



# Damnation at Toluca Ranch

CREATURE  FEATURE

Through October, *The Monitor* will be running a nine-part series entitled Creature Feature. Published each Thursday, this series will feature creepy tales of ghosts, ghouls and cucuys from deep South Texas by author David Bowles, with illustrations by a variety of local artists.

By David Bowles  
Special to The Monitor

Florencio Sáenz was an ambitious man who grew up admiring the wealthy landowners along the Río Grande. Gifted with a sharp mind for figures and languages, he eventually became bookkeeper for the Tampacuas Ranch, a sprawling spread carved out of the Llano Grande Land Grant in 1836, the year of Florencio's birth, by Don Antonio Cano.

After a decade of work, Florencio had done pretty well for himself. However, he wanted more, much more. As he surveyed the vast lands of his boss, which stretched from modern Nuevo Progreso to Edcouch, he dreamt of

schemes to make his fortune.

One day, tiring of the daily drudge and yearning for a quicker way to attain his dreams, Florencio approached a shaman living on Agua Negra Ranch.

"Tell me ... how can I become a rich landowner like Don Antonio?"

The *brujo* eyed him cautiously, his brow furrowed in thought. "I know someone who can help you," he said at last, "but I doubt you

will approve."

Excited, Florencio rasped, "I'll do anything, talk to anyone."

"Very well. Every new moon, at midnight, when darkness is thick," the *brujo* whispered, "the Devil appears near a crumbling house on the banks of the river. If you go there, Señor Sáenz, he will give you what you desire."

Though Florencio was afraid, his fear waned as the date of the new moon

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approached. That night he got on his horse and rode to meet the Devil. He had seen the ruined house before, so he arrived without problems. As midnight approached, the dark air got colder, and beside the house appeared a handsome, well-dressed gentleman. Florencio knew in an instant that this was Satan himself.

"So, Don Felipe," said the