

## Copal Jenness – A Prologue [Part 6]

By: FastWinger

Copal Jenness, the Questors Four, the Sheriff of Tamarind and his six Guards, all circled the Tea Shop of the Sun in the first light of the day; searching, they knew not for what, but for any clue.

Just in front of the Tea Shop of the Sun, on the Main Quay Road, they found the shattered lance of the Paladin.

The twelve turned to the Mountain and found they were following a trail of blood. Most of the village that was awake came close on their heels.

The long climb led through parts of the rainforest, hung thick with mosses and shadowed trails, places unfamiliar to Copal, high places. Places where it was rumored that desperate pirates came to hide, living the lives of outcasts, attacking any form of law that dared enter. The town Guards, anxious to look heroic, pushed quickly ahead down the long gullies, followed closely by the Sheriff of Tamarind.

Suddenly, there on the down-sloping trail, Copal saw one of the Guards stumble, caught on some unseen device across the path, and before he could even call out, "Beware!" a great swinging log trap arced across their path, instantly killing three of the Guards, and narrowly missing the Sheriff as it tore off his hat! The Sheriff fell heavily, all the wind knocked out of him. Everyone else just managed to dodge the great, deep swing of the log trap through the gully.

Looking up, Copal saw that at the top of the hill, silhouetted against the skyline, stood the missing Paladin.

His formerly white tunic was stained red with blood, his crests were torn from his shield and armour. Without horse or lance, he stood and shrieked curses at them. Drawing his sword he dared anyone to disarm him.

His own party stepped forward to reason with him. Roth, Cleric of Wellsmere Isle came forward bravely and called him “companion”, begging him to “but come talk”. He did not appear to know them and hurled insane rants and dared them to fight, but they had no heart to kill their own.

He raised his fists to the sky and cried, “I killed them both! I would do it again with no more regret than killing a raving mad hyena! They deserved death! A thousand deaths!”

Copal Jenness and the Questors Four believed he should be taken alive if at all possible. They had a deep wish to know his reasoning, for nothing made any sense in his actions. Then too there was the matter of The Law, and each person must be made to answer for his crimes.

The grieving Knight spoke. “There must be some accounting, some explanation!”

But the Paladin fought like a madman, challenging all, cursing, ranting that he, the Paladin was, “In the right!”

The town guards circled the Paladin carefully. Weary and heartsick over their demented fellow Questor, his old companions, accompanied by Copal Jenness, then stepped up to disarm the Paladin. It was at that moment the Sheriff of Tamarind raged in from behind the unaware Paladin, and without any warning, cut him down in front of the horrified group.

Disbelief mingled with regret in Copal’s mind that he had been so close to the capture of this madman, and had it forced from his control.

The Sheriff of Tamarind stood over the stricken man and began hacking away at his body until even his town Guards pushed forward and dragged him away from the mangled corpse. Copal looked down at the forever silent Paladin, who took his reasons for his actions with him in death. Then Copal looked around at the chaos.

There was the wild-eyed Sheriff struggling over the body with his own Town Guards. The Questors Four, struck silent by the total disfigurement of their former companion’s body, stood away to the side, shocked to silence.

Unbelievably, from out of the middle of the crowd of townspeople huddled together behind them, and into this dreadful scene, came Miyu.

As Copal Jenness stepped into her path to stop her from seeing the carnage, the small girl looked up at the now hatless, raving face of the Sheriff of Tamarind, who was held firmly by his three remaining town Guards. She pointed at the Sheriff and began screaming, "The third, the third!"

With a tremendous heave the Sheriff broke free from the three town Guards and flung himself at the girl, both of his hands going around her neck. He began to choke her to death. There was no time to consider, no time to realize the entire situation was insane. Copal pulled a dagger and stabbed the Sheriff in the back. It was not a mortal wound as Copal well knew, but designed to stop the Sheriff in his tracks and force him to release the chokehold on the girl.

The Sheriff turned on Copal, releasing Miyu, and Copal told her to "Run!" as he drew his sword. A new fight began between the Sheriff and Copal Jenness, who found himself backed across the trail by the fury-fuelled Sheriff. Copal was reluctant to kill the man, for the entire scene was unreal, and taking the Sheriff alive might be the only way to ever understand what had happened, what was happening!

The Guards and Questors were as puzzled and overcome by the turn of the Sheriff upon his own detective as Copal was. Unwilling to defend himself, Copal backed away, even as the Sheriff pressed forward. But the Sheriff's rage blinded him to the danger of pushing forward over the rocky, moss-covered footing on the jungle trail edge, as he realized too late, in the middle of a vicious swipe at Copal with his bloodied sword. The Sheriff lost his footing. His entire body fell forward heavily, twisting, sword up-thrust, the wicked point missing Copal by a hairs breath, and the flat of the blade catching Copal across the arm. The sword arced upwards and a driving blow from the heavy hilt spun into Copal's chest and up across his face, knocking him unconscious. Falling by the trail, he fought no more.

As the Sheriff of Tamarind advanced, sword raised over Copal Jenness, in the darkness of Copal's mind, only the unfathomable mystery of it all swirled, as the shadow of the Sheriff's sword fell across him.