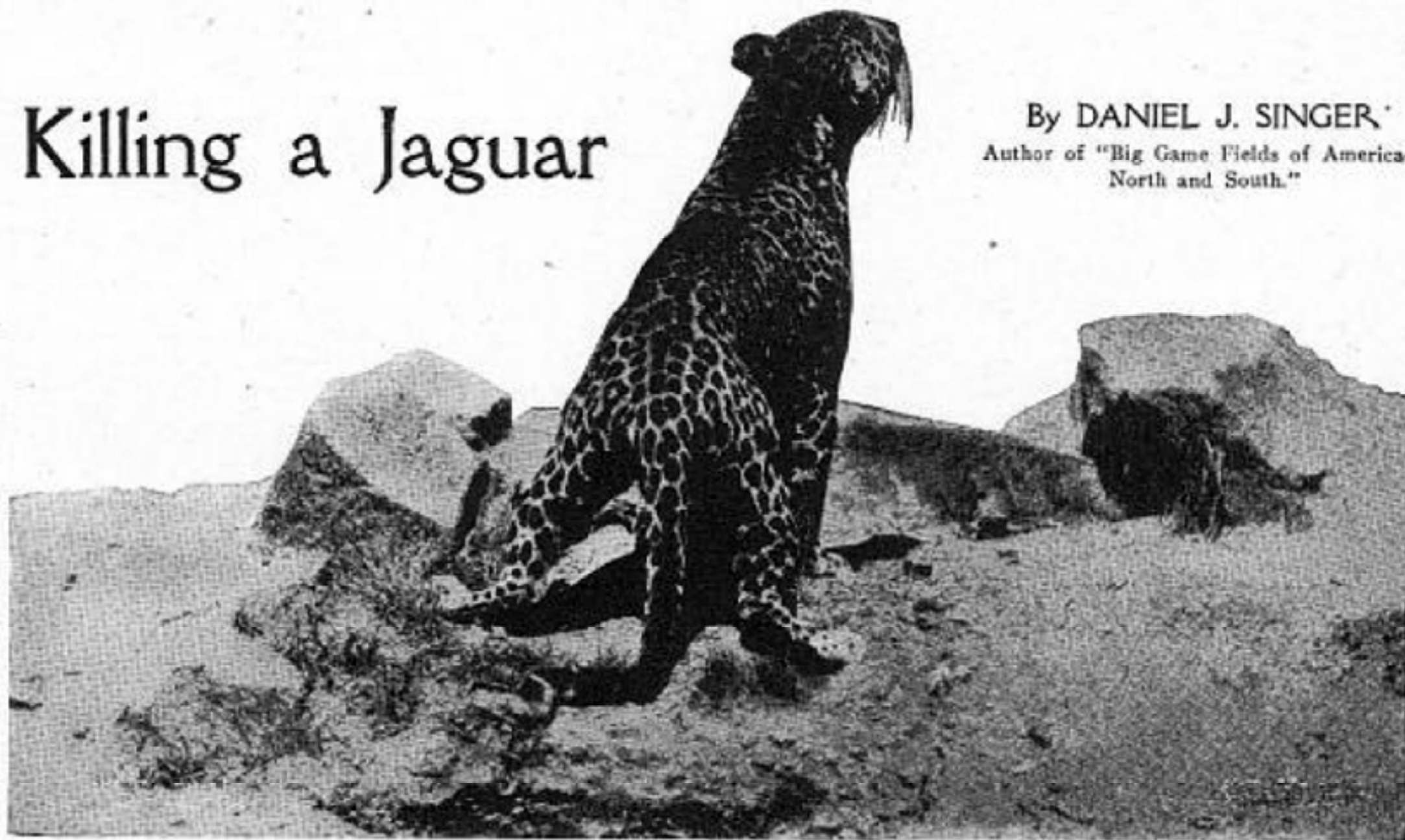


Killing a Jaguar

By DANIEL J. SINGER

Author of "Big Game Fields of America—
North and South."



DOWN in the jungles of British Guiana a naturalist and explorer trailed a jaguar into the tangled growth of the tropics. Here it became impossible to pursue the chase without the aid of hounds, so the hunter sent John Charley, his guide, back to camp for the dogs. But suddenly the quarry came into clear view on the trunk of a fallen tree. The hunter was armed only with a shotgun and the jaguar was not within effective range, but he took a chance and fired.

What happened then is told in the following extract from Daniel J. Singer's new book, "Big Game Fields of America—North and South," recently published by the George Doran Company.

RELOADING and slipping to the ground, I paused at the butt of the tree to catch the slightest sound or movement. There was neither. Then out along the Mora log, with the gun at the ready, I stepped cautiously along. A big lizard went scuttling over some dead leaves. Up went the gun, and I almost let off the right barrel.

Near the end of the great log a few dots of scarlet caught my eye. He was hit—there was no doubt of that. Ever so carefully, step by step, and scanning carefully every possible foot of the way, I took up his trail. Twice I lost it, and twice I turned back and puzzled it out again. Now and then I could see his footprints plainly in the soft soil, and occasionally a spot of blood. Then the ground became harder, and the blood spots fewer and further apart, until I finally lost all trace; made a circle back to pick up the trail again, missed it, tried again and again, and then tried to find my way back to the tree where I had been watching.

In an hour more there was no use trying to fool myself, though I hated to accept it as a fact. I was lost; and what was more, at almost this moment there came a veritable tropical downpour. Before the torrents of rain pelted down and drenched me through I was in a dripping perspiration, but now the sudden wetting had thrown me into a violent chill. Shaking so from head to foot, I was compelled to

put my gun down for fear of dropping it.

So far I had escaped fever, but this occurrence was almost sure to bring on fever that would go raging and surging until it ran its course—one way or the other. To put it mildly, my prospects were not good. At length the rain passed over, but every few minutes I would be seized with another chill. When I realized that I was in a maze out of which no human being could possibly find his way, excepting it were a native Indian, a horror of loneliness gripped me as I felt myself being completely swallowed up in the immensity of the jungle.

Could John Charley trail me after that sea of rain had swept away every sign? I didn't know. But I did know that every bit of wild craft he possessed would be taxed to the utmost to do so. I climbed high up in a tree to see if some solution of my predicament would present itself.

The sun was slowly sinking below the great, undulating roof of the jungle; the prospect of spending the night in such an ill-chosen place was gradually commencing to assert itself. As I stared out over these vastnesses my heart was smitten with a sudden sense of infinite and eternal desolation. Then I felt another chill coming on, so I quickly slid to the ground.

Pale shapes took form before my vision—made and unmade themselves—the whole jungle swayed, moved a pace forward, then back; I was in the grip of the jungle fever! After a short interval I recovered my strength sufficiently to move on again. Walking over to the gnarled roots of a giant tree, I sat down to "take stock" of my chances.

"A man should never give up until he is quite dead," I would say slowly, which seemed to have a slightly stimulating effect.

Taking a deep breath, I sent a long, loud call chasing through the jungle, and when it ceased it struck me that it had something of the tone in it that reminded

me of a lone wolf bewailing the loss of his mate. I then listened intently, straining my ears to catch the slightest sound.

Suddenly a heavy, hissing breath close behind me made me whip around with a sensation of the hair rising on my scalp. Not more than a few paces away was coiled a huge boa constrictor in the low branch of a tree, with its head protruding too unpleasantly near, and eyeing me with a pair of cold, unwinking, malignant eyes. A forked, colorless, flickering tongue added to its heinous appearance. Fickle fate seemed pitilessly and endlessly whimsical. What would happen next?

The deadly contents of the shotgun flew out and quite demolished his whole head. And then slowly his great coils unwound, and gracefully, even in death, they slid to the ground until the tail finally came down with a flip. I couldn't help but smile when the thought struck me that I would have fresh meat, at any rate.

Then once more came the mysterious, whispering, terrifying silence. But now a sharp sound came from the depths of the gloom, for the light was pallid now, and still another sharp sound. Then I hallooed long and loud—and waited; like an echo it rolled back through the jungle. There was no mistaking it now—it was John Charley coming with the dogs. . . .

John Charley managed to get the hunter back to civilization before the fever reached a dangerous stage, and he was soon strong enough to take up once more the trail of the jaguar. The closing incidents in this exciting hunt are described by the author as follows:

WE carefully beat through three long strips of jungle. But no fresh sign rewarded us; and so it was on the second day. After hunting carefully, we returned to the ranch without finding a trace of the crafty fellow. The third day was going very much the same, and it was

waxing along in the afternoon when we rode across the savannah to hunt the last strip of likely-looking bush. The cattle, gazing gracefully, only stopped now and again to gaze at us inquiringly. As we rode by I could not help admiring their splendid condition, for I was not aware that cattle thrived so well in the tropics.

Another mile, and we were at the edge of the strip of jungle. Jack's brow grew dark—his lips tight set, his dark eyes fixed upon something half hidden in the bush.

"A fresh kill," he said at last; "done today, not ten hours old. We ought to get this fellow now, if we ever do."

The hounds came up, and as they sniffed the evil scent their hair bristled along their backs. Then Star, the biggest and boldest of the lot, led out, with the others following through the jungle, and then their quavering chorus rose until the whole woods echoed with the din of the wild chase.

The jungle was thick and the going difficult. Jack went on ahead with the cutlass, for the tangle of vines and creepers made it impossible to force a way without continually wielding the cutlass.

The hounds had evidently stopped short, for we could hear the whole pack, not fifty yards ahead, while the wailing and clamor that smote our ears assured us that just beyond, in that intricate and tangled mass of almost inconceivably thick cover, that savage, crafty and powerful lord, the jaguar, was facing the pack. At this ill-timed moment Jack leaped back, nearly knocking me

to the ground; his face went white. "Shoot!" he said, for he was carrying nothing but the cutlass.

I saw nothing to shoot at, but a second glance revealed a coil of a dozen feet of the most dreaded of all snakes—the "bushmaster."

The treacherous-looking reptile appeared so enraged at our intrusion that an attack seemed almost certain. But in his moment of hesitancy it was averted by giving him an undisputed right of way and changing our course, for I did not want to shoot at that moment, fearing that the report might spoil my opportunity just ahead—for which I had come so

far and which seemed almost within my grasp.

The moments were precious now; the balful chorus of the hounds warned us the quarry was within a stone's throw; yet we could see nothing. Then my eye lit upon something that held me for a long moment arrested, motionless.

Close along a bough, its ears flat against its neck, its tail twitching, its lips drawn back from its yellow fangs in a vicious snarl, lay the handsomest jaguar I ever saw. From between their wide lids his eyes blazed into mine, as I raised my gun

to my shoulder, took careful aim and fired. The claws relaxed their hold; slowly the great body rolled over and fell into the midst of the frenzied pack. But, before I could take a forward step, the huge cat had leaped to its feet—I had

aimed too high, the bullet penetrating the upper part of the shoulder. Into the wild melee I dared not fire, though my soul sickened at each lightning stroke of those terrible paws.

At last my moment came—for an instant the dogs drew back. Before they could again rush in, my second bullet crashed through his brain.

The cattle-killer had paid his debt—many lives had he asked—now he had paid with his own.

He was a male in splendid condition, and the tape showed him to be six feet ten inches in length. The day was fast declining, so we hastily started back through the waving, bending sea of grass for the ranch.



The sun was just going to rest after a terrific day's work trying to burn up the world. The western sky was

afire with gold and crimson, while the firebolts leaped to the world below. Then the sun went lurid down. Slowly came the evening's changes, softly falls the mellow twilight, until the waning light has fled—then everywhere stalks the mystic night.

Big Jack's hulk, with his slouch hat at a careless angle, loomed up before me as we filed back in silence. Then, as we went over a slight rise, he and his horse became a clear-cut silhouette against the star-dust seeded sky.

Away in the east a thin, silvery light flooded the sky—a full moon was rising. Then across the vast and overpowering loneliness of the stupendous savannah waste the vagrant winds whispered soft and low. They were sweetly solemn—wildly sad.



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