

# **Man-eaters of Kumaon Study Guide**

**Man-eaters of Kumaon by Jim Corbett (hunter)**

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## Plot Summary

The Man-Eaters of Kumaon is the story of Colonel (then Major) Edward James Corbett (1875-1955), who is a famous soldier in the British Indian Army, and an excellent hunter and conservationist. Corbett's greatest claim to fame is keeping the Kumaon area of India safe from man-eating tigers. Corbett notes in his introduction to the book that tigers do not naturally eat human flesh. Instead, they only begin to eat humans through some accident, usually through a wound from a hunter, or an inability to catch their own game, such as broken teeth from old age. It is Corbett's job to hunt the tigers down, which is often a very difficult task. It involves not only risking his life, but of putting himself through grueling conditions, such as making platforms in trees known as machans and keeping watch alone with his shotgun for sometimes twelve and even eighteen hours.

Corbett hunts man-eaters from 1907 to 1938; he documents killing nineteen tigers and fourteen leopards, all of whom are man-eaters. All together, these animals kill twelve hundred human beings, including women and children. Since tigers will often hunt those who stalk them, Corbett hunts alone or with his trusty guard dog Robin. In part because he hunts alone, no characters but Robin have a prominent role in the book. Corbett rarely mentions family and only occasionally mentions friends; most of his interactions are with local Kumaons.

The areas Corbett hunts in are today located in the Indian state of Uttarakhand; the town of Nainital is the capital of the state. Kumaon is the eastern of two administrative zones in Uttarakhand and Garhwal is the other. It is composed of a number of smaller districts, including Cahmpawat. All of Corbett's hunts occur in either Kumaon or Garhwal. In the book, Corbett includes the stories of killing man-eaters in Champawat, Chowgarh, Powalgarh, Mohan, Kanda, Pipal and Thak.

Man-Eaters of Kumaon contains an author's note, nine chapters and a glossary full of Kumaon jargon. The author's note explains why and how tigers become man-eaters and the reason that Corbett has to kill them. Chapter 1 is the story of Corbett's first man-eater kill, the Champawat Man-Eater, Chapter 2 introduces Robin and their first hunts together, and Chapter 3 tells the story of the Chowgarh tigers and the hunt. Chapter 4 contains the hunt of the "Bachelor" of Powalgarh and Chapter 5 relates the hunt of the Mohan Man-Eater. Chapter 6 is a brief interlude concerning a fishing expedition. Chapters 7 and 8 are both brief and discuss the huntings of the Kanda Man-Eater and the Pipal Pani Tiger respectively. The final chapter describes Corbett's final hunt, where after weeks of tracking, he kills the Thak Man-Eater.



# Author's Note

## Author's Note Summary and Analysis

In the author's note, the author explains why animals develop man-eating habits. Man-eating tigers, for instance, have been compelled to eat men due to wounds and old age. Only when tigers have been incapacitated will they eat humans, or when they have missing teeth and so on. It is important to not classify tigers as man-eating too quickly, however.

Not all man-eaters are old and mangy; the mange comes from too much salt in human flesh. The cubs of man-eaters also do not automatically become man-eaters. Cubs will eat what their mothers give them, but mothers almost never give them human flesh. There is also some dispute over whether humans killed and partly eaten are eaten by tigers or leopards. Tigers are usually responsible for kills in the day, leopards kills at night.

However, often why a tiger kills men depends on the supply of natural food in his environment, the nature of his disability, and whether it is a male or a female with cubs. The author has never seen a tiger be deliberately cruel to a human being without provocation. Tigers seek to maintain a natural balance, and so eating humans is rare. It is not fair to the species to blame them all for the actions of a few. The author's opinion has met with near universal agreement. He does not want tigers to be killed for this reason, for he fears that the tiger in India may go extinct.

Leopards, though, are somewhat scavengers and will be pushed to eating human flesh when game in their environment is slaughtered. The author finds himself in hills filled mostly with Hindu who cremate their dead, though cremation is a complex undertaking, but in times of great disease when bodies cannot be disposed of quickly enough, hot coals are placed in the bodies of the dead and the bodies are then thrown over a hill. Leopards will acquire a taste for human blood from these bodies and then will start killing humans. Of the two man-eating leopards in Kumaon, who have killed five hundred and twenty-five humans, one followed a severe outbreak of cholera and the other a mysterious disease that in 1918 in India was called "war fever."



# Chapter 1, The Champawat Man-Eater

## Chapter 1, The Champawat Man-Eater Summary and Analysis

Major Corbett is hunting with Eddie Knowles in Malani when he hears of the Champawat man-eater. His friend Eddie's family is full of excellent athletes and his brother-in-law has been hired by the Indian government to kill the Champawat. However, the tiger is still not dead four years later and the death-toll rises.

The tiger comes into Kumaon from Nepal as a man-eater, having killed two hundred people and then in Kumaon killing two hundred and thirty-four more. Major Corbett travels to Naini Tal to visit Deputy Commissioner Berthoud, who is pleased to know that Major Corbett will take up the responsibility of hunting the Champawat down. He declines government rewards and keeps his men back. He neither wants to be seen as a mercenary nor take the risk of being shot.

A woman in Pali, a village of fifty, has just been killed, and the town is terrified. The tiger is still nearby and Corbett's trimmed-down crew of eight stay overnight. Corbett has never hunted a man-eater before and is a bit frightened. The next day he has the villagers take him to the places where people have been killed. For three hours, Corbett searches the village for tracks and then stops for lunch. The people resume activities while he is there, but only then; they harvest and clean.

The next morning, several village men take Corbett around the area to hunt mountain goats for food. Eventually Corbett runs across one and eventually shoots one in the shoulder and then, improbably, right through the neck. The village grows in confidence at Corbett's success.

At noon, Corbett has a group of men take him around. In a ravine, Corbett finds pug mark tracks and is able to reconstruct some of what has happened. He then mentions that man-eaters, contrary to myth, do eat head, hands and feet of humans; they will eat everything. They then find some of the woman's remains that they will return to the village for cremation. Corbett also hears from a woman who chased the tiger away.

The Major learns much from his research and goes back to Naini Tal; for the next three days, he wanders the jungles all day. Hilariously, on a tangent, Corbett assures the reader that he does not dress like a woman when he goes on the hunt. Corbett decides that the tiger has moved to Campawat, east of Pali. Corbett finds his way there with his party but then adds some twenty more men. Some of the men tell Corbett that they saw a live woman carried off by the tiger but were afraid to do anything. Even with a large party, they were unable to rescue her.

The next morning, Corbett, accompanied by Champawat's Tahsildar, goes down to an area where a leopard has eaten a cow just that morning. They then find a tiger's



preferred drinking hole, though this is not the same tiger. They are on a wild goose-chase.

The next day, Corbett relaxes and the Tahsildar joins him. A man tells them that the man-eater just killed a girl. The people are hysterical and point Corbett the right way; Corbett sets off and finds the tigress tracks. He then starts on the chase with the Tahsildar and his men. Corbett realizes he is close enough to stop the tigress from enjoying her meal when he finds a "young, comely leg" that belonged to the little girl.

All of a sudden, Corbett raises his gun, sensing that the tiger is aware of him; he then sees her tracks lead to a wilderness of rocks. Progress is slow, though Corbett knows that of her four hundred and thirty-six kills, she has never been pursued so persistently. Corbett starts to hear her growl.

After four hours, Corbett is still on her track, not having seen her. Unfortunately, it is nearing sunset and camp has to be made. Corbett cannot stalk her too quickly because she would probably leave the locality. He needs a group of men to smoke her out of the area. Corbett then returns to the Tahsildar and they recruit men that morning, nearly three hundred in all. They then begin the hunt.

When Corbett settles into a spot to wait for the tiger, many of the men are shouting and shooting; Corbett then sees the tigress three hundred yards away. Shots are fired and then the tiger appears on Corbett's left front. Corbett shoots and hits her; she then looks at him and he shoots her again. He is out of shots, and is lucky the tiger does not charge. Corbett has the Tahsildar bring him his gun and starts pursuit; within twenty feet of her, he fires and hits her right paw; this causes her to lurch forward and hit a rock. When Corbett approaches her, he hopes she is dead. The crowd is filled with rage and eager to hack her to bits.

However, when the crowd approaches the tiger, they calm; Corbett finds that the tigress's teeth are broken and so she could not kill her natural prey. They then wrap the tigress's body and return her to the village so the people can know she is dead. On return, they find the girl's head; when they get back to the village, Corbett skins the tiger, cut her up and then gives parts to the people and the people make locketts. While a celebration is prepared, Corbett cannot stay; the next day he leaves with his men.



# Chapter 2, Robin

## Chapter 2, Robin Summary and Analysis

Major Corbett never intends to recruit his gun dog Pincha. Over the past thirteen years, he proves invaluable. Corbett rechristens him Robin. Corbett starts training him for the hunt immediately. After hunting season ends, Robin and Corbett spend the summer on the hills, with Robin learning many valuable lessons. It later turns out that his heart is weak from malnutrition at a young age, so Corbett can only take him out after big game. They often follow tracks together, with Robin tracking when they enter the jungle. When Corbett misses a kill shot, Robin often is able to distract the enraged animals. Robin only abandons him once, and that is the story of the chapter.

One day Robin and Corbett are hunting a leopard; Corbett has shot him but missed his heart. They then track the leopard's blood trail but the leopard escapes so Corbett cannot track him. Robin has to go it alone. Robin finds his trail and the leopard springs at them. Corbett shoots him through the left thigh and deflects the leopard. However, he disappears before Corbett can get another shot. Robin and Corbett track the leopard again. They cannot find him, so they decide to make for home.

The next morning they pick up the leopard's blood trail again; Corbett tries to get the leopard to charge at him on open ground. The leopard indeed springs at them and Corbett immediately fires twice. However, the leopard is too fast and disappears again. Robin runs off at the sight of the leopard and hides behind a tree trunk. After the leopard disappears, Corbett finds him and clearly Robin feels ashamed.

A few minutes later, they walk to find the leopard, who is dead. While Corbett is writing the story, Robin dies.



## Chapter 3, The Chowgarh Tigers

### Chapter 3, The Chowgarh Tigers Summary and Analysis

Between December 15th, 1925 and March 21st, 1930, the Chowgarh Tiger creates a reign of terror. In February 1929, Major Corbett commits to killing it. The Chowgarh tiger has done more damage than the three man-eaters in Kumaon. The newest trails are too old, so Corbett tracks from the place the last person was killed. When he reaches Dalkania, he finds that the tiger has attacked a number of women just that morning. Corbett spends the day outlining the trail. He notes that often foliage and birds are useful aids in tracking a tiger; approaching him from behind is too dangerous when one has to enter dense jungle first. Corbett spends the second day marking out a trail as well. The next day he runs across a group of tigers that he narrowly avoids.

Corbett spends a third night in the jungle and observes a tigress; she is old and knows much about dealing with men. He acquires her pelt and stores it. The next day, uncomfortable and hungry, Corbett leaves for Dalkania. When he arrives, he falls asleep for twelve hours. His observations have also helped him realize that several of the tigers have acquired a taste for human flesh from sharing with the original man-eater.

For ten days, nothing is heard of the tigress. On the eleventh day, a woman is killed by the man-eater. She is not dead when Corbett arrives and bleeds while he is there. He treats her and many of her wounds heal; afterwards he finds where she was attacked and stays up all night waiting for the tigress to return. However, he sees and hears nothing. The next day, Corbett follows the tracks but loses them after two miles.

Two days later, the man-eater has killed another victim five miles away. Half-way there, Corbett feels that he is being tracked but it is a false alarm. When he arrives he finds fresh pug marks from the man-eater. He also finds the girl, who is too damaged to describe. Were Corbett a doctor and had the right tools, he still could not have saved her. Corbett has to stay the night as well, and the girl dies that night.

Corbett discovers that the elder tigress is relying on her cub to do her killing; thus many are mauled first and then killed and some can escape. Corbett stays at Dalkania another week and announces he will leave for home the next Monday, as he can no longer stand the strain of not sleeping and tracking. However, before he leaves, he helps the villagers hunt game. His guide is an elderly, gaunt man who was attacked long ago and survived.

Corbett shoots and kills a mountain goat, but from far away he watches a bear approach the goat. Corbett shoots it as well, hitting it in the stomach. After hitting the bear five times, it runs off and Corbett follows the blood trail; they decide they have to kill the bear because it will get nasty. They quickly find the bear and chase him. The gaunt guide sneaks up behind the bear and brings an axe down on his head. However,





the axe bounces off his skull and he runs off. Corbett then uses his axe and cleaved his skull.

A day later, Corbett starts his travel home, first by footpath then by car. No news has surfaced of the tigress for a week but just an hour after he leaves, Corbett finds the tigress's tracks and starts to track them. The tigress apparently has seen him and so he watches her from a ledge that she cannot surprise him on. However, while he wait, he hears nothing and then his men arrive; they begin their march. A man they visit to find water is later attacked after they leave; he us taken thirty miles away to the nearest hospital by fellow villagers but he dies there. Corbett reflects on the irony of this man being killed, instead of he who tracked the tigress for a month.

The next February Major Corbett goes back to Dalkania. A number of others have been killed and still more wounded. When he arrives, he finds that a cow had been killed the evening before in a familiar area, but the cow was killed by a leopard. The man-eater is still at large. Corbett starts to track once again and finds a place from which to watch the cow carcass; he hops the animal that killed the cow will return to eat. After ten minutes a leopard appears. On a tangent, Corbett admires the beauty of the leopard and again speculates on the oddity that some families simply suffer misfortune at the hands of the tigress. Corbett then shoots and kills the leopard.

The next morning, Corbett moves his camp and the next day he starts off after the tigress. By afternoon, two men approach him, telling him the tigress has killed a bullock. Corbett then camps around a hill where he can see the carcass but vultures ruin the kill. Near evening, the villagers bring a buffalo to tempt the tigress; Corbett then sets watch at a higher altitude again. After the sun sets, the tiger attacks the buffalo and kills it. Corbett notes that tigers kill with their teeth.

Corbett aims and fires, but he misses and the tiger runs off; however, the tiger has not seen him. After ten minutes or so, the tiger's head appears again, walking up to the buffalo. Corbett again aims and fires and the tiger runs off. Corbett has shot the buffalo. The tiger will not return a third time, and so Corbett has to leave in the night. However, he is sure the tiger is the man-eater, though he does not know where she is. Corbett stays where he is and at dawn he returns to the village. The villagers are disappointed.

However, as Corbett explains that the tiger ran off, one of the villagers sees the tiger lying dead in the ravine. Then another tiger is found, both lying sixty yards from where he fired. When Corbett approaches the tigress, he finds that she is very old but that she is not the man-eater; the villagers dissent when he tells them. The second tiger is a mere male. Corbett then skins the tiger and finds it unpleasant. Afterwards he returns to camp. No more news comes concerning the man-eater and after a few more weeks in Dalkania, Corbett leaves.

On March 22nd, 1930, Corbett receives a request to go to Kala Agar; after two days, Corbett arrives. On the 21st, a woman was killed and taken by the man-eater. The next day the woman's body is taken for cremation and replaced by a young buffalo; that



night, an animal comes upon the kill, and they think it is a bear. They ignore it; however, it is the man-eater.

On the 25th, Corbett decides to use buffaloes as bait, since it worked before. The tigress approaches them for three nights but does not touch them. The fourth night a buffalo is killed, but it turns out it is by a pair of leopards. Corbett has to kill them so they will not kill the other buffaloes. Over the next two weeks, Corbett spends all of daylight tracking; he only sees the tigress twice.

Corbett cautions that the narrative has been long. He then gives an extended account of his first and last meeting with the tigress. The meeting occurs on April 11th, 1930, nineteen days after he arrives. He goes out at 2pm that day to again tie up his three buffalos. He comes upon a group of men on the way and leaves two buffalo with them, tied up. Then Corbett waits, finding a ravine to scout in. When he stands on a giant slate rock, he looked behind his right shoulder and looks right into the tigress's face. He then describes the situation in great detail.

Corbett knows he has to make the first move and in a way that will not alarm the tigress. Corbett moves slowly and the tigress is still looking at him. He aims and fires. The tigress's head sinks onto her paws and a jet of blood comes out of the bullet hole. It has injured her spine and shattered her upper heart. Corbett has killed the Chowgarh tigress, the animal that has killed sixty-four humans, though some think twice that. He attributes his success to swinging around and shooting her with one hand, because he is holding rare eggs in the other, his light rifle and the fact that the tiger is a man-eater. Corbett cannot resist attaching some quasi-divine significance to the eggs.

The tigress was returned to camp at the Kala Agar Forest Bungalow and to the day of Corbett's writing, no human is killed or wounded over hundreds of square miles of the village. The tigress's claws are broken, as is one of her canine teeth. Her front teeth are worn down and all these defects cause her to become a man-eater.



# Chapter 4, The Bachelor of Powalgarh

## Chapter 4, The Bachelor of Powalgarh Summary and Analysis

From 1920 to 1930, the most prized big-game trophy in the United Provinces is "The Bachelor of Powalgarh." One day in a glade near his house, Major Corbett sees the Bachelor, though he quickly disappears. He notes that, despite attempts to catch him, the Bachelor has never been fired at. The next winter, Corbett takes Wyndham, their Commissioner and tiger expert to see the Bachelor's home. They and their assistants find his pug tracks and find that the Bachelor is quite large.

A few days later, a runner tells Corbett that he has seen pug tracks of a very large tiger and the next day he and Robin set out to find the tracks. Corbett senses that the tiger is only a few minutes ahead of them. After moving a few dozen yards, Robin indicates that the Bachelor is in a ravine just ahead. However, he disappears and Corbett and Robin go home empty handed.

At breakfast, Corbett returns alone with his gun. He then hears a man whose buffalo are being attacked by the tiger and arrives just in time to save the man. The man, a friend of Corbett's, urges the tiger away and Corbett follows the tiger back into the jungle. He watches for the tiger and eventually finds a track that he crosses with Robin. Corbett then loads his rifle and waits for the Bachelor. After Corbett's call, the Bachelor appears.

Corbett aims and fires but the Bachelor does not die; instead, he jumps into the air and falls onto a tree. He then attacks the tree and tears it apart, and Corbett expects to be attacked at any moment. He hides for half an hour, afraid to reload. He then lies still for another half-hour and then goes home.

The next morning, Corbett returns with his friend, an expert tree-climber. Initially they cannot find the tiger, though they found a blood trail and part of the tiger's skull. He also realizes that the Bachelor had been very close to him. Back in a tree, Corbett fixes his rifle and starts to pepper the bushes with shots. However, he hears very little and decides to call it a day.

Returning the next morning, Corbett finds his friend with buffaloes on the plain; his friend found the blood trail and skull shards with the help of his buffaloes and thinks that the Bachelor could no longer be alive. Thus he and Corbett next use the buffaloes to hunt for the Bachelor's body, about twenty-five in all. Progress is slow and Corbett sends the man and his buffalo home.

On the fourth day, Corbett finds fresh pug marks, though there is no more blood trail. A bit later, Corbett spots a tiger near a water hole, but he does not shoot as he is not sure it is the Bachelor. He then hears a stick break, indicating that an animal has fled from the tiger; eventually Corbett sees the Bachelor crouching and shoots him twice, killing

him. Corbett examines the body and finds the hole in his head and it is surprisingly clean.

Corbett heads home and rounds up a carrying party. They then measure the tiger and find it to be ten feet, seven inches.



# Chapter 5, The Mohan Man-Eater

## Chapter 5, The Mohan Man-Eater Summary and Analysis

The next man-eating tiger is to be found near the Himalayas on cliffs near the Kosi River and fifteen miles from Corbett's summer home. A woman is attacked four miles from her village and the villagers are terrified. The injured woman is brought back to the village and tells her story to Mothi Singh, a friend of Major Corbett's; she later dies. The woman is the first human killed by The Mohan Man-Eater. The tiger will later kill a number of other people across the area and at an increasing rate. Corbett decides to take up the hunt.

On a hot day in May, Corbett and his assistants make their way to Mohan and gather information on the Mohan man-eater. He has just killed a fisherman. Progress is slow due to steep tracks and great heat. On the way, Corbett makes friends with an Indian fisherman's wife who will spread his name to the village and help him gather information.

When Corbett's team reach the Foresters' Hut, they make camp. Over the next day, a number of men come from the village and speak with Corbett about the man-eater and give him the lay of the land. They also tell him that the Mohan Man-Eater makes a low moaning sound when it enters the village and that the sound is continuous. Corbett infers that the tiger has a wound, that he feels it only when in motion and that therefore the wound is in one of his legs.

Corbett has the Tahsildar purchase two young male buffaloes and bring them to Mohan for him. He then explains his ordinary plan to the villagers, that is, to use the buffaloes as bait. Night comes and Corbett goes to bed. At breakfast, Corbett sends for the buffalo and travels to where the most recent person has been killed (at that time, a young woman). The trail is too old to be useful, but after lunch the buffaloes arrive.

Corbett sets off to find tiger tracks alone a road; tigers often leave scratch marks when they walk on the side of the road and generate useful information, such as the tiger's gender, direction, time elapsed since it passed, direction of its headquarters, nature of its kills and whether the animal has recently eaten. Pug marks are often left as well. Indeed, Corbett finds several scratch marks and later pug marks. The tiger is large, male and old and Corbett discovers his direction. By sunset, Corbett has made only mild progress tracking the tiger. He returns to camp and goes to sleep. The next morning is spent gathering information from the villagers and at lunch Corbett ties up one of the buffaloes. He put bells on both of their necks but the next day he finds them asleep and has heard nothing.

Corbett decides to stalk the tiger and ties up the buffaloes for a full twenty-four hours, watching from afar. This continues for four days. On the fourth day, Corbett senses the



tiger and after moving slowly away he hears the low muttered growl above him. Animals make noise, however, and the tiger runs off.

The next morning is clear, after a rain that washes heat and dust out of the air. Corbett visits his buffaloes in the morning and then leaves down the road, taking his 450/400 rifle. Eventually Corbett finds fresh pug marks. Near that area, the buffalo is gone and Corbett feels disconcerted; it seems impossible to move the buffalo without making noise. When he finds the buffalo, he realizes his plans have been badly upset; the tiger has gnawed through his ropes and carried off the kill. He then follows the drag marks of the buffalo's body.

At the end of the track, Corbett comes to a rock formation, though the rock gives a good view of the surrounding jungle and protects him from the man-eater. When Corbett climbs up, he spots the man-eater. After half-an-hour of waiting, Corbett moves down the rock to the kill. The tiger has eaten about half of the buffalo and many tracks surround the carcass. The grass tells him the tiger is only minutes away. After a minute or two more of tracking, Corbett sees the Mohan Man-Eater's tail twenty feet away. Corbett creeps forward until he has a better shot. The tiger is lying down, asleep. Corbett then shoots him in his forehead and the tiger's body barely moves.

Corbett defends his killing the tiger when he is asleep, since it is so dangerous, though he regrets not giving the animal a "sporting chance." Corbett moves the tiger's body to the ledge and coos over the hills. A crowd comes to meet him and they drag the tiger back to the village. After skinning the tiger, Corbett discovers that a number of porcupine quills are lodged in the tiger's left leg; they do not dissolve and have been there awhile. He then remarks on how odd it is that tigers get stuck with porcupine quills when they eat porcupines but that leopards do not.



# Chapter 6, The Fish of My Dreams

## Chapter 6, The Fish of My Dreams Summary and Analysis

Major Corbett loves to fish for mahseer, finding it a fascinating sport. The rivers he fishes in, though, are full of other wildlife as well. One day Corbett is out on the river trying to spot a tigress and her two cubs in order to photograph them. He is fishing all the while and at one point grapples with a fish on his line, on and off again. Eventually Corbett catches it and leaves it in the river tied with a line through its gills. The next day, when he releases it, it immediately swims away and pulls Corbett into the river. The fish is probably fifty pounds, though he eventually pulls it ashore. Catching the fish makes Corbett very happy.



# Chapter 7, The Kanda Man-Eater

## Chapter 7, The Kanda Man-Eater Summary and Analysis

Chapter 7 brings Major Corbett to another hunt. On another hot day in May, Corbett is staying in a Forest Bungalow and is notified that another man-eating tiger has been spotted. The next day, he starts to gather information and take account of the tiger tracks. While he does not make progress, he is able to confront and kill a rare snake. The next day, Corbett finds fresh pug marks and then the next day tracks them down alone; another day passes and Corbett learns that a buffalo has been killed and dragged.

Corbett's reconnaissance begins; midday Corbett reaches the right spot to find the kill and from a ledge he catches site of it, though not the tiger. Corbett then suddenly becomes aware that the tiger is staring at him at short range. The tiger then belts off beyond Corbett's view; Corbett shoots at him and he falls backward; he seems to break his back. However, he is not dead, having only been hit in the left elbow joint.

The next day, Corbett visits the kill and finds that the tiger has returned to it to have a meal; while deciding where to scout out the tiger, Corbett hears the tiger call and calls back. They go back and forth for an hour, though the tiger refuses to approach.

Corbett decides to camp out in a tree and spends the night straining his eyes and ears. He then feels a stone strike the tree and realizes it is the tiger. The tiger can probably reach him from the tree. When Corbett prepares his rifle, he hears a deep growl. After a bit of time, the tiger leaves and starts eating the kill. This is early in the morning.

Corbett spots the tiger and takes his shot; he hits and this produces a roar. The tiger rushes toward the tree and Corbett takes another shot that goes into his chest. The tiger still strikes the tree and falls down into the valley into a pool. He then lumbers out of sight. When Corbett tracks him down, he is dead. Next the villagers come to drag off the corpse.

Local inhabitants often perform heroic acts in the fact of the man-eaters. Corbett then tells the sort of one act regarding the Kanda man-eater's last victim; Corbett remembers every detail. An elderly man and his only son live in the same area; the older man served in the army in World War I. He has been asked by locals to kill a man-eater, which has already killed two women. The two men find themselves in the jungle and in a misfortunate oversight, the younger steps out into a ravine where the man-eater is. The tiger then springs on him and kills him.

The father returns to the village to learn that his son has been received into the army and only later goes into the woods to search for him after being unable to find him. The man asks no one to follow him and he spends all night searching for his son. As the sun





rises, the father sees his son dead and collects his remains. The father runs a grave risk, although his son has died. When Corbett kills the Kanda man-eater, the father reports his gratitude. This is the last of the three man-eaters Corbett promised the District Officials of Kumaon he would kill.



# Chapter 8, The Pipal Pani Tiger

## Chapter 8, The Pipal Pani Tiger Summary and Analysis

Major Corbett tells us of a tiger, no more than a year of age, whose pug marks he tracks down. He sees the cub in January and decides to wait for it around a chital kill. Near sunset, the cub appears in front of the kill and Corbett shoots at him, missing only by a hair. The next winter, he sees the cub several times. Later the cub finds a mate. One day, Corbett tracks down both tigers and finds them asleep, but a bird wakes them up and he misses his shot.

After a week, the tiger splits with his mate and no longer permits Corbett to visit his kills and in the next March, the tiger kills his first adult buffalo. He is able to track the tiger through its drag marks, though it wounds him with its horn, causing the tiger to lose interest. Two months later, the tiger feasts on small animals on the outskirts of the village.

Over the years he increases in both size and repute; many sportsmen try to kill him. One day a villager, hunting pig with a single shot-gun, shoot a pig in the jungle; some equipment malfunction prevents them from carrying it off right away and probably saved their lives. That night the search for the pig is abandoned.

The "pig," in fact, is the tiger, the Pipal Pani tiger that is. Now that he is wounded he might do great harm; for three days Corbett searches for him. On the fourth afternoon he finds two people running from tiger calls that have caused a cattle stampede. Corbett then camps and makes his tiger call and is answered. After half an hour, the tiger appears and when Corbett raises his rifle the tiger rushes at him. Corbett shoots him in the chest with a heavy bullet, killing him.

Sadly it turns out that the wound Corbett feared would make him dangerous was almost healed. However, he still has a fabulous trophy, ten feet and three inches in length. Corbett does have regrets that he will not again hear the growl of the tiger he has known for fifteen years.



## Chapter 9, The Thak Man-Eater

### Chapter 9, The Thak Man-Eater Summary and Analysis

In September 1938 a girl in Naini Tal is killed by a tiger and Major Corbett's services are again required. The town where the attack occurred is seven miles west of Thak. An old woman is killed in Sem as Corbett approaches Naini Tal. When he arrived dozens of villagers are ready to hunt. The day after arrival, Corbett starts after pug marks, finding tigress and a young male tiger's tracks. The tigress is of average size and it is not clear why she is a man-eater, though perhaps the Chuka man-eater introduced her to human flesh.

Corbett again procures buffaloes and ties them up. On the 27th, a man from Thak is missing. After breakfast, Corbett puts out for Thak, accompanied by a number of men. When they arrive, the man has been found by his wife's clothes. The group is determined to shoot the tiger on her kill. However, it is hard to find a blood trail. Corbett's friend Ibbotson, Corbett and the Headsman of Thak, Tewari, move silently through the forest. Eventually they find the tigress though she runs off. She leaves a blood trail and they find the mangled corpse of the man.

At some point in the day, the team starts to go back to the village, but Corbett, Ibbotson and Tewari believe that the tigress will move her kill. They then track the kill and eventually hear the tigress move a rock. When a stick breaks, Corbett knows exactly where she is. Ibbotson returns an hour later and Corbett remarks on his bravery and intelligence. The men then make a machan, a tree platform, near the kill and start off for camp.

Ibbotson is behind when Corbett hears the tiger and realizes that the tigress has gone after him, though Ibbotson keeps his party safe. Now Corbett can track her movements, even after sundown. Corbett then camps and falls asleep and pulls an all-night vigil.

The tigress crosses the river Ladhya the next day and some men spot her. Corbett and Ibbotson quickly find her pug marks, though they cannot find her. On the 29th, they track the tigress to another area they find the pug marks again. In a machan later, Corbett hears the tiger calls and two nights later the buffalo at Sem is killed. The next day Ibbotson and Corbett go to find the kill and track the tigress to a small area, though they are still looking for the kill. They eventually track down her location but decide it is too risky to try for a shot.

The next morning, Ibbotson and Corbett find out that the tigress has carried the kill away; they track her and find where she has drug the kill; they hear her again but cannot track her. Early next day, Ibbotson and his wife are scheduled to leave, along with their fifty men.



Corbett has to proceed alone and continues to use his buffaloes with his own men. He continues his search, but to no avail. Corbett has to leave on November 9th, much to the chagrin of the villagers. On the 12th, a tigress kills a man in Thak. On the 24th, Corbett returns and procures more buffalo. While Corbett is gone, the Headman is nearly killed as well. Corbett then recounts the story of how the man who is killed dies; he also discusses some of Thak's history, which is quite long.

Corbett finds the tigress's pug marks again and is able to locate the tigress's last kill location; the body, incidentally, has not yet been recovered. After more tracking, Corbett returns home for the day. He then notes that he promised he would return by December and that his man-eater hunting days would be over. Corbett can no longer handle the strain.

On the 25th, Corbett goes off for tracks again, noting that thousands of men are preparing to harvest the trees in the area where the Thak man-eater lives. That day, Corbett takes another buffalo to Thak and finds the pug marks again; he then leaves the buffalo in the proper area but again, no luck; it seems the tigress has no interest in buffalo. At sunset, Corbett camps in a tree for sixteen hours and goes back to camp. When he returns, the second buffalo is dead and has been dragged away. The next day Corbett finds the buffalo but is not able to stop the tiger before he hears it terrorizing someone.

At 10 pm, the tigress calls twice and is on the move; Corbett sets after her but she is silent the whole night and Corbett returns to camp. He then asks the Headman about who the screams could have been from; he does not know.

The next day another blood trail appears and the Headman takes him to track it; he then hears tigress calls though they do not last for long. After another night of stalking, Corbett returns to camp. At that point a large number of people surround the camps, mostly construction workers. Then the last day of man-eater hunting comes and Corbett decides to use goats as bait rather than buffaloes. In Thak, Corbett hears more tiger calls along with his team though this leads nowhere.

Corbett returns to camp on the last day; he has hunted the Thak Man-Eater for a long time. Corbett deeply regrets his failure and knows that people will die. However, before he leaves the village, villagers report hearing tigress calls; Corbett then decides to set off again to get a shot before the very last day is over. He decides to call and a back and forth ensues; she is on her way. After some difficulty locating a shooting area, Corbett sends out a final call.

The tigress comes in in an unexpected fury; she calls at close range and terrifies Corbett and the villagers that accompany him. Nightfall is coming and something has to be done quickly. The tigress then appears and calls right in view and stops dead. Corbett's first bullet hits her under her right eye and the second in her throat. Corbett's rifle kickback nearly sends him off of his perch. The tigress is dead and the villagers, while initially having trouble getting the tigress back to camp, are successful. Corbett is ecstatic. The tigress is then burned on a haystack.



The population that had fled Thak returns and has since lived in peace. Corbett skins the tigress and finds her relatively young and with two buckshot wounds; one partly incapacitated her and probably caused her to become a man-eater. After skinning, Corbett leaves on a twenty mile journey. This is the end of his man-eater career. In Corbett's opinion, all of his suffering was worthwhile even if it saved only a single human life.



# Characters

## Major Jim Corbett

The author and main character of *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* is Colonel (then Major) Edward James Corbett, otherwise known as Jim. Born in Nainital, India, near most of his activities in the book, Corbett is a British citizen though largely lifelong resident of the Kumaon district of the now Indian state of Uttarakhand. Corbett is most well known for his excellent hunting skills particularly with respect to killing dozens of man-eating tigers and leopards in Northern India.

The then United Provinces government (contemporary states of both Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand) often hires Corbett to hunt leopards and tigers in their provinces, particularly upon receiving reports from local villagers about something being mauled or killed by one of these animals. Between 1907 and 1938, Corbett is the main man for the job, killing 19 tigers and 14 leopards that together kill over twelve hundred people. The story of his first kill is recorded in Chapter 1, the Champawat Tiger, which alone kills four-hundred and thirty-six people.

Many readers will be tempted to assume that a pre-Indian independence British hunter in India would be a savage imperialist and bigot, but no such qualities are displayed in the book. Corbett is a man of the hunt and receives a thrill from killing animals, but he only shoots the wrong animal on one occasion and deeply regrets it. Furthermore, he hates to shoot tigers in their sleep because he respects them enough to give them a "sporting chance." Finally, he is a great conservationist and lover of nature; he claims that he only kills tigers in order to protect the people they threaten.

## Robin

Major Corbett often hunts alone, and he does so for several reasons. First, other hunters are rarely as well trained as he is and have significantly less endurance; this means that these hunters would be in significant danger. They would also leave a larger trail for the man-eaters to track, as they often would when they sensed they were being stalked. Thus, *Man-Eaters of Kumaon*, while often mentioning that Corbett travelled with a team, notes few if any individuals of significance.

However, there is one exception to this generalization and that is Corbett's hunting dog Robin, his beloved companion. When Corbett decides to raise Robin, he does not really want a dog but Robin endears himself to him. When Corbett is writing the chapter, Robin is thirteen years old and dies as Corbett is finishing the chapter. Corbett does not initially intend for Robin to be a hunting dog, but he proves somewhat helpful. However, due to a leg injury, Robin often makes noise in the woods and so cannot be used to hunt small game. For this reason, he primarily aids Corbett in hunts for tigers and leopards.



The two would often find pug marks and Corbett tracks the animal into the jungle; Robin picks up from there. Sometimes Robin runs animals out of bushes into Corbett's line of sight. Despite the danger, Robin only once runs off from Corbett during a hunt; but this is a special event and Corbett forgives him.

## **Local Tahsildars and Headmen**

Local commissioners and village leaders; these individuals often report news to Corbett and sometimes accompany him on hunts.

## **Local Villagers**

Local villagers are the most common victims of the man-eaters and are also among those most eager for revenge and most grateful to Corbett when he kills one of them.

## **Corbett's Friends**

Corbett rarely goes into any details about his friends, but they often accompany him on hunts or entertain him between hunting expeditions.

## **The Champawat Man-Eater**

Corbett's first man-eater kill; the tigress kills over four hundred people.

## **The Chowgarh Tigers**

A man-eating Tigress and her cub that helps her track humans, Corbett kills them both but does not realize that the cub has not yet acquired a taste for human flesh.

## **The Bachelor of Powalgarh**

A massive male tiger that Corbett kills in Chapter 4; he measures ten feet and seven inches end to end.

## **The Mohan Man-Eater**

A tiger Corbett kills in Chapter 5 who becomes a man-eater when porcupine quills infect his leg.



## **The Kanda Man-Eater**

A man-eating tiger that kills a man's son and leads the man to a great act of heroism. Corbett helps the man have peace when he kills the tiger.

## **The Pipal Pani Tiger**

Corbett knows the Pipal Pani tiger for years, from a year after his birth to fifteen years later, when Corbett has to kill him.

## **The Thak Man-Eater**

The final man-eater that Corbett kills before retirement; it almost eludes him.





# Objects/Places

## Causes of Man-Eating

Tigers often become man-eaters after sustaining wounds or physical wear that makes them unable to successfully hunt their natural prey.

## Pug Marks

Tiger tracks that Corbett uses for tracking.

## Machans

Tree platforms Corbett builds to scout for tigers or wait to shoot them.

## Vigils

Corbett would often engage in overnight "vigils" to watch for the man-eaters.

## Buffaloes

Corbett would often use Indian buffalo to lure man-eaters into a line of sight or to get them to drag buffaloes away to create "drag" marks that enable better tracking.

## Bungalows

A sort of one story house created in India; Corbett often stayed in local bungalows when he was on the hunt.

## Rifles

Corbett often discusses the rifles he uses to hunt man-eaters; he prefers his 450/400 rifle.

## Cooee

Animal calls made from bushes.



## **Sahib**

A salutation for "Sir" or a Britishman.

## **Shikari**

Hunter's guides in Kumaon.

## **Kumaon**

The region of India that is today the eastern of two administrative areas in the Indian State of Uttarakhand. Major Corbett spends most of his life in Kumaon and hunts most of his man-eaters there. The capital is Nainital, which Corbett often uses as a way point on his way to other towns.

## **India**

While Corbett is British he spends almost all of his life in India, particularly in the present day state of Uttarakhand which is then the United Provinces.

## **Local Kumaon Villages**

Corbett spends a great amount of time in a number of small villages where man-eaters are located, including Champawat, Chowgarh, Powalgarh, Mohan, Kanda, Pipal and Thak.



# Themes

## The Glory of the Hunt

Man-Eaters of Kumaon is an exciting book not only because it is a true account of the dangerous hunts for man-eating tigers pursued by Major Corbett, but because the accounts themselves are riveting. Major Corbett is an excellent story teller and includes a number of important details of the hunts. He discusses at great length the details of his preparations and the sounds he hears; he explains his strategies for hunting down the tigers and personalizes the tigers to a great degree. The reader will get a good impression of the physical feels of hunting for long stretches of time. Corbett displays extraordinary skill with the rifle and an unusual ability to stand totally still and stay up for all night vigils in a tree for half a day at a time.

Corbett also discusses the tigers with a sense of respect; he hates to shoot tigers while they are asleep because he believes in giving them a "sporting chance"; otherwise, the hunts are not as exhilarating. Further, when the tigers approach at the climax of each tale, Corbett is extremely clear to describe every last detail of what he saw and experienced. He gives a clear sense of the slow-motion quality of the tiger rushing off or even rushing at him, watching his bullets crush the tiger's skull or shoot through its body and then describes the sense of exhilaration he feels after the kill and the happiness he feels at having prevented more locals from being killed by the man-eater.

For Corbett, the hunt is a glorious pursuit, not only giving him a thrill but a sense of purpose.

## Protecting Human Life

One might initially find Major Corbett gruesome and shockingly indifferent to the value of animal life because of his detailed descriptions of his kills and his seeming calm at skinning a tiger's corpse. Further, his sense of exhilaration might give one the sense that he hunts tigers merely for sport, killing beautiful and valuable animals to gain their pelts or build his reputation as a hunter.

However, by Corbett's account, he does not exactly enjoy killing animals. While he enjoys the hunt, he makes a concerted effort to never kill a tiger or lion that is not a man-eater. He goes out of his way to identify his prey as those who have killed or mauled a human being. By his own testimony, he only killed a non man-eating tiger once and he felt a great sense of remorse.

It also becomes clear that Corbett has a complex and refined conscience and capacity for moral reasoning. He often explains the considerations he balances when making decisions about how to hunt the tigers and displays a respect for life generally. It is his aim to protect human life above all else and at the end of the book he maintains that he would have spent thirty years hunting man-eaters even if it had saved only a single

human life. Thus, Corbett is not indifferent to life's value or even to the value of animal life; instead, he risks life and limb to protect local residents from being killed.

## Honoring Nature

The reader will not know simply from reading *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* that Major Corbett later became a Colonel and conservationist and naturalist. He was a deep lover of nature and even has a national park named after him in Kumaon. While the purpose of *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* is to tell the stories of Corbett's kills, his love of nature comes through across the book, so much so that it is a clear theme of the book.

Corbett spends a great deal of time in the jungle; he knows all the wildlife and foliage, describing important details about the animals with great ease. He also knows the terrain and comments on the beauty of the ravines and jungles he runs across. Corbett is never arbitrary, cruel or needlessly destructive to animal life. While he does sacrifice buffaloes to lure man-eating tigers into plain view, he only does so to save human life, which he regards as more valuable.

Corbett also has a sense of being attuned to nature. As a master tracker, he notices the smallest details, is able to accurately estimate the age of tracks, and recognizes the meaning of animals moving through bushes, animal calls, and even the quality of growls. On one occasion, Corbett deduces from the constant low growl of a man-eater that it has a wound that only hurts when it walks and that it is probably a series of porcupine quills in his leg. Corbett also has a hobby of photographing the Kumaon jungle and often describes his attempts to capture beautiful scenes.



# Style

## Perspective

Major (later Colonel) Jim Corbett is both the book's author and main character. Corbett is an English soldier from the mid-20th century and displays the sense of honor, propriety, respect and emotional reserve of a British officer of his day. He has a clear sense of duty to protect the lives of the locals, despite being hired by the United Provinces' government to go on the hunt. He goes out of his way to avoid describing gruesome details to the reader and often displays a respect not only for his kills but for nature generally.

It is notable how totally Corbett is devoted to describing the hunt. We hear nothing of his family, save a mention of his sister, and his friends are rarely described and seldom named. While Corbett often travels with a group of men, he almost never mentions them and tends to hunt alone so as not to put them in danger.

Corbett sometimes comes off as an emotionally detached man, but this is an error, to be sure. He is clearly deeply attached to Robin, cares deeply for the local villagers and has a sense of honor in his kills. Instead, it appears that Corbett merely finds his personal life irrelevant to the story; unlike many novels that feature authors as main characters, Corbett sticks to what he senses, sees and deduces, not what he feels, his emotional past or the intimate details of his life.

## Tone

Man-Eaters of Kumaon is a series of short stories with a common theme of protecting the Kumaon countryside from man-eating tigers and the occasional leopard. While one chapter focuses on Corbett's dog Robin and another brief chapter on a fishing expedition, by and large the book is about a series of intense hunts that took place between 1907 and 1938.

Each chapter has a clear introduction, build-up, climax and denouement and the tone associated with this structure is to be expected. The introduction begins with a calm tone, often with a series of mundane observations and a straightforward explanation of the particular man-eater to be hunted down and shot. Corbett then travels to the relevant areas to begin tracking and describes each day as a series of scouting, tracking and occasional sightings of the man-eaters or other clear signs of them.

While Corbett occasionally has to give up, he is largely successful and as evidence builds Corbett gets closer and closer to killing his prey. Consequently, the tone builds gradually to an intense emotional frenzy, where Corbett is standing right behind or in front of an animal that could easily and instantly kill him; he then quickly describes his shots and how the animal eventually dies. Afterwards comes a calmer tone in the denouement and a sense of triumph pervades the text.

Finally, in some of his tangential observations the tone takes on a comedic cast, but these moments are loosely sprinkled throughout the text.

## Structure

The structure of *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* has three notable features. First, its superstructure is relatively straightforward: it is primarily a compilation of short stories (though true stories) that explain how Major Corbett hunted and killed a particular man-eating tiger. However, the book contains an author's note which discusses the various reasons tigers start to eat human flesh. It also contains two chapters that are not primarily concerned with the hunting of man-eaters; one chapter informs the reader about Robin (Chapter 2), Corbett's hunting dog and the other chapter discusses one of Corbett's most memorable fishing expeditions (Chapter 6).

By and large, the text covers hunts. Chapter 1 details Corbett's clash with the Champawat Man-Eater, which was his first kill. Chapter 3 explains the hunt for the Chowgarh tigers and in particular the hunting of the elder tigress. Chapter 4 has Corbett hunting the Bachelor of Powalgarh and Chapter 5 is the story of the Mohan Man-Eater. Chapters 7 and 8 are relatively short and explain the stories of the Kanda Man-Eater and the Pipal Pani Tiger. In Chapter 9, Corbett tells the story of his last hunt, which concerned the Thak Man-Eater.

The second notable feature of the structure of *Man-Eaters of Kumaon* is the structure of each chapter that concerns a particular hunt, that is, all of the chapters save 2 and 6. As described in the tone section, each story is largely self-contained within the chapter and has its own introduction, rise, climax and denouement which are correlated with discovering a dangerous man-eater, tracking it with varied tactics, locating and killing it and then bringing the carcass to camp and skinning it.

The final notable feature is that the text contains a number of tangential though often related anecdotes and speculative comments. The author will sometimes explain how he deduces particular facts about the location, wound or nature of a particular man-eater; other times he will tell some light story from his past or relate a light anecdote.



## Quotes

"... it is not fair that for these acts a whole species should be branded as being cruel and bloodthirsty." (Author's Note, xviii)

"Come quickly, sahib, the man-eater has just killed a girl." (Chapter 1, 18)

"There it is on the rock! Pull it down and let us hack it to bits!" (Chapter 1, 27)

"It is never safe to assume that a leopard is dead until it has been skinned." (Chapter 2, 43)

"I have told you the story, and while I have been telling it Robin—the biggest-hearted and the most faithful friend man ever had—has gone to the Happy Hunting Grounds, where I know I shall find him waiting for me." (Chapter 2, 44)

"Over this area the Chowgarh tiger had established a reign of terror." (Chapter 3, 45)

"Even before looking at the pads of her feet I knew it was the Chowgarh tigress I had sent to the Happy Hunting Grounds ...." (Chapter 3, 99)

"... for when I started on my 'get-away' I was only ten yards from the most dangerous animal in the world—a freshly wounded tiger." (Chapter 4, 111)

"When you go out looking for a lion, be quite sure that you want to see him." (Chapter 5, 144)

"... when the heavy bullet at that short range crashed into his forehead not so much as a quiver went through his body." (Chapter 5, 145)

"A fish I had set out to catch, and a fish I had caught ...." (Chapter 6, 154)

"I am content now, sahib, for you have avenged my son." (Chapter 7, 170)

"You who have spent as many years in the jungle as I have need no description of the call of a tigress in search of a mate, and to you less fortunate ones I can only say that the call, to acquire which necessitates close observation and the liberal use of throat salve, cannot be described in words." (Chapter 8, 179)

"Of all the men I have been on shikar with Ibbotson is by far and away the best, for not only has he the heart of a lion, but he thinks of everything, and with it all is the most unselfish man that carries a gun." (Chapter 9, 192)

"There have been occasions when life has hung by a thread and others when a light purse and disease resulting from exposure and strain have made the going difficult, but for all these occasions I am amply rewarded if my hunting has resulted in saving one human life." (Chapter 9, 233)



## Topics for Discussion

To the modern reader, Major Corbett's job hunting tigers may seem gruesome. To what extent did Corbett recognize the gruesomeness of his job?

What do you think of Corbett's ethical defenses of his actions?

What does Corbett's desire to give the man-eaters a "sporting chance" indicate about his attitude towards them?

Why does Corbett say that a tiger becomes a man-eater? Give two illustrations of this from the text.

Which of Corbett's personal qualities made him such an excellent hunter?

What is Corbett's ultimate justification for hunting the man-eaters?

Explain three of Corbett's common hunting tactics.

Provide a step-by-step guide for how Corbett hunted a man-eating tiger from first hearing about the tiger to the final kill.