

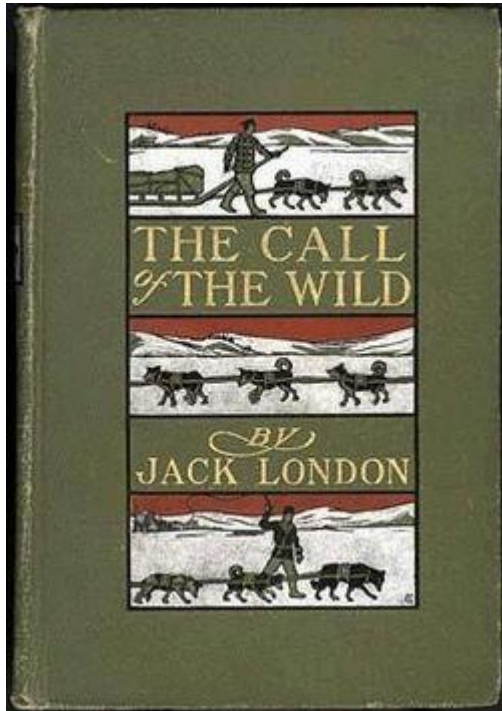
The Call of the Wild

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The Call of the wild



First edition cover

Author(s)	Jack London
Illustrator	Nolan Gadiant
Cover artist	Evan Adkins
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Language	English
Genre(s)	Adventure novel
Publisher	Macmillan
Publication date	1903
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Pages	179
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The Call of the Wild is a novella by American author [Jack London](#) published in 1903. The story takes place in the extreme conditions of the [Yukon](#) during the 19th-century [Klondike Gold Rush](#) where strong sled dogs were in high demand. After Buck, a domesticated dog, is

snatched from a pastoral ranch in California, he is sold into a brutal life as a sled dog. The novella details Buck's struggle to adjust and survive the cruel treatment he receives from humans, other dogs, and nature. He eventually sheds the veneer of civilization altogether and instead relies on primordial instincts and the lessons he has learned to become a respected and feared leader in the wild.

The Call of the Wild is London's most popular work and is considered the masterpiece of his so-called "early period."^[1] The novella is often classified as children's literature because of its animal protagonist, but the maturity of its subject matter makes it valuable for older audiences as well. Major themes include [survival of the fittest](#), civilization versus nature, and [fate](#) versus [free will](#).^[2]

The Yeehat, a group of [Alaska Natives](#) portrayed in *Call of the Wild*, were a figment of London's imagination.^[3]

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[\[edit\]](#) Epigraph

“Old longings nomadic leap,
Chafing at custom’s chain;
Again from its [brumal](#) sleep
Wakens the [ferine](#) strain.”

The novel opens with the first quatrain of [John Myers O'Hara](#)'s poem, *Atavism*.^{[4][5]} The stanza outlines one of the main motifs of the novel, that Buck, raised in the "sun-kissed" [Santa Clara Valley](#), has reverted to innate instincts of wolf-like savagery due to his captors' brutality and their having thrust him into the [harsh Northland environment](#) where *The Law of Club and Fang* reigns supreme.

[\[edit\]](#) Plot

Buck, a powerful [St. Bernard-Scotch shepherd](#) dog,^{[6][5]} lives a comfortable life in California's Santa Clara Valley as the pampered pet of Judge Miller. One day, Manuel, the Judge's gardener's assistant, steals Buck and sells him in order to pay a gambling debt. Buck is shipped to Seattle, during which he is harassed in his crate and given nothing to eat or drink. When he is finally released from the crate, he confronts and is beaten by the "man in the red sweater", learning respect for the club. Buck is bought by a pair of French-Canadians named

François and Perrault, who think he is one in a thousand. They take him to Alaska and train him as a sled dog where he quickly learns how to survive the cold winter nights and the pack society by observing his teammates. He and the vicious, quarrelsome lead dog, Spitz, develop a rivalry. Buck eventually bests Spitz in a major [fight](#), and after Spitz is defeated, the other dogs close in, killing him. Buck then becomes the leader of the team.^[7]

At some point, the sled dog team, including Buck, is sold to a "Scottish half breed" man working in the mail service. The load the dogs carry is incredibly heavy, and the journey they make is tiresome and long. After a long time with this owner, the dogs are beat down and so tired that they can no longer make the trek.

Eventually, Buck is sold to a trio, Hal, Charles, and a woman named Mercedes, looking to make a fortune finding gold. They know nothing about sledding nor surviving in the Alaskan wilderness. They struggle to control the sled and ignore warnings not to travel during the spring melt. They first overfeed the dogs, then when their food supply starts running out, they do not feed them at all. As they journey on, they run into John Thornton, an experienced outdoorsman who notices that all of the sled dogs are in terrible shape from the ill treatment of their handlers. Thornton warns the trio against crossing the river, but they refuse to listen and order Buck to move on. Exhausted, starving, and sensing the danger ahead, Buck refuses and continues to lie unmoving in the snow. After Buck is beaten by Hal, Thornton recognizes him as a remarkable dog and is disgusted by the driver's treatment of him. Thornton cuts Buck free from his traces and tells the trio he's keeping him, much to Hal's displeasure. After some argument, the trio leaves and tries to cross the river, but as Thornton warned, the ice gives way and the three fall into the river along with the neglected dogs and sled.^[8]

As Thornton nurses Buck back to health, Buck comes to love him and grows devoted to him. Buck saves Thornton when the man falls into a river. Thornton then takes him on trips to pan for gold. During one such trip, a man makes a wager with Thornton over Buck's strength and devotion. Buck wins the bet by breaking a half-ton sled out of the frozen ground, then pulling it 100 yards by himself, winning over a thousand dollars in gold dust. Thornton and his friends return to their camp and continue their search for gold, while Buck begins exploring the wilderness around them and begins socializing with a wolf from a local pack. One night, he returns from a short hunt to find his beloved master and the others in the camp have been killed by a group of Yeehat Indians. Buck eventually kills the Indians to avenge Thornton. After realizing his old life is a thing of the past, Buck follows the wolf into the forest and answers the call of the wild. Every year Buck comes to mourn for Thornton at the place where he died.^[9]

[\[edit\]](#) Development

Buck, the main character in the book, is based on a Saint Bernard/Scots Shepherd sled dog which belonged to [Marshall Latham Bond](#) and his brother [Louis Whitford Bond](#), the sons of Judge [Hiram Bond](#), who was also a mining investor, fruit packer and banker in [Santa Clara, California](#).^[10] The Bonds were Jack London's landlords in Dawson City during the autumn of 1897 and spring of 1898; the main year of the Klondike Gold Rush.^[10]

[\[edit\]](#) Adaptations

Several films based on the novel have been produced. The [1935 version](#) starring [Clark Gable](#) and [Loretta Young](#) emphasized the human relationships over Buck's story. The 1972 *The Call of the Wild* starred [Charlton Heston](#) and Mick Steele. A television film starring [Rick Schroder](#) was broadcast in 1993 that focused more on the character of John Thornton.

Another adaptation was *Call of the Wild* television series broadcast in 1997

The Call of the Wild: Dog of the Yukon (1997) starred [Rutger Hauer](#), narrated by [Richard Dreyfuss](#) and adapted by [Graham Ludlow](#). Three [Leonberger](#) 'actors' (one was a female, and two males) played the starring dog "[Buck](#)"^[11] a Canadian rendition of [Jack London](#)'s *Call of the Wild* starring [Rutger Hauer](#) as John Thornton (narrated by [Richard Dreyfuss](#)).^[12] This breed chosen in this movie was not the one identified as [Buck](#) in the novel.

On June 12, 2009, [Vivendi Entertainment](#) released "[Call of the Wild in Digital Real-D 3D](#)", a family-oriented adaption feature-length film.

The TV special *What a Nightmare, Charlie Brown!* has a plot similar to that of *The Call of the Wild*.

In June 2009, American composer [Jeff Wayne](#), best known for [his musical version of The War of the Worlds](#), stated that he was currently working on a similar musical adaptation of *The Call of the Wild*. However, Wayne has stated that it is unlikely that he will complete it until the *War of the Worlds* live stage production has finished.^[13]

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- [^] [London 1998](#), p. xi.
- [^] [Zhang 2010](#), p. 1.
- [^] [London 1997](#), p. 101.
- [^] [London 1998](#), p. 3.
- [^] ^{*a b*} [London 1903](#), [Chapter 1](#).
- [^] [London 1998](#), p. 4.
- [^] [London 1903](#), [Chapter 1](#)–[Chapter 4](#).
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- [^] *Call of the Wild – Dog of the Yukon* at [Internet Movie Data Base](#).
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- *The Call of the Wild* (1903)
- *The Kempton-Wace Letters* (1903, anonymously co-authored with [Anna Strunsky](#))
- *The Sea-Wolf* (1904)
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