

## The Trial of Alamit the Civet

By ALFRED WORM

The animals of the Philippine jungle had assembled in the white light of the full moon in front of the entrance to the big cave in the vaulting wall of a limestone cliff on the precipitous bank of the Alassin river, island of Luzon. *Saua*, the big python, queen of the jungle creatures, had awakened from her monthly sleep; it had been somewhat prolonged and was induced by her ingesting the largest meal she had ever eaten, the biggest wild boar, said *Ungoy*, head huntsman of *Saua's* faithful pack of monkeys, the jungle had ever known.

To avoid the fate of wild pigs, the monkeys had promised Her Majesty to keep her abundantly supplied with such tidbits as boars and deer, in return for which they enjoyed immunity from her voracity.

According to age-long custom, this night, the night of the seventh moon in the seventh year, was the night of judgment, rewards, and frivolity for the animals of the jungle. The queen would listen to the oppressed, pronounce sentence and reward the brave. Following this, the sabbatical festivity would take place. The main feature of the festivities, this year, was to be the wedding of *Sylva*, the beautiful daughter of *Usa*, the most powerful buck of all the deer on Luzon. From east and west, north and south, over trails, by water, and through the air, came all the animals, birds and reptiles—for once to assemble in peace and fraternity as their ancestors did in Eden before Eve ate of the apple and brought on the destruction of Paradise.

*Kalaw*, the hornbill, master of ceremonies at *Saua's* court, hopped clumsily over the ground, his harsh voice rasping on the tender nerves of the timid dove tribe, the *punays*, *bato-batos* and *puñaladas*. "Koak! Koak! Koak!" croaked *Kalaw*. "Ye dwellers in the jungle, listen to *Paniqui*, clerk of Her Majesty's court, who will take the names of those wishing to appear before the Queen to complain or to be rewarded!"

*Saua* had been wise in choosing *Kalaw*, with his deep voice, as master of ceremonies. No other creature in her realm would have been able to lift its voice to such a pitch as would penetrate the babel of screams, screeches, cooings, whistles, snorts, hisses, howls and grunts which filled the air.

*Paniqui*, the clerk, hung by his hind legs from a branch, head down, for he was a large fruit bat. His black eyes blinked merrily at the curious assemblage, and his sharp ears twitched in all directions to catch the conversations below. *Paniqui* was wise, cautious, and a jolly fellow—very much liked by all *Saua's* subjects, never harming even the weakest and always being willing to aid those in trouble. When he flapped his large wings, signifying that he was ready to entertain requests, silence reigned at last.

The animals observed certain courtesies, giving preference to the doves. *Puñalada*, the bleeding-heart dove, flew to a place in the tree, beside *Paniqui*, and told her grievance to him. "*Alamit*, the civet," she spoke with tears in her eyes, "has robbed my nest, eaten my children and bitten me in the breast."

"Her Majesty will punish him," *Paniqui* answered gravely. "*Alamit*, you will appear before the Queen as defendant . . . Where is *Alamit*?"

Long and short necks of animals and birds stretched this way and that looking for the civet, but he could not be seen.

"*Guago*," ordered *Paniqui*, "take your squad and search for *Alamit*. When you have found him bring him here to answer the charges made against him."

*Guago*, the large horned owl, was the chief of police of the jungle, perhaps because his eyes could penetrate the darkest night as clearly as though the forest were flooded with sunlight. At the clerk's command the chief and his tribe of owls, large and small, flapped their wings and flew out over the crowd in search of the cunning criminal. The last had scarcely disappeared when two birds flew simultaneously up to the branch where *Paniqui* hung.

"See how we look," they cried, "once we were snow-white, the pride and envy of all the birds,

but *Alamit* played a trick on us and now our feathers are spoiled."

*Paniqui* smiled at them. "*Kuliawan*, you should not complain. Your new coat of yellow gold and black is very beautiful."

The clerk was not ordinarily given to personalities.

*Kuliawan*, the golden oriole, was flattered. He began preening himself as he looked superciliously down on the assemblage, which was expressing approval of the bat's discriminating aesthetic sense by twitterings, screechings and miscellaneous cries creating pandemonium.

"You are more beautiful than you were before, *Kuliawan*," they chorused. "*Paniqui* is right. You should not complain against *Alamit*, but thank him."

Greatly pleased, for he was a vain creature, eager for more admiration, *Kuliawan* flew from the branch to mingle with his relatives and friends. As he left the tree, *Coling*, the bald-headed monkbird, who had made his plaint together with *Kuliawan*, protested: "But what about me? My coat has become jet-black, and

with this spot on my head, I look like an undertaker." Cheers, mocking laughter and cries of *Monk, Baldy*, and *Undertaker* greeted his lament, and poor *Coling*, with wounded feelings, ruffled his feathers in anger.

*Paniqui* called for order and then dismissed *Coling*. "You shall appear before Her Majesty and tell your story . . . Who is next to be heard?"

All eyes turned to a small animal, covered with blood, who was limping painfully toward the foot of the tree. It was *Musang*, the palm-roller. "I demand that *Alamit* be hanged for frustrated murder," he cried with tears in his eyes. It was evident that he was suffering. "*Alamit* lured me into a trap where *Aso*, the dog of man, almost killed me."

The list of complaints presented to this tribunal was lengthy. Many jungle dwellers came to bear witness against the mischievous *Alamit*, for all the charges were brought against him. Again and again the clerk called for the defendant, but *Alamit* was to be seen nowhere. His cunning instincts had warned him to stay away, for he knew that *Saua* was stern in dealing out justice, and the long list of crimes heaped upon his guilty head would surely lead him to the gallows.

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acle. To speak of an artesian well as "an awful bore" would be a correct use of the word, but would cause smiles instead of wonder or admiration, simply because of the widespread misuse of "awful." Careful speakers will scrupulously avoid such misuse of awful, terrible, horrible, and similar words.

**aye.** Two distinct pronunciations of this word are sanctioned. When it signifies "yes," or a vote in the affirmative, it is pronounced as long i; when it means "always, ever," the pronunciation is that of long a.

### B

**bachelor.** A very common abbreviation of this word is bach; not used by good speakers or writers.

**back.** Should not be used with "return," which includes the sense of back. "He will return back home" is an example of frequent misuse.

**bacillus.** Pronounced ba-sil'us. The plural of this word, "bacilli," is often misused for the singular form.

**backward, backwards.** The former may be used as either an adjective or an adverb, the latter is a variant form of the adverb. We speak correctly of "a backward pupil," and we retire either backward or backwards, according to individual preference, both forms being used by good writers. There is a tendency to drop the final s in all such adverbs.

**bad.** Misused in such cases as "a bad cold, a bad wound," where severe or dangerous is the proper word. As one writer pertinently asks, "Inasmuch as colds are never good, why should we call them bad?"

**bade.** The a is short, bad; not baid.

**badly.** "I want to see you badly" should be "I want to see you very much." Similarly with "We miss you badly." The use of badly in such cases is undesirable.

**baggage.** The word is seldom used in speech in England, where "luggage" takes its place. The best English writers, however, are now using "baggage," and it is etymologically the better word. "Luggage" is perhaps better suited to the conditions existing in Europe, where travelers continue to "lug" their baggage, in the absence of many conveniences of transportation here.

**balance.** Frequently and erroneously used for rest, remainder. Balance is the excess of one thing over another, that which will make them balance, and should only be used in this sense. "The balance of the evening" is not only wrong but ridiculous, like "The balance of the guests stayed late." "Rest" or "remainder" are easily and properly substituted. "Balance" is correctly used of accounts, in referring to the difference between the debits and the credits, or the sum needed to balance an account.

**balm.** Pronounced bahm, not bam.

**banister, banisters.** Used colloquially for baluster and balustrade, which are preferred in formal speech and writing, on the ground of etymological correctness. Banister is simply a corruption of the old word baluster. Common usage has given it a certain standing of authority.

(Continued in October)

### TRIAL OF ALAMIT . . .

(From page 19)

Her Majesty's subjects were properly awed by the appearance of the Court retinue. They divided into two groups to make room for the parade, which moved toward the foot of the tree from which Paniqui hung. As they marched along they were accompanied by music,—the booming cries of crocodiles in the nearby river Buaya, chief of the crocodiles, and cousin to Saua, awaited the Queen under the tree to deliver the address of welcome. Saua reached the gigantic old balete tree and stopped. With pleasing grace she raised the front portion of her body and bowed her head to her assembled subjects in acknowledgment of their greetings and renewed vows of allegiance. Slowly the python wrapped herself around the enormous trunk of the balete, and powerful coils moved spirally upward. Admiringly, with mingled feelings of

amazement and awe, the motley crowd watched the huge body glide along the tree to a large, thick branch almost twenty meters above the ground.

"How beautiful our Queen is!" croaked Uak, the crow, into his wife's ear, the while one eye was winking mischievously. "Lovely enough to make me want to hug her to my breast."

"It would be your last hug, you old fool," snapped back the jealous Mrs. Uak. "Look at that pile of bones below the tree, all crushed to splinters. They are Tao's, the man from the barrio, who once foolishly matched his strength with Saua's."

The smooth, vari-colored scales on the body of the enormous python glistened in the rays of the full moon as Saua, Queen of the jungle, lay coiled around the large limb. Shadows cast by the leaves above formed fantastic patterns on the large reptile, and when a gentle breeze swayed the tree top they moved, becoming grotesque figures leaping in a mad dance. All the animals and birds assembled below were fascinated,

staring with fixed eyes at Saua, whose small black eyes glittered brightly in her gracefully poised head. Some were superstitious; others saw in the person of their queen a supernatural being.

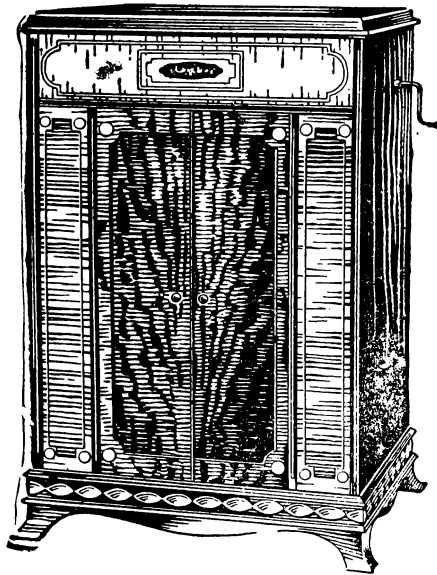
Breaking the hypnotic silence, at last Saua spoke to Paniqui hanging above her. The clerk raised his right wing in a signal to Kalaw, who had been watching him. Now the Master of Ceremonies flew to a high stump and raised his powerful voice.

"Koak! Koak! Koak!" he shouted. "Her Majesty, Saua, Queen of the jungle, has consented to listen to those who have been wronged. All who wish to be heard assemble under the balete tree."

Puñalada, Coling and Musang came forward instantly, but Kuliawan, who was now proud of his new plumage, wished to remain behind. Coling, the monkbird, insisted, however, that he appear with him as witness against Alamit.

Saua spoke to the bleeding-heart dove first. "Puñalada, how did you get that red spot on your breast?"

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