



**W**e read the forest-department notice a dozen times, but it told us no more than we already knew. The beast we were looking for, it said, was known to have killed four people, was likely to charge on sight, and was last heard of near the village of Sirur at the foot of the Nilgiri hills in south India. It was nine feet eight inches high, its front feet were four feet 10 inches around, and it had two normal tusks about 2½ feet long.

"This elephant is proscribed," the notice announced, and informed all license holders that whoever shot it could keep the tusks. Fine, but it had to be shot first. It was worth taking up the challenge, and that's why Edward Wapshare and I were there.

We knew that originally there'd been two elephants, both regues. One was large, the other small. The smaller one

left his partner, as regues do now and then, to go on a spree. He'd tried to pick up with a nice little cow elephant belonging to a neighboring herd, but a big, burly bull hadn't liked it. He rumbled the intruder and, in a gory, eight-hour fight, stabbed him in the chest, neck, and side, killed him, and tossed him down a hill.

The bigger rogue, an ill-tempered, quarrelsome brute, carried on alone. He was lumbering through the jungle one day when he came upon a shoegar (forest dweller) and his wife. They were cutting timber, probably a little illicit sandalwood. The husband was up a small tree, his wife beneath, and they were chatting quietly when the man spied the elephant coming out of a bamboo clump 200 yards away.

"Run down the hill, quickly," the husband whispered, and as soon as his wife was safely out of sight he shouted, shook

# MARKED FOR DEATH

by  
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The rogue had pinned me down once, and now had killed our friend. We set out to even up the score, but little did we know what was in store for us

ILLUSTRATED BY  
JAY WEAVER

As the rock Edward threw hit him on the head, the "dead" tusker rolled over and heaved up on his feet



the tree branches, and waved his cloth. The elephant heard and saw, and came rushing over.

It tore the woodcutter from his perch, threw him to the ground, stamped its huge foot on him, and kicked him back and forth between its feet. Then it coiled its trunk around the body and pitched it high in the air. It fell in a bamboo cluster and hung 12 feet from the ground. The elephant padded off to the river and bathed, letting out little squeaks of delight as it splashed around.

When news of this reached me in Madras, 350 miles away, I doubly wished I'd had a round or two left when, some weeks previously, both rogues had pinned me down in high lemon grass a few seconds after I'd put my last cartridge into a troublesome bison (see "A Billigiri Bison," *OUTDOOR LIFE*, February, 1955). Fortunately the rogues hadn't found

me or I'd have suffered the same fate as the sholegar, but the tragedy made me all the more inclined to go back and stalk the remaining killer.

I was thinking about that when a letter arrived from my planter friend Edward Wapshare. The Wapshare family came to India in 1840, and has pioneered in clearing the jungle, building houses, roads, and bridges, and fighting lawlessness, malaria, and wild animals. Edward shot his first panther—a black one—at 14, and had a tiger and an elephant to his credit before his voice changed. When I first met him he used to sleep with two panthers on his bed and a porcupine, Joey, under it. We've been together on many hunts.

Edward's letter told me the fate of Bomsa, a sholegar who'd served us both on hunts. In (continued on page 103)

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his youth Boma tried to cut off the leg of a pig a tiger had killed, and when the tiger objected and chased him he jumped 30 feet down a bank and broke his leg. For the rest of his life he walked with a limp.

Boma had been returning to the village of Annaikutti with a couple of pals, Edward wrote, when they came to a dark path fringed with bamboo. Since it was already dusk, the friends suggested circling this forbidding place, even though it meant walking an extra quarter of a mile.

"Nonsense, brothers," Boma argued. "We can hear the talk from the village, and besides my leg hurts."

"But what about the elephant?" one companion asked. "It's been seen at Sirur only six miles away."

"I'll lead the way," Boma replied. As he stepped into the path, the elephant came screaming out of the bamboo. It picked up Boma, dashed him to the ground, played football with him until he was lifeless, then threw him up into the high stalks.

That settled it. I wired Edward telling him I'd start off right away for his estate bungalow 30-odd miles from Annaikutti.

The village was hushed with fear and sadness when Edward and I got there three days later. Boma had been well known among the forest people, including members of the Kurumba tribe, who live on grain, meat, wild honey, and roots; the agricultural Badagas, who at certain times of year drive their cattle from the hills to pasturage in the jungles; and the forest-department employees, who are generally Malays from Malabar on the west coast.

The tragic news had traveled swiftly by word of mouth, and so had details of the rogue's whereabouts. The grapevine told us he was back again beyond Sirur, eight miles away now, and going east.

With Edward and me were Mara, a good shikari from the village of Masanagudi; Mathan, whose leg had fallen off after he'd been bitten by a viper (he'd come along for old times' sake); and a cookboy. We were armed with Edward's .450/400 double-barrel rifle of the hammer type, my .404 Mauser, and two 12 bore shotguns. Since Edward was known to the villagers, we were received with warmest hospitality.

That night, after we'd made our plans for the next day, the atmosphere in the village changed completely. Fires were lighted, arrack (a potent palm brew) was passed around, and tom-toms played softly. As the flames leaped higher and higher, so did our spirits.

A Badaga produced a bamboo flute, and a Kurumba brought out a daughter who knew the dance of the porcupine and the snake, in which the porcupine shakes his tail and makes a rattle. The dancer delivered everything but the rattle, and her imitation of the snake was good too.

While the tom-toms beat, two of the

old boys did the dance of the rogue's slaying. One acted out the elephant while the other, carrying an unloaded rifle, was Edward. Many imaginary shots were fired, and many times the elephant fell as if dead, only to rise again. It was prophetic, but we didn't know it then.

That night, before sleep came, I heard the loud *shook* of the sambar, and listened to the tuneful repertoire of elephants near the river—ranging from high squeaks to great roars. Then the chilling *HOWN* of a tiger calling his mate to the kill, and the *ticka, ticka, ticka* of the nightjars.

We were up and about at 5 a.m. After breakfast Edward and I climbed into the front seat of the old Ford, while Mara, a forest guard, and a local man got in the rear. We headed for Sirur along a track strewn with boulders as big as footballs, and on the way we saw chital deer, bison, and a panther. In 45 minutes we were at the two or three huts which make up Sirur.

As we shuddered to a stop, half a dozen natives crowded in on us, among them a man we'd sent out the day before from Annakutti. He told us the elephant was three miles to the south, and that two men from Sirur were on his track. Then our man and one from Sirur led us off afoot, following sign left by the two who'd gone ahead.

The party was a big one—there were six of us—but we went carefully and quietly and soon overtook one of the advance trackers. He whispered that the other man was ahead with the elephant. We dropped some of the natives, and continued. Edward and I had drawn straws for positions, as usual, and he'd pulled the longer one. So he followed right behind the Sirur man, then I, then Mara. Half a mile away we met the other advance guard, who said the elephant was in a thickly jungled ravine just ahead. Then Mara took over. He's the finest tracker I've ever met, and has hunted with Edward for over 20 years.

He tested the wind and led us off to some high ground which ran above a small stream. How he knew which way to turn I'll never understand, but I've always been impressed at the ability of these people to detect the vaguest change in the direction of a breeze without using cigarette smoke, grass, or dust.

**A**s we crept forward trying to locate some sound or movement, a peacock flapped up, disturbed by our approach, and it in turn put up a jungle fowl which whirred off across the ravine with a noisy *koha, koha, koha*. It was enough to scare anything, and all of us expected the elephant to charge. Mara and the Sirur boy were up a tree in a flash, while Edward and I quickly squeezed ourselves behind two thick trunks.

The rogue ambled out of the opposite side of the ravine, crossed the stream, and went off at right angles. We saw little more than his back, but we quickly reassembled and resumed the stalk.

The tusk's pace soon quickened, and it was obvious he was heading for

a stretch of jungle bare of big trees. At first we thought this was fine, and we followed for about a mile. Then Edward stopped and said, "I think this devil knows we're following him, and he's trying to get us away from the trees. Then he figures he'll swing around and charge. What d'you think we'd better do?"

"Go right back and take him on our ground," I said. We turned quietly and went back to the stream, but the elephant didn't follow. At dusk we returned to Annalkutti.

After we'd had some tea we got into the car and had just started the motor when we heard a scream and saw an elephant rush out of the trees to our right. I had an impulse to shoot, but I suppressed it. An elephant tried that tactic on me once before on the Annamalai hills, a range about 50 miles from where we were now. He had chased me two or three times, and then one evening had found my parked car. He hid in a near-by wood and waited patiently for me to return. I barely got away that time, but the next day I deliberately left my car as bait, and when the elephant came along again to wait for me he got a bullet in his ear.

**T**hat night we watched the jungle fires. In many south-India forests the grass grows high after the rains, and by the end of the year game is difficult to see. But usually by February—though sometimes as late as March, as it was now—the grass is as dry as tinder. Then the forest department alerts itself to control the annual fires.

Sometimes the blazes start naturally, sometimes they're touched off by villagers so there'll be grass for the cattle to graze upon after the spring rains. Though the fires often look frightening, they're never as serious as the big forest burns in America and Canada, for it's only grass that goes up in smoke.

We could see 11 fires, one of them on a distant mountainside. It must have been two miles long but only about 25 feet wide—a thin, winding snake of flame. Most of the countryside was burned, and game was concentrated near the streams. All throughout the burned area tracking and visibility were excellent.

Back at Sirur next morning, we learned that the rogue was across the track from his favorite ground and was on our right below some 6,000-foot hills. We were on the Mysore Plateau, 3,000 feet up, and that may have been the reason we had our shirt collars turned up. Or it may have been a shiver of anticipation, for we sensed something was going to happen.

We lost no time getting to where the beast was being watched by the Sirur man. The elephant was in an avenue of bamboo, which strangely had escaped the fires, and was busily eating his 400 pounds of fodder for the day. He was as unsuspecting as his nature would permit, so I suggested we send one of the boys around to the opposite side to fire off a couple of rounds. We told him to go carefully, not quite into the wind, get up a tree, and start shooting. We

lined ourselves up and waited quietly.

Twenty minutes later, from 400 yards away, there was a loud bang. Then another. Now something was going to happen. It did. The elephant charged the shots. We could hear him screaming and bellowing as we hurried in closer. He hadn't pinpointed the source of the shots, and was stamping around in a circle. We could hear the crashing of bamboo as we doubled in closer to get behind a big clump 100 yards from the tree on which we could see the Sirur man.

The elephant suddenly came in view 40 yards away, broadside on, ears cocked, trunk up. It wasn't an easy shot, but a takable one. Edward let fly, and the huge body thudded over. We waited a minute or two. No movement. I suggested we go around to his front to be sure he was really dead.

"I aimed for his ear," Edward said. Mara suggested another shot, but Edward was certain.

He handed the .450/400 to Mara, picked up a rock, and he and I walked up to the beast. I started to unload my Mauser while Edward took aim with the rock and hit the elephant on the head with it. The result was startling as it was unexpected; the elephant rolled to his knees, heaved up, and was on his feet in seconds.

I'd like to make it clear, in explanation of Edward's reluctance to fire a second time, that both of us were convinced the elephant had been killed instantly. At that time ammunition was difficult to get, and it seemed unnecessary to waste another shot. An elephant's brain is shielded by a bony structure rather like a honeycomb, and a bullet that strikes this is likely only to stun the animal for a short time. That's what had happened now.

Edward is a good shot, but he'd been having trouble with his arm. A year or so previously he'd wounded a panther at night, and the next day he, his brother Bob, and Mara went to pick it up, expecting to find it dead. Instead the panther had revived, and it charged.

Since Edward was wearing a cream-colored shirt, and hence was most conspicuous, the panther made for him. It chewed his shoulder, his right upper arm, and tried to tear out his throat. Bob couldn't fire because of the way Edward was being held, but he managed to smack the panther with his gun butt and to kick it off.

Edward was rushed to a near-by dispensary for first aid, and later to Ooty, a township atop the Nilgiri hills, where his doctor fixed him up. He got over it all right, but afterward his arm wasn't as steady as it used to be, especially when carrying a weight, and Edward's rifle weighs 11 pounds plus.

The accident didn't change his attitude toward hunting, however. Edward had shot several elephants, and I'm afraid he's inclined to treat them and other big game with a certain amount of contempt.

But he had no intention of being hurt this time, and neither had I. As soon as the rogue got to his feet, we fled. Edward, Mara, and I ran around the

bamboo clump, the others scattered, and the elephant rumbled off to our left. But it was easy to follow his trail, and in the ensuing running fight he got five or six more shots, none of which stopped him.

During the chase I asked Edward how many rounds he had. "Nine," he replied. I recalled that at the Annakkutti tamasha (party) some nights before, the man who danced the role of the rogue was "shot" at least 20 times.

Finally the rogue reached his old ravine near the stream, a mile or more from where he got his first bullet. When we came on him he was mad with rage, digging into the bank with his tusks, down which blood poured freely. If it hadn't been for the woodcutter and Boma, and his other victims, I might have felt sorry for him, but he was a wanton killer.

A solid between his eyes finished him, and this time there was no doubt. After the shot there was a long silence, and by comparison with what had gone before it was like being in a tomb. A crow cawed as it flew over, and this broke the spell.

"Turned out nice again after all the rain," I said to Edward.

"What's that got to do with the price of shirts?" he grinned.

We went down to the stream bank to look the elephant over. There was nothing about him physically that might have accounted for his bad temper. No festering wounds; no malformations. There was no sign that he was in must—the period when mature male elephants are in a frenzy usually connected with the rut. An elephant in this condition is something to guard against, even though he might be tame, for he becomes dangerously moody. The period lasts two weeks or more, and is easily detected by the exuding of a sickly sweet-smelling fluid from a tiny hole near the elephant's temple.

The rogue was larger than the forest-department notice had described him. His tusks turned out to be four feet seven and four feet three inches long, weighed 34 and 31½ pounds, and their diameter outside the gum was 13½ inches. He was about 40 years old.

Two days later we were heading back to Edward's estate.

"You know," he said, as we bumped along, "as soon as one rogue is shot another takes his place."

"That also often happens with a man-eating tiger," I replied.

At Teppakadu, halfway between Annakkutti and the estate, a forest guard held up his hand for us to stop.

"An elephant has just attacked a man near the Mudamalai sanctuary," he said. "The man was walking from Mysore city to the west coast when it happened. He's been sent to the hospital at Gudalur, but I don't think he'll live."

"Can we shoot it?" I asked.

"Oh no," the guard replied firmly. "It's not been proscribed."

Edward turned to me and raised his eyebrows. I nodded. We knew that in six months we'd be rogue hunting again.