

# FROM DAYS GONE BY

## Chapter 17...

On many nights, travelling with Apparicio, I had remained wake for long hours, listening to the myriad sounds of the jungle, and seeking to identify them and to interpret their meaning. This is instinctive with those who travel in wild places and sleep by a camp fire at night; but that was nothing like the feeling I experienced this night.

I found myself staring into the blackness beyond the dull rim of light from the glowing fire, and feeling the strange mystery of the jungle at night. There were things not identifiable, or even capable of being sensed outwardly. Yet I felt them within my own senses. They were like ingredients of my solitary vigil... For example, I closed my eyes at one moment and tried to understand what the *tigre* would do, if it were prowling around the camp site. I con-

### Fifth in the series...

Excerpts from classic hunting and outdoor literature.

This issue's excerpt was selected by the Club's Director of Big Game Records from **Tigrero** by Sasha Siemel, published in 1953.

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A true story of adventure in one of the wildest places on earth, told by a hunter who fights giant man-killing jungle cats with a spear.

cluded it would watch us, and then skulk off, having no possible reason—unless it was hungry—for attacking that red glowing spot in the blackness. I looked into the black ring of trees and tried to understand the deep quiet of the jungle at night; and I think I actually understood how an animal would feel, crouching in suspension between sleep and wakefulness, having no desire to attack any living thing, but ready to defend itself at the slightest unfamiliar sound. There are many animals that prowl in the jungle at night, and a few of these I heard... the soft gnashing of teeth of the *cayetú*; and once I saw a gleam of eyes beyond the fire. I reached for my rifle, but whatever the animal was, it scurried off and I resumed my vigil.

By the time the first streaks of light began to outline the trees and the marsh grass to the east, I was fully awake and actually refreshed; and above all, I felt as if I had passed through a

kind of inner change. The vigorousness of the morning air, which was cool at this time of the year, filled me with a sensation of strength and sureness which I had not felt the day before. It was as if the night I had passed alone in the deep silence of the jungle had poured into me a confidence and an awareness of the jungle's power, and also of my own power. I still felt that sense of solitary responsibility for what I was doing—for my own life, and the lives of the animals; but I no longer had any doubt as to my own capacity.

Valente picked up the trail less than an hour after we left the night camp; and before the sun was above the rim of the *capão* to the east, Beduino was running along after the dogs. I knew from the tone of Valente's bark—a deep baying, that came full out of the dog's throat, rather than a whining yell—and from the straight run the dogs made, without scurrying to one side and the other, that the *tigre* was not far ahead.

I rode along the rim of the forest, keeping within range of the dogs' barks; and as Beduino plunged through patches of thorny thickets I began to wish I had Joaquim's uncanny knack for picking his own fighting ground.

However, I had no chance to make such a selection. After a mile of rapid pursuit, the dogs' barks changed from eager baying to a sharp, snarling crescendo, and I knew the *tigre* was at bay. I rode close to the place from which the noise was coming, dismounted and fastened Beduino's reins to a thorn bush. I pulled my spear from the sheath and also took my rifle, since the cat might be in a tree where it could not be reached with a spear. Then I pushed forward through the high grass.

The brush country was not good for spear-fighting... I knew that, from all Joaquim had told me. Also, it was unfamiliar ground. But I had no choice in the matter—since I could not return to Beduino and leave the dogs. So I shoved my way through the grass and brush.

I saw the dogs sooner than I expected. They were near a patch of brush and grass that surrounded a thicket of *acuri* palms. From the direction of their snapping and barking, I knew the *tigre* must be in the thicket. I laid my rifle against a branch, and holding the spear in readiness, shuffled cautiously toward the bank of brush.

As I approached, I could hear the low, throaty snarl of the *tigre*, even in the din of the dogs' barking and growling. It seemed to say: "Leave me alone, and I'll leave you alone."

I got close enough to probe with my spear into the grass; but still I had not located the position of the *tigre*. The hoarse grumbling was now a snarl, as if the patience of the big beast was rapidly thinning. The sounds from the cat were quite audible; but I had no idea of the direction from which they came.

My hands had become slightly damp, from the heat and from sweating in the palms. I knew the next few seconds would decide my fate—and probably that of the dogs and of Beduino. ■