



## I, Tarzan: Against All Odds

**Jean-Philippe Soulé**

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*The fascinating memoir I, Tarzan is about overcoming personal struggles in order to accomplish cherished dreams.*

Jean-Philippe Soulé's inspiring memoir *I, Tarzan* covers his daring pursuit of adventure and recognition.

Soulé grew up in France, near the Pyrenees. His parents abused him in emotional ways. He longed for adventure and to travel—at first because of his childhood idol, Tarzan, and then because of explorer Jacques Cousteau. But his dreams were dismissed by his family members and teachers.

The good and bad events of Soulé's life are chronicled in painstaking detail, beginning with the traumatic events, including bullying, that shaped his deep insecurity, which first took the outward form of timidity, and later of bravado. Soulé channeled his teenage rage into fighting, smoking, and drinking; he was in constant conflict with most authority figures, and fell into problematic behaviors. Later, a compassionate, perceptive teacher persuaded him to drop his self-destructive behaviors, nurturing his interest in sports and mountaineering. This led to healthier coping mechanisms. When he was eighteen, Soulé dropped out of school and signed up for military service, where he soon joined an elite group, the Mountain Commandos. At twenty-six, he became the full-time adventurer he'd always wanted to be.

Soulé's despair and anger come across most clearly early in the text, which is unflinching in its depiction of hard topics. In addition to longstanding neglect, abuse, and bullying, the book records an attempted gang rape by a superior, as well as the physical and emotional consequences of such events. But these difficult accounts are balanced by records of joy, including from the two years Soulé spent in the Mountain Commandos, and during the adventures he undertook after finishing his military service.

This is a compelling book whose language is concise, clear, and poignant in depicting Soulé's emotional reactions to its events. A strong sense of setting carries it, from Soulé's early life surrounded by the mountains and in cities, to the jungles and rivers he encountered later. The memoir conjures images via both careful and foreboding descriptions that respect the dangers of nature, and with charming anecdotes about swimming with sharks and octopi in the Red Sea.

Although the memoir is one part of a series, and ends when Soulé is twenty-six, it can be read as a standalone, thanks to the underlying topical thread that links all of its events together. Its ending has a sense of closure, but also of new beginnings that are informed by its events. Soulé's progression from hopelessness to hope is steady, even though it's marked by setbacks, and the book's conclusion is a satisfying one as a result.

The fascinating memoir *I, Tarzan* is about overcoming personal struggles in order to accomplish cherished dreams.

CAROLINA CIUCCI (August 11, 2021)

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