of the jungle queen during the last years of serial-making. Attractive Phyllis Coates, just out of her role of Lois Lane on the *Superman* television series, starred with "Clay" Moore in *Jungle Drums of Africa* (1953), an uninteresting arrangement of stock footage and clichés involving uranium in the jungle.

It was not, however, until 1955, in the second to last serial ever made by Republic, titled *Panther Girl of the Kongo*, that Phyllis shed her city clothes and donned scanty jungle garb. The resemblance to Frances Gifford's Nyoka was more than coincidental. She wore the same costume, giving more than suspicions that audiences were in for plenty of stock footage from *Jungle Girl*. The Panther Girl suddenly emerged wearing leopard-trimmed attire.

But serials had greatly declined by the 1950s in all respects.

The elaborate and thrilling chapter endings, as seen in *Perils of Nyoka*, had been reduced to the standard falling tree, the groping and shoddy gorilla, and the plunge from the always present cliffside. To boost the dying entertainment form, Phyllis as jungle girl Jean Evans (even the names had lost their exotic sound) was given a threat to tangle with that was totally unlike the usual Republic hazard. This menace was an enormous crab, appearing in the first chapter, "The Claw Monster," enlarged through the scientific madness of the sinister Dr. Morgan (Arthur Space). Dr. Morgan used such monsters, plus a band of animal-suited hirelings, to frighten the superstitious jungle people away from his diamond mines. But despite this added injection and excuse for special effects photography (Phyllis Coates running before a process screen showing close-ups of the arthropods), *Panther Girl of the Kongo* could not save the Republic serial from extinction. The first and last female serial star from that studio wore the same jungle garb. But the clothes and every setting and situation they appeared in, in 1955, was secondhand and worn out.

REPUBLIC'S REIGNING QUEEN

The Tiger Woman, filling her spotted outfit with curves, and her boyfriend, handsome Allen Saunders, his expression and his shoulders carved from the same block of wood, were trapped inside a house used as a bombing target by the merciless crook, Morgan. The hoodlum was circling the small building in his monoplane, dropping grenades, each exploding with more telling accuracy. In another drop, the building would be hit, and the Tiger Woman and Allen blown to bits.

Allen Saunders considered the situation in a flash as he grabbed up a machine gun. He could not allow the Tiger Woman, so beautiful in her brief jungle outfit of slightly inap-

appropriate "leopard" skin, yet so efficient when it came to fighting evildoers, to perish in the impending holocaust.

He took careful aim with the tommy gun as Morgan's plane swooped in for the kill. Then Allen let out a burst of hot bullets, spraying the dive-bombing craft. Morgan slumped forward, struck fatally. But there was still enough life in the villain for one last effort to destroy the Tiger Woman and her boyfriend. With grim determination, Morgan guided his wavering hands to the control stick of his plane, then aimed his explosive-laden ship kamakaze style toward the target house. A moment later, there was a tremendous impact of plane and house, both exploding into a cloudy barrage of flying, burning debris.

The chapter was the eleventh, and suitably entitled "The House of Horror." But it was not, of course, the final chapter of this serial, Republic's 1944 outdoors adventure, *The Tiger Woman*.

In the next episode we saw the Tiger Woman and Allen flee the building scant moments before the airplane collided into its walls.

The Tiger Woman, a twelve-episode production directed by Spencer Bennet and Wallace Grissell, was Republic's major attempt to create another Pearl White. The studio wanted to mold its own action female who would star primarily in their own chapterplays and program features. The ideal selection, who would wear the leopard garb in *The Tiger Woman*, was a statuesque, young actress with a firm jaw and sensual lips, named Linda Stirling. Added to these qualifications which were required in this role of another female Tarzan was her athletic abilities.

In a sense, Linda Stirling's success was partially due to the late star of silent cliffhangers, Ruth Roland. Ben Bard, Ruth Roland's widower, had opened an acting school using the money left by his wife. It was at this school that Linda learned much about acting.

Linda followed her dramatic schooling with various modeling

assignments. Luckily, one of the magazine advertisements featuring Linda Stirling fell before the gazes of the "right" people at Republic Pictures. They immediately contacted her agent, who passed on the news that her big break might be on the horizon.

It was, but Linda was still not sure of what awaited her. For, instead of a screen test, she was given a test, more or less one that might be given a rodeo contestant, to see just how athletic she really was. Linda was put astride a horse and asked to show what she could do—including leaps over fences, fast dismounts, and lightning gallops. She did them all, but none of her stunts were recorded on film.

Linda, tired and still confused, was told the next day that she had the part. It was the lead role in the first of many serials for that studio, *The Tiger Woman*. Republic Pictures had a new girl star.

Some part of the reason for a return to the serial queen must have been a knowledge of the sexual appeal of the dominant woman to many males. Miss Stirling slapped, kicked, flipped, spun, and whiplashed countless men in her serials. She was in turn struck and bound with ropes and chains. The erotic element may have been subliminal, but it was present. Linda Stirling combined two elements, one or both of which were absent in earlier sound era serial heroines. She had both "sex appeal" and "class." The first made her attractive and the second made her "acceptable."

Linda Stirling's first serial involved the rivalry between two oil companies for deposits located in the South American jungle. The head of the villainous company was Walton (played by perennial Western bad guy, LeRoy Mason), who would stop at nothing to get the deposits for himself. In his employ was the hoodlum Morgan (Mexican actor George J. Lewis) and a band of hired thugs capable of any type of crime.

Allen Saunders (played by Allan Lane, in his first serial since *Daredevils of the West*, with the second Nyoka, Kay Aldridge) was working for the opposing and good oil company, and went to the jungle for help. At first, the natives prepared to drop the gringo into a pit of flaming oil, but he was pulled back to safety by the Tiger Woman, a strangely civilized white goddess ruling the tribe of primitives. The Tiger Woman agreed to fight alongside Allen, and together with another oilman, José (played by Duncan Renaldo who would become famous as television's Cisco Kid), they fought the greedy villains.

139. EXTERIOR JUNGLE TRAIL: MEDIUM:

A point where the limb of a tree overhangs the trail just a little higher than the rider's head. MORGAN spurs through, dragging the girl's horse behind him and as she comes under the limb, the TIGER WOMAN reaches up and seizes it. The horse goes out from under her and the saddle, leaving her hanging from the limb the saddle dangling from her ankles.

139 A & B. COVER CUTS FOR ABOVE ACTION

140. EXT. Jungle Trail: MED.

SHOOTING BACK along the trail as MORGAN rides to f.g. still leading the riderless horse. THE TIGER WOMAN lets go of the limb and drops to the ground. MORGAN turns and sees this and starts to check his horse. But just then JOSÉ, on BOLTON's horse, appears galloping in from the background firing as he comes. MORGAN changes his mind and continues ahead and out PAST CAMERA, dropping the reins of the riderless horse.

141. EXT. JUNGLE TRAIL: MED.

THE TIGER WOMAN lies on the ground, her hands still bound and her feet lashed to the stirrups. JOSÉ skids his horse to a stop, drops from the saddle and runs to her.

142. EXT. JUNGLE TRAIL—MED. CLOSE.

On JOSÉ and the TIGER WOMAN as he starts to cut her loose. She speaks quickly and breathlessly.