

The Devil's Cabin

By VANCE HOYT

I SHALL never forget those torturing days we spent in the nightmare jungle near the Jalan river.

Placer gold we obtained, to be sure; but there were other things that left their indelible imprints upon the memory. Chief among these was the fiend Rodriguez and the manner in which he was known as "La Fiera," the beast!

As a trail man and master of camp, Rodriguez probably never had an equal. But a thorough knowledge of pack, and the superhuman understanding of a mule, is not everything.

A halfbreed of Mexican ponce and Yaqui Indian was Rodriguez. Never shaven, his fat, swarthy countenance was indicative of the blood that flowed in his veins. His neck was short and powerful, like a gorilla's. Jet-black, greasy hair grew far down on his forehead to a slight space above the cruel, pig-like eyes. Everything about Rodriguez—every move, every attitude of his body—was that of a vicious animal.

He was commonly known as "a killer." Some proclaimed that he was possessed by a devil. Others that he was mad.

But not until we had obtained from our guide, the mozo, the cause of his scorpion-like hatred of Rodriguez did we learn for ourselves, Bill and I, the reason why he was feared and dreaded among the natives.

The incident had occurred several years before when the halfbreed made camp near the casa where Alamondo lived with his wife. There was no reason for the native to mistrust the man, never having heard of La Fiera before. But one day his wife complained of advances Rodriguez had made toward her.

The mozo demanded an explanation, but the halfbreed merely laughed in his beastly way and said nothing.

That night, when Alamondo returned to his casa, he found his wife dead, a stiletto in her breast. La Fiera had attacked her, and she, in her distress, had thrust the dagger into her heart.

Alamondo swore vengeance!

Then came the moment of reckoning. A curse—the flash of steel—! But the

little mozo lost his nerve. When he recovered, there was an ear missing!

After that, Alamondo never could summon sufficient courage to repeat the attack. He lived in fear of the beast. And so it was, when we emerged from the jungle into a small clearing where stood the "devil's cabin!"

It was late in the evening, and I proposed that we bunk for the night in the

going to sleep in any ramshackle cabin even a native won't go near. Maybe there's a devil in it and maybe there isn't; but I'm not going to bunk in it to find out. No, siree! My hammock in the open is good enough for me."

Bill always was an obstinate cuss, so I paid no heed to what he said. I began questioning the mozo as to what he thought was lurking in the lonely hut.

It seemed that the cabin had not been inhabited for many years, perhaps hundreds—"quien sabe"—Alamondo did not know. Stray natives and travelers who had slept within its walls, seeking shelter from the poisonous jungle air, had invariably been all but murdered by some invisible devil. Several had been found terribly mutilated, and one native, whom the mozo knew personally, had died from wounds that would not heal.

No one ever had possessed courage sufficient to enter the hut and discover what the evil "thing" might be. Thus, in the uncertainty as to just what the "thing" was, everyone, light-footed and alert, swerved past the cabin at a respectable distance, crossing themselves and muttering: "*Hay diablo!*"

"Well, Bill, old-timer," I said, after turning the guide's story over in my mind; "here's where I tucker-it-out alone. Might as well die by the hand of the devil as the fever from sleeping in the open. Here goes!"

Bill stood looking in the direction of the cabin, rather chagrined. It was a bitter pill for him to swallow. He was no coward, this partner of mine. Back in the mining days of Klondyke, on a bet, he had gone into a cage with a mountain lion and bled the cat with a butcher knife.

However, this was physical bravery. Bill was not so certain of himself mentally. So he kept peace with his soul and had nothing further to say. Save that it was poor judgment to seek risks that even a native declined.

This slur upon my judgment sealed the question right then and there. I was going to sleep in that haunted cabin, devil or no devil, or know the reason why.

Rupert Hughes

After Reading "The Devil's Cabin"

Wrote to the Author:

"Dear Dr. Hoyt:

"It seems to be part of my job to have to read the manuscripts of poor devils who can't write. I had just written two letters to such unfortunate (breaking my heart and theirs) when I took up your story.

"It was a double joy to find it vividly and vigorously written, and to be genuinely thrilled by it. It gave me 'the cold spine,' which I have not enjoyed for a long time. I should think that any editor would be glad to buy it.

"(Signed) RUPERT HUGHES."

deserted, log-adobe hut. But the mozo instantly fell upon his knees at my feet, seemingly terror-stricken at the suggestion.

"*Hay diablo, senior!*" he warned. "*Si, gran diablo!*"

Not knowing the significance of his fright, I laughed and said to Bill, my partner, jocularly:

"Do you hear? *Gran diablo*, says the mozo. A big devil. Eh, Alamondo? A big devil!"

But the next instant, I stood speechless.

On the still, hot air of the approaching night, came the shrill scream of Felis Discolor, the black leopard.

"And I heard that, too," spoke up Bill, reaching for his Winchester. "I'm no coward, but I be dog-goned if I'm

I GOT up from the camp-fire and examined my Colt, a special .38-caliber on a forty-four frame, slipping an extra belt of cartridges about my waist.

I stood for a moment observing the hunkered form of Rodriguez hovered near the fire, where he was roasting the meat of a monkey he had slain for his meal. He had had nothing to say pertaining to the "devil's cabin," exhibiting not the slightest interest in our conversation.

As I watched him, more than ever, in the crouched position, he resembled the aspects of a beast. And in the flicker of the light, I thought I caught the faint traces of a cruel, crafty smile on his dark face as he sniffed at the odor of the roasting meat.

For a moment, I stood studying the man at his task. He had been left severely alone. None of the natives would have anything to do with him. He had moved back upon his haunches, like a dog, and sat tearing and gnawing at the steaming meat with his strong, yellow teeth—the beast that he was!

As I stood there, observing the grim scene before me, from somewhere back in the jungle came the weird cries of a howler, seemingly booming his wrath at the death of kith and kin.

In the stillness that followed, I heard the rustling of creeping things; the faint chirping of metallic throats; the whir of fluttering wings and the purr and hissing of slinking creatures—evidences of a thousand living things, unseen but seeing—the ever-moving, sticky, hot jungle at night time!

And as I stood there, scanning the darkness about us, two tiny diamonds caught my eye, twinkling in their yellow and green brilliancy. Further back in the black void, another set of living gems, flashed their fire.

I stared at them, for the moment fascinated, not certain at first of just what I saw. They seemed to creep toward me with no perceptible motion, as a scene on the screen is focused closer by a moving lens.

Suddenly they vanished, as quickly as they had appeared. Then came a scream that brought my spine stiffly erect; the most terrifying cry I had ever heard! And two slender shadows, noiseless as a feather, cleaved the crescent of light from the camp-fire and vanished into the brush opposite.

Then another, and another, and another of these nightmare screeches—the blood-curdling voice of the jaguar!

In the palm of my hand I held the handle of my revolver, but the lightning bodies of the lithe creatures disappeared so quickly there was no time for a shot.

Rodriguez scarcely looked up from where he sat crouched, gnawing the steaming meat of the monkey. The native carriers moved in nearer the fire, and Bill sat peering into the brush where the cats had disappeared.

But the mozo—! Terror had seized the man. He fell upon his knees before me in a frenzy, muttering a prayer and begging of me to tie a little red sack he held in his hand about my neck! He said it would keep the devil away.

Piqued at such superstition, but rather than offend him, I did as he asked, declining the trouble of ascertaining just what the little red sack contained—save that a pungent odor came from its contents.

The poor fellow was so evidently pleased with the acceptance of his "devil-killer" that all fears for my safety seemed instantly to leave him. And as though it had in some mysterious way instilled a spark of bravery in the native himself, he deliberately walked over and entered into conversation with La Fiera.

The move was so abrupt and foreign to his nature that I marveled at the confidence he held in his belief and faith in the powers of the little red sack.

But it was growing late, and I was tired and sleepy, so I did not take the pains to investigate the subject of their conversation. Thus, equipped with my trusty revolver and the odoriferous voodoo sack, I took up my blanket and sauntered into the black void of the night.

I SPENT considerable time in locating the makeshift door, which was really no door at all, but several logs stood on end and lashed together by tough vines and jungle grass. After much exertion, I managed to pry the logs apart sufficiently to worm my way into the interior of the hut.

For a moment, I stood listening and peering about in the dense darkness of the close, musty-smelling room. Assuring myself finally that I was alone, I relaxed my vigilance, lit a candle, and began to investigate.

My attention was first attracted to the floor. It was constructed of a series of split logs laid across sleepers, a foot or more above the ground. The logs creaked and rocked as I moved over them, exhibiting in several places holes large enough for a man's body to slip through. All of which was an unusual floor in this country. They almost always consist of plain earth, trampled to the solidity of concrete.

In the wall near the camp, I discovered an opening, which, in all probability, was once meant for a window. It was really a large chink between the logs which had

been plastered up with mud. I finally succeeded in tearing away the mud for purposes of dissipating the foul air that had accumulated in the long pent-up room.

Beneath the window, my eyes rested upon an old bunk securely fastened to the logs at the height of my knees. It was made of branches of trees, cut and lashed together with strips of split vines. A crude and rough affair.

However, here was my resting-place for the night. It was, at any rate, solid and firm. No sliding and shifting in an elusive hammock for me, turning turtle and fetching up with the earth, face foremost.

As I stood there, thrilling to the thought that I had chanced upon this piece of luck in finding a fairy couch where I might stretch and ease the muscles of my tired body, something caught and held my interest for a considerable time. On the bunk, and along the side of the wall, were several dark-brown stains, some more red and fresh than others.

I bent forward to the muddy logs of the wall, then down to the matted work of the bunk, with the lighted candle before me, so that I might examine more closely and minutely these stains, and, to my horror, I discovered that they were splotches of blood!

There is always something in the sight of blood that forces one to sniff, to become alert, and in the movements of the body to direct them more swiftly.

I wheeled about, taking in at a sweep every lurking shadow the sputtering light of the candle fitted into the far corners of the room. There was nothing to be seen, nothing to be heard except the humming of a few insects that had come in through the window.

I released my grasp upon the handle of the revolver, then looked about, cautiously. I raised and lowered the candle, moved over the loose logs, got down upon my knees to scrutinize the flooring more carefully.

Here, I found more splotches of blood. A considerable amount in one place, which had soaked into the log, thick and dark—blood that had not been spilt so very long!

I arose and stood near the window looking out toward the camp-fire, thoughtfully. Except for the space it illumined in the dense wilderness, everywhere there was total darkness. It was the dark of the moon.

Alamondo and Rodriguez were still in conversation. The little native stood very near the powerful, slouching form of La Fiera. There was not the least sign of fear in his attitude toward the

halfbreed. They were excitedly arguing some question which seemed to be of intense interest to both.

All the while, the mozo prodded the camp-fire, which he had kindled into a bonfire. He was wildly gesticulating and waving his hand toward the cabin where-in I stood. Now and then his hand wandered to the stub of the severed ear as though it pained him. And once, when the beast stooped and lighted his cigarro with a burning brand, I saw Alamondo quickly place something in the pocket of the halfbreed's cotton jacket.

The rest of the party could be seen in their hammocks, swung in the trees nearby. They looked rather snug and comfortable beneath their nettings.

For a long time I stood observing the mozo and La Fiera in their talk, marveling at the mysterious change that had suddenly come over the native and wondering what he could have placed so stealthily in his enemy's pocket.

But no explanation could I conjure to solve the enigmas. So I turned my attention to the crackling sound in the near brush. A noise like an animal crunching brittle bones. Pecocaries, I thought; the rooting, granting scavengers of the jungle.

Then it occurred to me for the first time; perhaps Bill was right, and, after all, I was wrong. But there was no backing down now. I had chosen my course. Man, devil or beast, could not force me to sleep elsewhere.

Thus, without further thought on the subject, I blew out the candle, wrapped my blanket about me, and, Colt in hand, was soon lost to the world.

I DO NOT know how long I slept. But it must have been after midnight when I awakened. Not suddenly, as one is usually aroused in moments of danger, but gradually, a degree at a time.

So natural was my awakening, that for several moments, I lay listening to the muffled ticking of the timepiece in the pocket of my trousers.

There is something soothing, mesmeric, about the ticking of the delicate works of a watch in the dead hours of night. And often, in the wilderness, have I returned to conscious life under the hypnotic, metallic voice of man's most timely friend. So it did not occur to me that my awakening was unusual, or that everything was not as it should be.

But as I lay there, restful, perfectly at peace with the world, dozing, lingering in a semi-conscious state, it suddenly dawned upon me that I was not alone. I sensed inwardly, rather than felt outwardly, that there was some living thing

in the room besides myself. Instantly I was awake and in perfect control of my senses, tense and alert.

A velvety soft, with now and then a grating, sound came to me from out the Egyptian darkness, like the scaly body of a huge snake crawling through dry grass. A tense moment passed. Then a strong, acrid odor assailed me, equally as revolting as that of the voodoo sack about my neck.

Cautiously, I came to a semi-sitting posture, revolver in hand and finger cocked for action. I was not to be taken by surprise. Breathlessly, I awaited the intruder's attack.

In the dense darkness I could see nothing, save now and then the phosphorescent glimmer of a vagrant lightning beetle that had flown into the hut.

I peered about the room, seeking to discern what living thing, man, beast or devil, confronted me. I stared until my eyeballs ached, but no object could I make out. Then my attention was suddenly attracted to the floor where something was lightly rocking the loose logs.

For some time I listened to this cradling of the planking, exerting my wits to fathom the cause of so peculiar a phenomenon.

At first, the thought had occurred to me that it might be some one of our party who had worked his way into the place to test my nerve. But I immediately dismissed this from my mind. The risk would be too great for a sane man to take. But then, what was it?

There was only one answer. I would have to find out!

I rose to my feet and gingerly stepped into the center of the room, listening for the faintest sound. But nothing was audible, save the stifled gasps of my breathing. The noise had suddenly ceased.

A flood of thoughts went skittering through my mind. Then it suddenly dawned upon me. This "thing" had deliberately moved away as I approached it. It had passed along the planking as quickly and noiselessly as a gliding reptile. I felt certain that it was neither human nor animal.

But what could it be?

However, it did not matter. There was but one remedy!

I leveled my revolver in the direction of the "thing" that must be somewhere before me. But before I had completed the movement, I was conscious that it had vanished—seemingly into space.

For the first time in my life, I felt a sense of terror tugging at my throat. Here was an enemy that had me helplessly at its mercy. There was no way of determining to where the "thing"

had vanished. It might at that very second be crouched directly behind me, preparing to spring.

A cold sweat crept over me. I instantly wheeled about, tense for the attack.

In the black void before me, I sensed that something moved. Now over here—now over there—behind me—in front of me—! Then I caught the heavy breath of the "thing" directly above my head.

I gasped and looked up.

TWO RED EYES, piercing as balls of fire, stared into my face. The warmth of its breath was upon my cheek and its odor was revolting!

Without thought, I sprang back and began discharging my revolver at this devil that was closing in on me from all sides.

A series of blood-curdling screams, human in their fierceness, filled the quietness of the room as if a thousand infuriated demons had sprung into the place, dancing to the staccato of my revolver.

There was a rush, a mad scramble. Something dashed over my head and out through the window with the swish of a monster bat. The rickety cabin shook as if in a tempest. Huge forms lurched about me and against the walls, tearing and rocking the logs of the floor in frantic desperation to escape the zipping fire of hot lead.

From outside came the reverberating roar of a living thing, and I knew something was leaving a trail of blood.

I sprang to the window to see if I could discern what I had hit. But in the blackness I could see nothing—except Bill, rifle in hand, revealed in the glare of the camp-fire, running towards me. The mozo, with a lighted pitch-pine knot, was following closely at his heels. Rodriguez was nowhere to be seen.

With the aid of the flaring torch, I saw a huge form lying near the foot of the bunk. I had stooped to examine the "thing" more closely, when the mozo caught me by the arm.

"Ay! Ay!" he shrieked. "Come away! Come away! *Jalingo! Jalingo!*"

I looked at the native sharply. There was in the tone of his voice all the evidence of extreme fright. But in the man's face I was not so easily deceived. There was a crafty, cunning expression in every feature.

But before I could express the thought that occurred to me, he crossed himself and stepped back into the darker portion of the room.

In the meantime, with the barrel of his Winchester, Bill had turned the

"thing" over that lay in a hairy mass at our feet.

We had never seen such a monster before. It stood about four feet high, resembling a Gibbon ape more than anything else I could recall. It was of a brownish color, except for its face, which was white. Among the natives, it is known as the "Jalingo," a thing to be dreaded when encountered in the jungle. The male possesses a long, white beard, not unlike the Great Wandero, and walks erect most of the time. The female fondles and nurses the young in her arms. They are seldom seen in the daytime, but roam the forest at night and are very ferocious in combat.

The mystery of the log-adobe was solved! There was no devil in the cabin, after all.

I had moved back to examine the Jalingo more carefully, when I felt something soft under my stocking foot, like the body of a snake. I quickly looked down and found that I had stepped upon the arm of a man. The upper portion was red and bloody. The fingers were crooked and distorted in a convulsive grip that clutched several tufts of coarse hair. There was nothing else in sight as I glanced about for the body.

Bill and I looked at each other in horror.

"I'll say there was a devil in here, all right!" he gasped. Then, suddenly:

"Look out, pard! What's that behind you?"

I wheeled about, instantly.

"Where?" I gulped, a sickening sensation quivering within me.

"There," he said, pointing at a large rent in the floor. "Wait! I'll turn this log over."

As he did so, the crouching form of a huge male Jalingo was revealed beneath the flooring. A prodding with the rifle convinced us that he was quite dead.

"Turn it over if you can," I suggested, leaning closer. "We'll—"

"Look!" suddenly exclaimed Bill

drawing back. "The greaser — the beast—! Great God!"

I peered eagerly into the dark cavity beneath the flooring. The sight that met my eyes recalled scenes I had witnessed in the bloody trenches of France.

I never want to see such a sight again. Before me lay La Fiera and one of the Jalingos, both devils that they were, locked in the grim embrace of death's struggle. The long, yellow fangs of the fierce ape had bitten clear through the neck of the halfbreed and all but severed the head from the body. Through the chest of each, a bullet from my revolver, had put an end to the struggle!

I shuddered in horror at the thought of what might have happened to me, and turned away.

"How do you suppose Rodriguez came to be in here?" I finally asked, wiping the moisture from my face. "I didn't see him in the room."

"Don't ask me," replied my partner. "I'm no detective. The last I saw the greaser, he and the mozo were talking near the camp-fire. I heard the native accuse the peon of being a coward and dared him to enter the cabin and give you a scare. They were still arguing when I fell asleep. How about it, Alamo-ndo?"

We both turned to the mozo for an explanation. The little fellow stepped forward as straight as an Indian and as steady in eye and nerve. There was not the slightest indication of fear in the man.

"Alamondo is avenged!" he spoke in the vernacular, hissing the words through clenched teeth. "La Fiera was big and strong, while Alamondo is little and not so strong as the beast. But I kill him, carrion in the mud beneath my feet! Kill him with my mind!"

"How do you mean, Alamondo?" I asked, greatly interested.

"Si, Senor! I kill him with my mind. Alamondo knows much of the ways of the jungle. Jalingo does not like the

smell of roasted monkey meat. Jalingo becomes a devil—*gran diablo!*—goes mad and tears the flesh of those who eat it.

"See, senores, the scar on Alamondo's arm—shoulder—neck—*Caramba!* Alamondo knows from experience. *Ay, yi!* When La Fiera ate the monkey meat Alamondo all the time smiled to himself.

"And, senores, once when the beast did not see, Alamondo filled his pocket with the odor of roasted monkey. Aha-a! Si, all the time Alamondo knew the Jalingo devils haunted the jackal. And—

—*De veras! Si, senores,*" he grated, glaring at the gruesome sight that lay before us. "He who lives as a beast shall die like a beast! *Sabe, senores? Sangre de Cristo!* La Fiera is dead! Alamondo is avenged! The beast is dead!"

"*Bueno! Bueno!*" approved Bill, who was never known to be serious long. "Clever you are, Alamondo. But I'm thinking it's mighty queer those Jalingo devils didn't make it hot for this fat-headed pard of mine. How about that?"

"Ah! *Nombre de Dios!*" muttered the mozo, crossing himself and bending to his knees at my feet. "Si, *senor. Dios! Dios!*" he continued, indicating that the Jalingo could not harm me so long as I wore the little red sack he had placed about my neck. "Alamondo knows much in his brain. See, *senores!* I will show you."

So saying, he took from his neck a little red sack, similar to the one he had given me. He tore it open, exposing its contents; a light-yellow powder, made from the leaves of some jungle plant.

"See! Cayamuella! Smell! Ugh! Jalingo fears the odor. Cayamuella makes his teeth fall out when he eats it and he will die. *Si, senores.* Alamondo knows much. *Perfectante!*"

Bill and I stood staring at each other, marveling at the strategy of the tropical mind in wreaking its vengeance.

The score between La Fiera, the beast, and Alamondo, the mozo, was settled!



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