

# TAWNY, THE MAGNIFICENT JAGUAR

and Other Great Jungle Stories



*Compiled and edited by  
Joe L. Wheeler*



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# DEDICATION

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Such an integral part of my growing-up years in Latin America was she—and impossible to ever forget!—that this book of jungle stories is dedicated to my irrepressible gadabout parrot:

## LORITA



*Left to Right:* Joe and Lorita, Barbara, Romaine, and Lawrence Wheeler in Guatemala City.

**Other books in the series**  
**The Good Lord Made Them All**  
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*Togo, the Sled Dog*  
*and Other Great Animal Stories of the North*

*Wildfire, the Red Stallion*  
*and Other Great Horse Stories*

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# INTRODUCTION

## NO ESCAPE ANYWHERE

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*Joseph Leininger Wheeler*

*There is something about stories featuring animals with larger-than-life reputations, such as rhinos, elephants, buffaloes, lions, tigers, leopards, jaguars, and serpents, that fascinate not only children but all age groups. What could be more terrifying than a man-eating tiger on the prowl or a rampaging rogue elephant? Thus this collection of stories has its place in this *The Good Lord Made Them All* series of books. Another portion of God's great "Web of Life."*

\* \* \* \* \*

How true it is that in the jungle, there is no escape anywhere. Almost every animal, it seems, has a nemesis that it fears. That so-called king of the beasts, the lion, fears the cape buffalo, the elephant, and marauding packs of jackals; the tiger fears the leopard and the elephant; the elephant fears most of all the nasty-dispositioned rhinoceros, whose one joy in life appears to be goring most any animal that comes into view (however, the elephant usually wins). Even the king cobra (so feared by both man and beast) dreads the sight of that weasel-like little animal, the mongoose.

But this survival of the fittest is not unique to just jungle animals; it is true of virtually the entire animal kingdom, no matter in what part of the world,

climate, or environment they may find themselves.

First of all, though, for the purposes of this particular story collection, let's define what a jungle is or is not. I don't know about you, but I've always assumed that a jungle was, quite simply, an extremely dense tropical thicket. Well, it is, and it isn't.

According to the editors of the Random House unabridged *Dictionary of the English Language*, the first definition of *jungle* confirms what I always thought it was: "A wild land overgrown with dense vegetation, often nearly impenetrable, especially tropical vegetation or a tropical rain forest."

But the definition does not stop there, it also includes a list of variants:

"A wilderness of dense undergrowth."

"A piece of swampy, thick-set forest land."

"A scene of violence and struggle for survival."

"A place or situation of ruthless competition."

According to these four definitions, almost any environment harboring animal life—or even insect life—could be aptly named a "jungle." Nevertheless, for this particular collection of jungle stories, I am excluding oceanic animals and animals of the North.

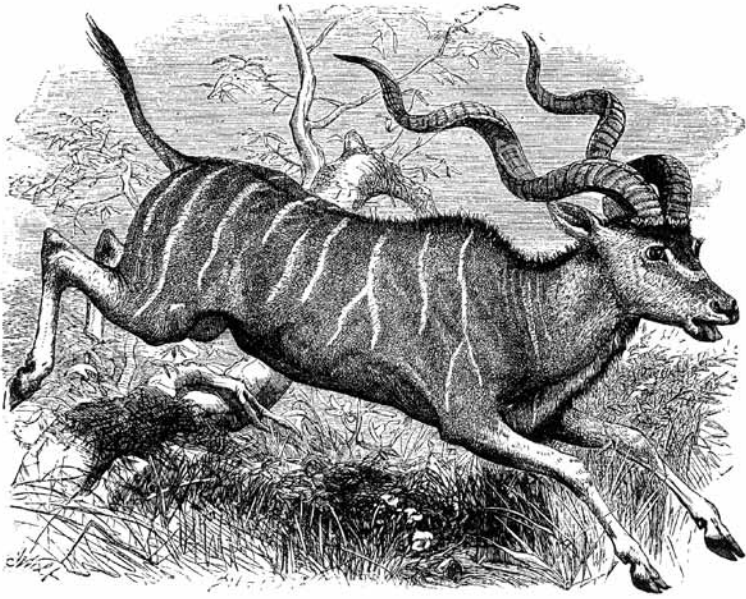
This is the first book in the series that is truly global, featuring, as it does, animals from Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras, Costa Rica, Jamaica, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, Brazil, South Africa, Seychelles islands, Kenya, Algeria, Egypt, Thailand, Myanmar, India, and Australia.

In recent years it has become fashionable, especially in the West, to gloss over harsh realities with euphemisms. Most of all, anything having to do with death. Rather than admit someone actually died, we resort to euphemisms such as, "passed away," "went to his reward," "shuffled off this mortal coil," "ceased to breathe," "gave up the ghost"—oh, the list goes on and on.

Yet, death is rarely pretty. If we deny the reality of death to our children, for instance, how are they then to understand death when it comes to someone near and dear to them?

Just so, to prevaricate to our children about the continual "survival of the fittest" going on all about them is to set them up for disillusionment and cynicism when they discover the truth. When they discover that virtually





every nondomesticated animal fixates on (1) the struggle to stay alive; (2) the struggle to get enough food (and most are carnivores rather than vegetarians); (3) the struggle involved in having to continually attack to stay alive, or having to continually defend to stay alive; and (4) and the universal instinct to procreate.

Consequently, a collection of jungle stories such as this can serve as a useful learning tool where grandparents, parents, and children can interact, discussing these realities taking place around them every day.

Christians, of course, are able to enter into discussions that result in understandable answers: that the “survival of the fittest” is one of the most significant results of the Fall in the Garden of Eden. And that it will remain so until the earth is made new.

Whatever one’s religion or philosophy of life might be, it is a fact of life that no child will be satisfied until provided with reasons for the “survival of the fittest” that make some sort of logical sense to them.

## **CODA**

I look forward to hearing from you! I always welcome the stories, responses,

and suggestions that are sent to us from our readers. I am putting together collections centered on other genres as well. You may reach me by writing to:

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*“No Escape Anywhere,” by Joseph Leininger Wheeler. Copyright © 2011.  
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# TAWNY

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*Edith Bowden*

*How could Tawny and Golden Fur have known that there were some kinds of animals that were off-limits to jaguars.*

*Then the dogs were upon them, followed by men on horseback carrying sticks that gleamed in the sun and spouted fire.*

*By then it looked hopeless . . .*

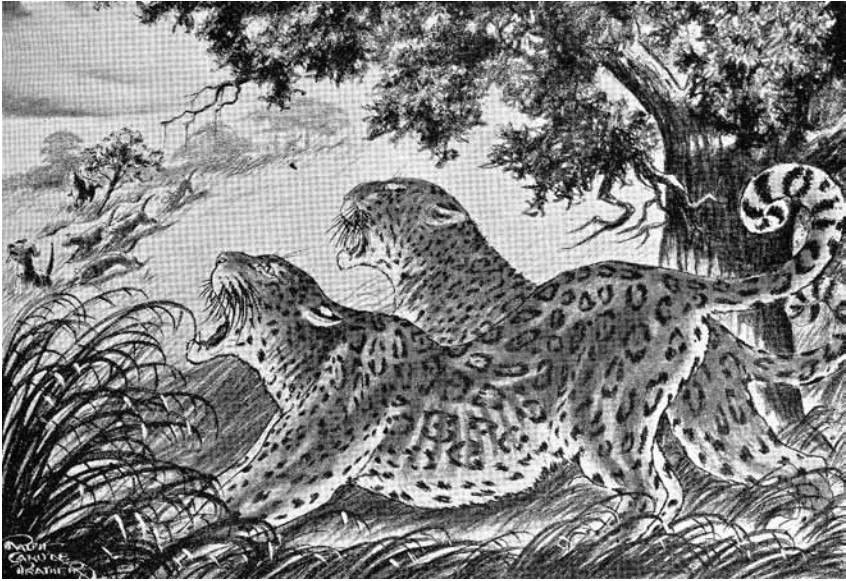
\* \* \* \* \*

Hunting hounds! Only a pack on the hot scent could blare out that fear-inspiring cry. The threatening sound made the little yellow deer and the coatis scuttle deeper into the tropical forest.

A pair of great spotted jaguars, dozing under a *quebracho* tree in a lonely Mato Grosso valley not far from the edge of the Brazilian jungle, merely opened and closed their drowsy eyes.

The approaching battle cry of the pack finally awakened the golden beasts. Slowly they raised their heads to glance toward a distant spot in the north where a few straggling wild cattle grazed.

As the din increased, Tawny nuzzled his mate. He wanted consolation for being disturbed. He hated being aroused when he was resting after a meal.



At last he rose to stretch himself. A yawn grew into a rumble of annoyance.

Golden Fur's thoughts were centered on something strange in their well-known surroundings. The sight of the long-horned wild cattle kicking up their heels to dash off westward to the Tapajos River first made her suspicious. When she pointed her velvety nozzle to the wind, she smelled an unfamiliar scent.

Tawny showed no alarm. Why should he? He was not afraid. The great three-hundred-pound cat had never in his life met anything that he could not conquer. He stretched—stretched until the powerful muscles rippled under his tawny pelt.

Steadily the clamor increased. Fearlessly the jaguar strolled forward at the sight of unfamiliar objects coming toward him—men on horseback surrounded by dogs. The party stopped at the half-eaten carcass of a bull Tawny had recently killed.

All at once Golden Fur nudged her mate in the flank. When he did not budge, she snapped at him gently. Still Tawny the Magnificent refused to heed her warning. Still he lingered, even though a strong odor of man scent came sweeping down the wind. Because it had never crossed his path before, nothing within him warned him that these were his natural enemies.

His mate was wiser, however, for she felt instinctively that the intruders boded ill for jaguars. The bows and arrows and the glint of the solitary shiny

rifle, as well as the dog howls, all combined to make her tingle with fearful excitement.

As the cavalcade came closer, Golden Fur punched Tawny hard as if to say, "How can you be so stupid!" But the king of cats had not the slightest premonition of their impending fate!

The intruders moved in a circle-swing to place themselves between the jaguars and the jungle, proceeding with a casualness that seemed to Golden Fur to show an evil definiteness. She sensed blindly that their coming would at least make it harder for the jaguars to eat.

Golden Fur had known what it was to be hungry. She and Tawny had been gaunt for lack of food. Their hunger had driven them far, far inland through a maze of forest; had brought them through the jungle and into this isolated section where they had found great droves of half-wild cattle.

All at once Golden Fur heard Tawny blast an ugly noise. She looked up to see a flurry of dog bodies streaking straight from the east.

Then with a vicious snarl, Tawny awaited the pack. The wild wish to flee almost overpowered the female, but she knew that Tawny would not run. Thus, with never a thought of deserting her mate, Golden Fur bounded to her rightful place at his side.

The pair had been together ever since the day when Tawny had first seen her come down to a stream to drink. He had been a good mate and a good provider of food. Golden Fur had done her share too. She, not Tawny, had always caught all their fish.

The great male hated rivers. He loathed them. He would never go into a stream, for he had a horror of the vicious *jacarés* (a kind of crocodile) and the man-eating little piranha fish that crowded to the surface at the taste and the smell of blood. He felt much less afraid of land enemies—even large and strange ones like these new invaders that were bearing swiftly down upon him.

As the pair of jungle cats faced the oncoming attackers, the great male spread his paws to get a firmer grip. A feeling akin to delight seized him as he saw his foremost enemy. Only an untrained dog would approach close to a full-grown jaguar.

Even as this thought flashed through Tawny's mind, the great male was surprised.

The hound changed his tactics suddenly. He zigzagged sharply; and openly

abandoning his pretense of fighting Tawny, he dived straight for Golden Fur. Perhaps he expected to kill her. Perhaps he expected only to nip her and then dash back, luring Tawny to the pack.

This act of rashness cost the hound his life. With a deafening roar, Tawny bared his yellow fangs; then he flung his massive frame in front of his mate. At the same time he lunged out with a death-dealing paw.

There was a wild cry. The dog rolled over to lie quiet, his back broken by the blow.

After a second of silence, the fight was on. Wild confusion sounded across the plain. It was as if a relentless tornado had swept down upon the jaguars.

Excited horsemen yelled at their dogs and spurred their horses forward. The spearmen and the archers leaped to the ground and tested their weapons, while the only hunter with a rifle rode up closer and closer.

The jaguars growled and leaped, charging the dogs. Then they retreated to be in a position to charge again. Golden Fur's armored claws slashed a luckless terrier, and once she sprang in a curve to land on a mongrel, crushing him to the ground.

A babel of battle sounds echoed across the grassland. The dark-skinned Brazilian spearmen shrieked at their dogs, first encouraging them, then scolding them. They ordered the hounds to fight, and in the same breath they ordered them to stop fighting. They yelled at the spotted cats for killing the hunting pack, and they raged at the pack for blocking their spears and arrows.

Horses neighed. Mules brayed. Suddenly the hunter with the rifle urged his horse forward until it snorted with terror. He did not even wait for the hounds to bring the great cat to bay, but raised the old-style rifle to his shoulder.

All at once, just as there came a split-second lull in the fight, he pulled the trigger. A spurt of flame! A roar! Then something whizzed so close to Tawny's head that he could hear the bullet sing.

The great cat dropped on his stomach. As he crouched, he had a momentary pang of fear. For the first time in his life, he felt the urge to flee from his enemy. He swung round swiftly. With the faintest signal to Golden Fur, he was off like a rocket. He knew she would be running at his side.

Five seconds later, his mate was bounding over the grassy hillocks behind the speeding Tawny. The baying hounds followed, keeping a safe distance at her heels. The hunters scrambled for their mounts, some of the riders sweeping

in behind the dogs, and others racing along on the left flank.

With leaping sweeps, Golden Fur gained on her mate as he turned due east and headed for the jungle. There lay safety.

The jaguars were splendid runners. They settled into a springy flight, running in graceful sweeps as they traveled with tremendous speed. There was as yet no panic in their hearts, as yet no fear that they were racing to their doom.

Slowly Golden Fur gained on Tawny as he loped away from the Tapajos River. At last they were running almost neck and neck. The great male cat was glad they were headed away from the river. He was glad that the chase led toward the jungle.

Although the forest was a network of vines and undergrowth, the jaguars were not afraid to dash into it. The two great cats knew the aisles that opened off the entering lanes.

The chase swept on, the jaguars skimming over the ground with mighty flying leaps. At the end of the first mile, the great cats had a big lead; but the hounds and the hunters were crowding them away from the jungle.

At the end of the second mile, Tawny could hear more plainly the cries of the dogs and the shouts of the hunters. At the end of the third mile, Tawny and his mate still held the lead. Whenever the dogs gained any ground, the jaguars miraculously increased their speeds.

As the hunted pair passed by the opening out of which months ago they had emerged into this grassland, Tawny caught a flying glimpse of it. How lucky they had been since then!

How could the pair have known that they were courting death by their wanton slaughter of the herd! Their waste of meat had been so brazen that the smaller animals had long since learned to follow them to eat the food they left.

Since Tawny was quite ignorant of human beings, he could not know that men had seen him and spread great tales about him. He did not know that men had said he was destructive.

As the great male's breath came faster, he ran less swiftly. Glancing around occasionally, he assured himself that the dogs were no longer gaining on him. Tawny's heart pounded with anticipation when he approached a spot within less than a mile of the jungle fringe. It was not an instant too soon, either, for Golden Fur's breath was coming in gasps. He slackened his pace, loath to appear to leave her.

Just as the painted pair caught a welcome whiff of the pungent eucalyptus tree that marked the hidden jungle entrance they were planning to enter, Tawny's quivering nostrils caught a faint trace of something else—the dreaded man scent! He did not need to see the group of native hunters half hidden in the underbrush to know that all was lost!

Golden Fur did not whimper once in the second that it took Tawny to decide whether they should veer north or south. She heard the ringing cry of the fresh pack.

Together the panting creatures ran parallel to the jungle. Could they outdistance the hounds in the desperate game? The formation of the chase had shaped itself into the letter V, with the jaguars at the point and the bands of pursuing hounds at the opposite ends.

The fresh hunters marveled that the spotted beasts appeared able to draw upon some unexpected supply of strength in their frenzied efforts to reach the forest.

Craftily the hounds forced them back—back—back upon the grasslands. The jaguars, traveling first parallel to the jungle and then running back toward the east, zigzagged constantly over the humpy ground in frantic efforts to shake off their pursuers; but the dogs always checkmated their efforts to reach the brush.

When at last the two packs merged, and Tawny turned right-about-face so abruptly that Golden Fur swept clear beyond him, she knew that they could do nothing but go back the way they had come. Ahead of them lay only the river, swollen now with heavy rains.

Then began the maddest chase that the spotted pair had ever known. For upwards of two hours, they swept across the open plain, running first toward the jungle and then away from it. Try as they might, they never found a chance to dart into the gloomy recesses of the forest. Their lungs were straining and their sides were heaving with each breath.

The race had tired the dogs and the hunters too. All except one man seemed to have left success or failure to the weary hounds that bounded along with their pink tongues hanging out. The owner of the rifle dashed out from time to time and *bang-banged* at the quarry.

As the shadows lengthened, Golden Fur dropped slowly back. When the panting Tawny glanced at Golden Fur's heaving sides, he slackened his pace;



then once more the two great cats ran on together.

On and on the jaguars circled. Behind them—then ahead of them—then behind them again lay the jungle that they could not reach.

All at once Tawny thought that Golden Fur was trying to tell him something. He remembered how she had been making little whimpering noises. Then he saw her stagger as she angled over the rough ground toward him.

It was as if she was telling him to leave her, telling him to run on alone! She was desperately tired. Her legs were giving out. Her head was whirling. Her heart was almost bursting. Without words she let him know that she had a plan for herself. She knew an easier death than to be tortured by men and dogs.

Without giving Tawny a chance to answer her, Golden Fur signaled him a last good-bye. Then she drew on a final ounce of strength and sped toward the river that lay only one thousand feet away.

Tawny did not even hear the cheers of the hunters and the rage of the dogs. He seemed hardly to realize that he was free now to speed forward as fast as he could. Nothing now held him back.

All he thought of was Golden Fur and her decision. *Which should he choose for himself? Death lay behind him! Death lay ahead!* Suddenly he chose to follow his mate.

Although he could hear the dirge of the river ahead of him, he turned to the right and raced toward the stream just as though he were going to victory.

Golden Fur outdistanced him. With never a backward glance, she neared the stream. At its brink, she hurtled through the air and sailed far out over the swollen river.

At her disappearance Tawny the Magnificent did not hesitate for even a split second. Heedless of shouts and the roar of the water, the great male gathered himself for the leap. With a rumble that died in his golden throat, he hurled his great body out—out—into empty space.

It seemed a long, long time before he struck the water. When he hit, he sank like iron. Almost at the very second that he disappeared from sight, a bullet followed from the bank behind him. *Sput!* The water splattered at the spot where he had gone down.

The jaguar did not come to the surface quickly enough to see the hunting party crash wildly along the bank. He did not see the men leap from their panting animals and peer eagerly down to see whether the *jacarés* or the piranhas

had already risen to find their prey. He did not hear the men asking each other excitedly, "Do you think the jaguars will come up?"

All at once a man yelled as he pointed toward the river excitedly. There was one golden head, then two. The jaguars were still alive, still safe! Their dripping heads glistened in the sunlight as the two great beasts bobbed about in the center of a current.

Golden Fur fought the current bravely. She seemed to be making headway toward the opposite shore, but Tawny was floundering. The watchers thought that he could not make the other bank that was fringed with heavy undergrowth. All at once he disappeared.

After what seemed an age, he reappeared. Then he sank again. Even before the jaguar could have time to rise, the hunter with the rifle calculated the distance coolly. Drawing back and dropping to one knee, he cocked the hammer of his gun.

When Tawny finally rose, gulping and gasping for breath, the marksman slowly lowered his gun. This time the weapon might have fired perfectly. This time his aim might have been perfect; however, something about the jaguar's gallant efforts aroused the hunter's admiration and kept him from firing.

In silence the men stood watching the swimmers. Very cautiously Golden Fur dodged uprooted trees. Very skillfully she twisted herself around forest debris.

When she was more than two-thirds across the stream, she slackened her pace until the almost winded Tawny overtook her. Then very slowly the jaguars breasted the torrent side by side.

Tawny emerged first from the river to stand upon the farther shore. Gently he nuzzled Golden Fur as she crawled out beside him.

Suddenly the great male pushed his muzzle upward. Then he blasted the silence with a roar of victory. As the sound echoed across the Tapajos River and over the jungle grassland, it announced that Tawny had won over his enemies.

As if to show his contempt for man, dog, and river, the great male blared out another ear-splitting roar. Then before its echo had died away, the king of Brazilian jaguars turned his back upon his foes.

With a signal for Golden Fur to follow him, the great beast led the way into an unfamiliar jungle. Tawny of the Mato Grosso was still alive, still free, still undefeated!

## *Tawny*

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