

QUEJO THE KILLER

BY EDWIN CORLE

CHARLIE Kenyon and Art Schroeder were looking for gold outcroppings. The search for the elusive metal has always carried with it the added element of danger. But the hazard reaches a new high in the particular part of the country where on February 18, 1940, Messrs. Kenyon and Schroeder elected to search. Pyramid Canyon, Eldorado Canyon, and Black Canyon, not even names on a map to most people, are part of the chain of precipitous rocky gorges cut by the age-old flow of the Colorado river. Collectively they determine the course of the river from Boulder Dam south to the lower extremity of Nevada, through a section of some of the roughest terrain in the Southwest.

Kenyon is sixty-three and Schroeder not far from the same age. But they cover the canyon territory with more ease than a kid of twenty. It's second nature now. So on last February 18th, they made their way up a secondary canyon on the Nevada side of the Colorado River about three or four

miles below Willow Beach, where they maintained a camp. Before noon they separated to cover an area as wide as possible, Kenyon edging along one canyon wall, guarding against the sliding detrital rocks, while his partner followed the same technique on the opposite wall.

About noon Kenyon leaned cautiously back against the face of the cliff. Down the canyon a few hundred yards was the ravine head, with a rise of at least a hundred feet straight up. Kenyon let his eyes drop down the sheer face. Near the bottom, where the canyon floor broke up into tumbled boulders, was something that nature never made. Kenyon looked long and hard.

There seemed to be a cave — a cave made by water erosion, no doubt. But guarding its entrance was a six-foot barricade of rocks, a barricade skillfully and strongly made, with the larger rocks at the base and the smaller ones graduating to the top. Now who took the trouble to make that and what was

it for? Kenyon was already scrambling toward the rock barrier.

The barricade effectively blocked his entrance to the cave. He pulled a top rock free and tossed it aside. Another. Then another, until a chest-high gap enabled him to make an ungraceful entrance. It was a small cave, erosion made, and not deep. The first thing he saw was a .30-.30 rifle, then a 12-gauge shotgun. Both were cocked and loaded. Next a cottonwood bow and three steel-tipped arrows, a string of wampum, powder, cartridges, a beaded belt, a child's toy automobile made of cast iron, and the dead body of a man.

Quickly Kenyon pushed other rocks from the barricade, and sunlight fell inside. The man had been dead a long time. At the time of his death he had been wearing a canvas coat and blue denim pants. The body was shrunken, the features misshapen, the entire corpse partially skeletonized and partially mummified. The hands lay clasped over the stomach, and nearest among the objects, quite within reach, was the child's toy automobile. A few strands of coarse black hair clung to the skull. The teeth were broken and the cheek bones high. These indications said, "Indian," as positively as the wampum. But that toy automobile?

II

The Cocopahs used to range up and down the Colorado River. They are an offshoot of the Yuma people. Sixty-odd years before Kenyon and Schroeder prospected the Colorado's canyons, a Cocopah girl gave birth to a male child. When the infant was born the tribal medicine man tried to dash its brains out. He said it had white blood, and he was right. The Cocopah girl fled with her baby upstream into the crags. Three warriors went to bring her back. After several days they returned without the girl or the baby. Both had died, they explained. No young girl and a baby could survive in the impassable canyons.

The girl hadn't died, but after negotiating the inexorable and rugged chasms and gorges she was more dead than alive. The child survived on her milk, but the girl had not the strength to stand and no more milk for the half-breed infant when she literally crawled over the crest of the Eldorado range and down an alluvial fan toward a dry lake bottom. She was close to the end when a party of Piute bucks, scouting for white men, found her sprawled halfway between the dry wash and a barrel cactus. The child seemed healthy.

The Piutes conferred. Two were for leaving her to die. Two were for saving her. One was not sufficiently interested to comment. Finally they decided by a three-two vote to leave the girl and send a party back for her, but to take the baby to their own camp and turn him over to a squaw.

This was a great mistake — a fatal one for some twenty-three people in the years to come. The fate of the Cocopah girl is not recorded. Doubtless when the second Piute party found her she was dead. But the child grew up among the Piutes and became Quejo, one of the worst killers in Southwestern history. In New Mexico, Billy the Kid is famous for having sent twenty-one men to oblivion before Sheriff Pat Garrett got him. Quejo lived a much longer life; he must have been over fifty when he barricaded himself in a cave and died. To the Kid's twenty-one victims, Quejo counted twenty-three, and no law ever caught up with Quejo. The Kid's victims were all men. Quejo murdered men, women, and children. A shot in the dark saved the Kid from the gallows, but it took the desert to get Quejo. He should have been killed, according to Cocopah tradition, at birth, but was not; by all rights he should have died in his mother's arms in the

Eldorados, but he did not; sheriffs, posses, and special deputies were trying for years to shoot him on sight, but could not. Fate the jester saved him for the sole palpable purpose of wholesale murder.

In spite of being an outlander among the Piutes and a half-breed to boot, Quejo lived for more than twenty-five years before the first indications of running amuck became manifest in his behavior. He began to grow sullen. A deadly belligerence toward all men, Indians and whites alike, grew to a mania. And in 1910 he took the murder path, which, according to Piute lore, cannot lead to beauty. He killed an Indian youth known by the Germanic name of Bismark — shot him through the back of the head. Quejo had tasted blood. During the next twenty years he murdered twenty-two more people, all within a hundred miles of the canyons of the Colorado.

Hi Bohn of Las Vegas, Nevada, was the first white man to cross purposes with Quejo and Bohn lived to tell it. It may be that Quejo was unarmed. At any rate, in a sudden blind fury he broke both of Bohn's arms with a heavy pick handle and then bashed him over the head. Without giving the *coup de grâce* to the prostrate white man, he fled to the McCullough Mountains for

sanctuary. Later, as killing became commonplace for him, to run from the scene of a murder might be essential, but it was never again a rout or a flight in panic. In fact, Quejo's skill at making his escape amounted to genius.

A journalistic account of his killings in chronological sequence would be boring. And no man can be certain of the exact number. Today, tomorrow, or fifty years from now, a trace, a clue, or some shrivelled remains of yet another of Quejo's depredations may be found. The hallmark of his handiwork will probably be a .30-.30 bullet hole in the back or skull of these relics, though at times he used a knife, creeping up on his victims and completing the job with one vicious swipe. Quejo killed, apparently, for two reasons, only one of them imperative. The fundamental motive was the pure, irresistible pleasure the act afforded him. He had acquired an appetite for killing, and like dope addiction and dipsomania, the tendency became habitual. The second reason was superficial — he killed for food, for physical survival. But like the Harps of The Wilderness he could have survived by other means had he so chosen.

After an Indian killing or two, and the skirmish with Hi Bohn, Quejo killed his first white man, a

woodcutter named Woodard, who with his dying breath whispered, "Quejo." And while the last rites were being administered, the operator of the Gold Bug Mill in Eldorado Canyon was shot in the back, and his clothing, shoes, and food supplies stolen. A half-hearted pursuit of the murderer got nowhere.

The years went by and an occasional story or rumor of Quejo would be whispered from the hills, from the canyons, from ranch to ranch, until "Quejo" became synonymous with "Jack the Ripper." And in 1919 an event took place that put Quejo outside the pale of frontier tolerance once and forever. He killed a white woman.

Mrs. Edward Douglas was the wife of a miner. She turned round in her cabin and saw coming in with the cat-like approach of the stalking hunter, a bronzed figure, his black hair held in place by a red band and a rifle in his arms. She saw the glint in his dark eyes and gave one piercing shriek, whereupon Quejo fired the rifle into her breast. Douglas found his wife's body some time later.

Then began a manhunt that was destined to carry on for twenty-one years until Charlie Kenyon and Art Schroeder came into Las Vegas, Nevada, in February 1940, with

the news that the thing they had found in a cave looked to be the long-sought Quejo.

III

Sam Gray was Sheriff of Clark County in 1919, and he assigned the redoubtable job of bringing Quejo to justice to his Under-Sheriff, Frank Wait. Wait breathed deep and undertook the job. In all the twenty-one years he stuck to it he never saw Quejo — and during that time the half-breed killed some fifteen or sixteen people, within anything from one hundred miles to one hundred yards of the Under-Sheriff. And don't think that Wait wasn't trying. His skill, courage, intelligence and physique were pitted against Quejo's murderous genius.

Wait employed Indian trackers, notably a Piute by the name of Baboon. The trail became hot, but never hot enough. Through the tortured malpais of the Colorado River canyons the trail led, with Quejo always just around the bend, at times miles ahead, at times a few hundred yards. The pursuers discovered several of the renegade's caves and occasionally a cache of food, ammunition and clothing. At one point they came upon the red-hot coals of his camp fire. In a cave

they found dozens of shells from desert turtles which Quejo had caught and eaten. A guard was posted at this cave all day, two days, a week, a month. Quejo did not return. He was busy murdering two miners, forever unidentified, fifty miles away. The guards at the cave were dismissed. The day after they left, Quejo was back.

Patiently Frank Wait decided to start again from scratch. All forces returned to Las Vegas. It was Quejo's round — granted — but just one more murder and they'd pick up the trail from that point and never let go. Obliging, Quejo wiped out a family of four on the Arizona side of the Colorado. Two of the members were children, and Quejo added to his souvenirs an object which must either have mystified or amused him — a miniature automobile, a child's toy made of cast-iron. It could have been of no use to the killer except, perhaps, to appeal to a latent esthetic sense. It was bright red and if you pushed it, it scooted.

Frank Wait and a posse started all over again. And so it went through the years. Periodically the possemen quit — Wait, never. Some day, somehow, somewhere, somebody was going to find Quejo off guard, and when that day came, Frank Wait was going to be there.

The depredations continued and the years went by to 1930. Wait, with a posse, was following a discouragingly cold trail east of the Valley of Fire when a lone horseman hauled up on a foam-flecked mount. Quejo had been seen that day only a few hours ago! Where?

"In Las Vegas — on Fremont Street!"

"Great God! Let's go, men," called Wait. The posse raced back to town. It was late afternoon when they arrived. A crowd of men stood before a small grocery store. The terrible Quejo had come into town in broad daylight. He had gone into that grocery store and he had — had —

"What? What'd he do?" demanded Wait.

"He bought a can of peaches," said the proprietor, "and then he walked out." Wait sat down on the curb. Half a dozen men claimed to have recognized Quejo as he left the store. Then he had melted away.

From 1930 to 1940 nothing more was heard of the killer. His last-known dastardly deed was the purchase of canned peaches. Apparently that harmless act was to write finis to his career. Ten years, with no incident to recall those of the past, began to dim the prestige of Quejo. Rewards for his capture

were still extant, but Quejo himself began to recede into limbo. Only Frank Wait remembered.

And on February 20, Wait heard the news that the killer had been sighted again. Charlie Kenyon and Art Schroeder came into town, and if their story was correct, the posse could take its time.

Eleven men left Willow Beach on the Colorado and followed the precipitous trail to Quejo's last stand. There Kenyon guided Frank Wait to the mouth of the cave, and for the first time the officer looked at the face of the man he had pursued for twenty-one years. "Hello, Quejo," he said. "I've come to take you home."

A coroner's jury was sworn in beside the remains, then the thing that had been Quejo was wrapped in canvas and borne down the canyon to the river. Over the badlands Wait packed the light remains in his arms, carried Quejo for the last time out of the country whither his Cocopah mother had carried him sixty years before. "I was sent to get Quejo," he reported to government officials in the modern town of Boulder City. "Here he is."

IV

A twenty-one-year search was now history. All that remained was the

writing of the story for the Southwestern newspapers. But if a student of ethnology or anthropology or psychology of the year 2500 should search the newspaper files of 1940, he would find a paucity of real knowledge about Quejo. What human beings do may have an interest, but the motivating "why" is the real import. Not often enough do we learn the "why."

Most perplexing question of all — why did Quejo decide to die in 1930 at the age of fifty, if there was still a lot more pleasure to be derived from killing? Something caused him to change — not only his manner of living, but life itself was no longer desirable. What caused him arbitrarily to prepare his tomb; to furnish it with objects which he wished to take with him on the journey, his guns, ammunition, wampum, a belt, and a useless toy automobile, the significance of which was greater than any of the other objects? Cave burial is typically Indian. To block up the cave to keep out the scavenging coyotes is also understandable. But when Quejo decided to wall himself in and never come out — what was the motivating force of his decision? Touch that instant of thought, and we'd know more about Quejo than the list of all his crimes and escapes could tell.

But that puzzle was of no consequence to Kenyon and Schroeder and others subsequently involved. There was the reward for Quejo's capture. Kenyon, quite naturally, believed the money should come to him. Then somebody decided that the reward had never read, "dead or alive." Since Quejo was obviously not alive, all reward claims were null and void. Kenyon then demanded his mummy back and couldn't get it. For by that time the cadaver had achieved a value. Quejo was claimed by many interests.

Boulder City decided it wanted him. Hadn't he been turned over to the authorities there by Frank Wait? But the body had been removed to an undertaking establishment in Las Vegas. That institution, finding that nobody intended to pay for Quejo's stay, claimed the right to exhibit the object in order to recover expenses. Kenyon protested: not only had his reward evaporated, but his title to Quejo was questioned. Moreover, he was an Elk, and the local lodge was having a booth in Las Vegas' Helldorado exhibition. The mummified Quejo had been advertised as the feature attraction.

Meanwhile the county Sheriff had legally taken possession of the guns, ammunition, belt and wam-

pum. Frank Wait felt that they should have been his, since it was his mission to bring in Quejo. But Kenyon wanted them, too. So did the undertaker. So did the Elks. So did Boulder City. In the shuffle somebody lost the toy automobile. Then somebody else discovered that Frank Wait, no longer Under-Sheriff but now Chief of Police of Las Vegas, had lost the right to bring in Quejo anyway. Judge Nelson, the Coroner, who had technical custody of the remains, declared that *nobody* had any right to the mummy until it was proved to the satisfaction of a probate court that there were no heirs. This made everybody howl. Quejo was causing as much trouble dead as he had alive. The consistency of his nature was amazing. But the consistency of his material being, having been some days removed from his dry cave, was not, and the undertaker had to seal him into

a coffin with a plate-glass top.

To add the penultimate bit of opera bouffe, the county sheriff discovered not one missing heir, but two, both young half-breed Indians. Each discounted the other's claims of being a "grandnephew" of the deceased. And for the final and "most unkindest cut of all," a third Indian witness declared that both claimants were actually grand-nephews of Quejo, but that the corpse was not that of Quejo after all. It was that of another Indian by the same name. Everybody hit the ceiling. Judge Nelson was not sure of the identity and could hand down no ruling. Charlie Kenyon was furious. Frank Wait was furious. The heirs were furious. So were Las Vegas and Boulder City.

But Quejo, under his glass-topped coffin, was calm enough. On his blanched death's-head there was, and is at the present moment, a ghost of a grin.

INTELLECTUAL FALLACIES

VII

That leprosy is the most infectious of all diseases.

Comment: For centuries this belief has heightened the horror and fear with which lepers are regarded. The disease *may* be transmitted by brief contact with an infected person or his surroundings. Yet its degree of infectiousness is not high. If one deliberately tried to inoculate himself with Hansen's bacillus, which causes leprosy, he would probably fail. It has been estimated that even in cases of conjugal relations between a leper and a well person, instances of infection do not exceed 5 per cent. Suggested by Perry Burgess' book, *Who Walk Alone*. — W. D.

COLLEGE OF SOUTHERN UTAH LIBRARY

PRODUCED 2003 BY UNZ.ORG

ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE THEATRE

BY GEORGE JEAN NATHAN

Season Sans Seasoning

THE look of the 1940-41 dramatic season, judging from the contour of its phiz at the moment, is of a corked bottle of champagne impatiently waiting to launch a ship that is nowhere in sight. The wine is vintage; the crowd is there with money in its pocket and ready to cheer; but the best that has showed up so far is only a number of obsolete ear destroyers. We have witnessed the launching of some eminently satisfactory musicals — *Cabin in the Sky*, *Panama Hattie*, and others — but there hasn't been even a faint splash when it comes to any straight play of any real critical quality.

I am, of course, speaking merely of New York, for things are different on the road. Just as it is a scrubby New York season, so is it a gala one out of town. While Manhattan is twiddling its thumbs over inferior plays, the road is having one of its best seasons with all the good plays that made it a satisfactory last season in the metropolis. The road had better take all

the advantage of the situation it can, because if things keep up in this way it is going to have a lean time of it next year.

Many reasons have been dredged up to account for the paucity of decent scripts, none of them particularly convincing. They say, for instance, that the war and the world unrest have made it impossible for playwrights to concentrate on the theatre. This is nonsense. Eugene O'Neill, even aside from his cycle of nine plays, five of which are completed, has managed for all his deep concern to complete two wholly separate plays, but simply doesn't wish to travel East for rehearsals and so is holding them up for another season. Despite the war and the world upset, Sherwood wrote one play last season, Anderson and Rice wrote one apiece last and have written one apiece for this, Saroyan wrote two that were put on last and has written two more that are looking for someone to produce them this, and so on. The playwrights in