

FEATURES

After Burn 58

When rain finally quelled the worst inferno ever to rage through the Amazon, somehow the members of one of the world's most storied Stone Age tribes escaped with their lives. But in the end, rampant fire may be the least of the Yanomami's worries. An exclusive report from the still-smoldering jungle. **By Tad Friend**

Where Have All the Wise Men Gone? 64

The Marathon des Sables is the world's most daunting footrace, seven days and 142 miles of running in the merciless, 120-degree Sahara. To some, it's a transcendent foray into the timeless sands of Morocco. And to the rest, it's plain bloody awful.

By Hampton Sides

Gone Summering, See You in September 83

The sweet season is here, and the time is right for hustling off to where the action is—or inaction, if you prefer: the most tantalizing adventure getaways, from sea to shining sea. Plus, a bounty of happenings to keep you sated till Labor Day.

Cape Cod Where land and sea blur into an alluring—and at times threatening—package. **By Paul Theroux**

Gualala, California Lost Coast survival kit: one sea kayak and one great hotel bar. **By Patrick Symmes**

The Dakotas Another fine offering from the people who brought you Big Sky Country. **By Louise Erdrich**

Portsmouth Island, North Carolina The consummate Outer Banks island: pure, raw, and primitive. **By Bob Shacochis**

Palo Duro Canyon, Texas Down on the Panhandle, just when you least expect it... **By Annick Smith**

The Maine Coast Here, salt rivers flow with the tides and the names of places still mean something. **By Tracy Kidder**

Lizard Head Pass, Colorado It welcomes paragliders, rebuffs climbers, and baffles amateur herpetologists. **By Rob Story**

Spring Green, Wisconsin A brief midwestern rhapsody—with a bug spray chorus. **By Craig Vetter**

The Smoky Mountains Ever wonder what it's like to trout-fish inside a terrarium? **By Donovan Webster**

Tell Us Now the Saga of the Self-Styled Viking, of His Epic Voyage Over the Frozen Sea, of His Glorious and Stirring Triumph... 100

Or, barring that, how about a tragicomedy about a West Virginia postmaster who hatches a laughably quixotic scheme to sail the North Atlantic on the trail of Leif the Lucky—and then actually tries to do it?

By W. Hodding Carter

COVER PHOTOGRAPH BY ROB HOWARD



AFTER BURN



The government couldn't douse the biggest fires in Amazon history, but a pair of shamans did just fine: chanting and ritualizing until the rains came and the inferno was reduced to sodden ash. Thus was saved the rainforest's most storied Stone Age tribe. But even shamans can't repel the hazards the Yanomami face next.

BY TAD FRIEND

Outside



SIX YANOMAMI INDIANS WERE trudging down the road toward the distant jungle. We pulled our car over and they ringed us at a cautious distance: four adults, and two children no higher than my knee. Clad in flip-flops, rags, and dust, only their slight builds and bowl haircuts marked them as Yanomami. The leader of the group, a young man named Francisco, said they'd walked five days to the town of Iracema for the most basic reason: "We were starving," he said in a low voice. "The fire burned everything. We knew it was too dry, but we had to burn the land to sow the manioc and bananas. Then the fire escaped, and other fires came, and destroyed all the food in the *maloca*"—their thatch-roofed lodge—"and the animals ran away." Or, in the case of the slower-moving pacas, snakes, turtles, and armadillos, were burned alive. "So we had to come to town to get spaghetti."

Though rapidly growing conversant with pasta, the Yanomami remains the world's largest Stone Age tribe. Its 22,000 members roam a huge rainforest reserve that extends from northernmost Brazil into Venezuela, and they have a reputation as the fiercest people in the world. (Particularly legendary in freshman anthropology classes are their duels, which demand whomping blows to the brain with ten-foot clubs until only one man's skull case remains intact.) But the Yanomami define themselves less as warriors than as a trading culture; after new ideas and artifacts are introduced in one area, they soon race through all 188 widely scattered villages. When it became clear to these travelers that all we had to offer was questions, they slipped away. Having sold fake artifacts in town—palm-wood daggers that have no function in their culture—they were now carrying back Santa-size bags

permits to drive, and later fly, into the Yanomami reserve.

Joaci, a gentle man with a Vandyke, was looking forward to talking medicinal plants with the Yanomami and to practicing his herbal wit on me. (Later, in the forest, he passed me a jade-colored stalk that tasted of green apples. "Chew this," he said. "Nice," I said. "What is it?" "Monkey skin herb," he said. "It makes you piss instantly.") Alan, our fixer, was an unshaven and excitable presence who, back in Boa Vista, the capital of Roraima, had honked at every pretty girl and ignored every stop sign. In Brasília, they had informed me it would take at least 20 days to examine our health records and process the paperwork; in Boa Vista, Alan simply told his boss, FUNAI superintendent Walter Blos, that we'd pay for a plane that could carry in supplies for the Indians. The red tape disappeared.

On this initial trip into the jungle we were headed for Ajarani, a Yanomami village near the edge of the reserve. Ajarani is surrounded by four large agricultural settlements populated by Roraiman farmers, one of many such new homesteads in Roraima carved out of former rainforest. In those settlements we saw herds of spectral white cattle surrounding stands of the inaja palm trees that are the tell-tale survivors of slash-and-burn clearing, and it was here that we first began to encounter the devastation left by the fires that flashed across the world's television screens in March.

This January, when farmers and small landholders across the state customarily set fires to clear their fields and open up forest land for planting, the Amazon region was tinder-dry after a severe six-month drought occasioned by El Niño. Before anyone quite realized what was happening, the fires were out of control. By February, 2,000 separate blazes were speeding west through 13,000 square miles of savanna, blown as much as 30 miles a day toward the rainforest



FIRES CHARRED 5,400 SQUARE MILES OF RAINFOREST (RIGHT) BEFORE CHIEF DAVI KOPENAWA (BELOW) CALLED THE RAINMAKERS TO DEMINI (ABOVE).



of the UN about as much as we need help from Argentina or Venezuela."

Eventually the military grudgingly accepted aid from the UN, as well as from Argentina and Venezuela. An air force of planes and helicopters flew sorties over the blazes, dumping barrels of water. The fires had grown too powerful, and 1,700 firemen and soldiers also had no effect whatsoever as the flames began to lick their way through the Amazon's understory. The fires would have continued deeper into Yanomami territory had the rainy season not arrived on March 31. By then, however, 5,400 square miles of forest had been destroyed—an

SOME YANOMAMI VIEWED THE SMOKE AS A SIGN OF THE APOCALYPSE, SOME BELIEVED IT POR-

filled with empty plastic two-liter Coke bottles, to be used as containers. That the Yanomami would lash urban refuse to their foreheads and lug it for five days back into the rainforest seemed piercingly sad.

We drove on westward in the fierce equatorial heat, past a charred black dog blanketed by four unhurried vultures. Behind the wheel was Joaci de Freitas Luz, a botanist with Brazil's Ministry of Agriculture, who was serving as a translator for me and photographer Ron Haviv. In the back was Alan Suassuna, who works for FUNAI, the federal Indian agency, and who had arranged our

by prevailing winds that tossed the smoke 6,000 feet high. The federal government didn't respond to Roraima's declared state of emergency for two months, until March, and then the attempts to fight the fire were almost comically hapless. (At one point firefighters battled the blaze with household mops.) Brazil has no firefighting planes or helicopters whatsoever, but federal authorities refused two offers of help from a United Nations team that fought last year's fires in Indonesia. The commander in charge of firefighting, General Luis Maia de Carvalho, haughtily declared, "We need the help

enormous amount when one considers that 7,800 square miles were deforested throughout the Amazon in the entire year of 1997. The Amazon creates one-fifth of the world's oxygen; suddenly it wasn't a green lung, but an exhaust pipe.

Yet the fire, which seemed at the time beyond the scope of human forethought—an "act of God"—was in fact a predictable consequence of the rampant tree-clearing and homesteading on the forest's borders. Another predictable consequence of such encroachments was what had already happened to the "preserved" Yanomami. Newly

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visible under the seared skirts of the forest, to anyone paying attention, was not the pristine tribe of the textbooks, but a bewildered people in transition. The fire should have been the sort of watershed event, like the murder of Chico Mendes or Bull Connor's fire hoses at Birmingham, that exposes a terrible underlying wrong. But as I discovered in my late-April visit, the instant the fires went out, nearly everyone in Boa Vista stopped paying attention—out of hopelessness or rank self-interest.

THE FOUR OF US ARRIVED AT THE VILLAGE of Ajarani, home to 51 Yanomami, to find a

the smoke from the fires as a sign of the apocalypse; some saw it as the effusions of evil spirits and banged on the walls of their lodge to make them go away; some believed it portended an epidemic; and some feared that, as had happened once before in a mythic time of smoke and earthquakes, animals and humans would switch bodies.

Though their banana trees were entirely burned and their game dispersed, the Yanomami at Ajarani seemed, with pragmatic resignation, to have seen the smoke simply as what comes from the white man's fire. A surly young man named Orlando (the Indians keep their native names secret from

"I have seen many changes in working with the Yanomami for 17 years. The closer to the settlements, the more change," he added, grinning hugely, the most cheerful analyst of decline I have ever met. "They are no more naked—they are ashamed not to use clothes. They learn to drink—we had 11 people from Ajarani in jail in town during Carnival. They never used salt before, and now they must have it. And the young ones don't believe in the shamans—they want white man's medicine."

Almost everywhere else in Yanomami territory during the fires, shamans performed a special ceremony to "clean" or "cool" the

TENDED AN EPIDEMIC, AND SOME FEARED THAT ANIMALS AND HUMANS WOULD SWITCH BODIES.

depressingly bare huddle of wooden houses. None of the Indians here bothered with their traditional face paint or stick-and-leaf decorations; children were chewing on Styrofoam; the generator providing electricity was so loud my head hurt. Such modern adulterations, which increase in direct proportion to a maloca's proximity to our world, compound the many subtle shadings of Yanomami culture.

The Yanomami reserve is home to four languages as distinct from one another as Spanish and Italian, and to legends that are equally diversified. Some Yanomami viewed

outsiders) muttered to me, "The fire was everywhere. We didn't know where each one came from." We had repaired to the FUNAI post—a log cabin decorated with a girlie calendar—to get out of the heat, and Orlando was loitering, looking for angles. "Where will you get food?" I asked him. "FUNAI must give," he said. Having answered me, he asked for my watch and then my backpack. "These are the most *civilized* Yanomami," Alan said, giving the word a shrugging spin.

"Yes," said Venancio, a half-Macuxi Indian who is FUNAI's representative at Ajarani.

red sun and bring rain. But while Ajarani's shaman can still help with, say, diarrhea, he's forgotten the harder spells. The shaman, a thin, glum-looking man, sat on the floor nearby, his face propped in his hand like Rodin's Thinker. Venancio gestured toward him proprietarily and explained that 15 years ago the shaman lived in a nearby maloca that got into a furious wrangle with another village over kidnapped women, prizes of war that included the shaman's wife. The feud escalated in a hail of curare-tipped arrows until all but a handful of people were dead. The shaman escaped to tell the tale, but those days of Tro-



jan glory seemed utterly bygone. After Venancio's wife gave the man a bowl of soup, he crept quietly from the room.

WE CONTINUED WEST, DEEPER INTO THE jungle, on a rutted laterite track that eventually peters out in the Yanomami village of Demini. The fire's spoor was all around; it was like a drive-through autopsy. The yellow and green pierid butterflies that gather after a burning fluttered like ash under the blackened pergola of dead cashew, ceiba, and Brazil nut trees. A burnt smell trailed us, an odor like rotting hay. The highest canopy was still green, but many of those trees with burned trunks would die slowly; unlike savanna trees, the rainforest flora is not adapted for fire and takes generations to recover. Much farther up the road we'd see flocks of blue and yellow macaws, a clamor of grey herons, the odd great egret, chameleons, an agouti, and even a peccary. But here there was only a hot, ghostly silence.

This overgrown single-lane road, BR 210, was what remained of Brazil's ambitious plan to build a trans-Amazonian highway. Laid down from 1974 to 1977, it was the first artery into the Yanomami area. "There were 15 malocas near the road when they started," Carlo Zacquini had told us in Boa Vista. A gaunt man with a spark of saintliness, Zacquini has worked with the Yanomami for 33 years as a nonproselytizing Catholic mission-

never had these diseases before."

Later, we flew above the jungle, heading southwest from Boa Vista in a Cessna at 4,000 feet, and the pattern of metastasis became even clearer. Dirt roads wended west from the Mucujai River into the forest. Oblong clearings pronged out from the road like shaved patches of mange. And from these clearings, thick brown veins of combustion wandered across the green flanks of the forest. Spot fires still smoldered near Apiaú, bosoming up smoke. Farther in were

his state was in flames, then said it was only 3 percent. The UN finally put it at 14 percent. The head of the UN team that flew in to advise, Carlos Monteiro Pereira, called the inferno an "environmental disaster without precedent on this planet." But after the rains came three weeks ahead of schedule, the world-historical catastrophe subsided, in the world's reckoning, into just another blip.

Driving from Ajarani, we eventually came to the small maloca Ajarani II, home to about two dozen starvelings. (No one could provide an exact census, as the Yanomami numeric system has three components: one, two, and many.) The women clutched at us, miming eating and crying, "Rice, rice—the children are hungry." The only food we had was sandwiches, and Alan whispered that the butter and mayonnaise would not sit well in the Yanomami's stomachs.

Their lodge's palm-leaf roof was crawling with thousands of cockroaches; in a healthy community—and there aren't many left on the forest border—it would long since have been burned and a new lodge erected. "Fire comes down the road," their chief, Jonas, kept saying, seeming sheepish about his



"THE REAL FIRE IS NOT THIS ONE," SAYS A CRITIC OF THE MASSIVE RELOCATION OF POOR INTO

ary and helped lead the drive that created the Yanomami Reserve in 1991. "I told them there will be a road, and settlements, and cattle, and the Indians said, 'Let them come,'" Zacquini said. "They didn't understand. At first they thought white people, with their machines, were a kind of god. I explained, 'There will not be fruit, the animals will run away—what will you do?' They said, 'We will go away a little bit farther.'" Zacquini sighed. "Afterward, only 51 people in one maloca were still alive—the others, one thousand people, had died of malaria and tuberculosis. They had no immunities, having

dozens of slag heaps and pools of latex-yellow water—the residue of the *garimpeiros*, illegal miners, who use poisonous mercury to separate gold from the earth.

In finding clarity in the view from above, I was falling in with all the officials back in Boa Vista, each of whom eventually pulled out a map to show me where the settlements were, where the fire had gone, where the Yanomami lived. We were conspiring to hope that cartography and statistics could make sense of what was happening. And yet, for all these calculations, the facts proved slippery. Roraima's governor declared that 25 percent of

people's utter lack of resources. Totally focused on finding enough bacaba fruit for supper, he couldn't grasp our query about whether the fires would return when the rainy season ends in September. "There are no fires," he said, pointing down the road. "No fires, and no food."

On my last visit to the Amazon, seven years ago, I'd gone up the Rio Negro in a bongo with a Yanomami named Valdir. He knew and could climb every tree in the forest, imitated frog sounds from belches to asthmatic whistles, and navigated by the Pleiades; he also spoke English, learned at a



MODERN ADULTERATIONS HAVE BROUGHT TWENTIETH-CENTURY REFUSE TO MALOCAS LIKE THAT AT DEMINI. HEAVY MACHINERY TO VILLAGES SUCH AS AJARANI II. MALARIAL DEATH THROUGHOUT THE REGION, AND MINE TAILINGS TO ONCE-VIRGIN RIVERS IN YANOMAMI LANDS (FROM FAR LEFT).

Salesian mission, and lived with his family in São Gabriel de Cacheoiera. After a week together in the jungle, I'd asked him if he liked living in town. "I'd be a secret Yanomami in the jungle if I still could, if I didn't know your world," he'd said, with a passionate sadness I had not expected. "You have your bow and arrows, your blowpipe, your wife. There's no sugar to take out your teeth, and no priests to tell you your curassow and parrot feathers and armbands look silly. And that people will laugh at you in the towns."

THE MESS IN RORAIMA THIS SPRING WAS A classic demonstration of the problem that the 1992 Rio Earth Summit was somehow supposed to address. In Rio, world leaders had bandied promises that they'd monitor global warming, that developed countries would help the undeveloped preserve their resources. But on the core question of how to balance the needs of the poor with the claims of the environment, even promises were few. Deforestation in the Amazon has actually increased since the summit—12 percent of the jungle, an area nearly the size of France, is now gone forever.

Roraima is the sort of frontier where such

to clear the restaurant so he could dine alone.

"Our poor population in the Amazon is the biggest threat," says Ademir Junes dos Santos, Roraima's head of IBAMA (Brazil's counterpart to the EPA), who welcomed me to his Boa Vista office one afternoon and spoke eloquently for two hours. "They have nowhere to go, so they farm or mine." At least 60,000 farmers have poured into Roraima from Brazil's impoverished northeast since the territory was made a state in 1988, and some 40,000 *garimpeiros* have swarmed into the Yanomami reserve since 1987. In the first four years of the gold rush, according to the Pro-Yanomami Commission, the miners killed 2,500 Indians through occasional massacres of inconveniently placed villages and through disease. But dos Santos argues that while "the Amazon population is seen by the international community as a predator, actually they are just poor people, in need of development, trying to live with dignity."

Excellent sentiments—if dos Santos were a development officer. Unfortunately, he's supposed to be the guardian of the forest. But IBAMA is fairly toothless; it collects just 6 percent of the fines it levies nationwide, and its Roraima branch has only 30 field

come replacement for the last superintendent, who this spring repeatedly told journalists that the fires were a myth. Perhaps because Roraima's self-image is predicated on exploiting the land, denial of the fires was widespread; IBAMA didn't even stop authorizing landholders from setting fires until February 1, at which point thousands of square miles had already been torched.

By March 30, with the fires at their peak and the rainy season not expected for another three weeks, the situation was increasingly dire. But then help arrived from an unexpected quarter: Two Kayapo Indian shamans, Kukriti and Mantii, performed a rainmaking ritual on the parched banks of the Branco River near Boa Vista. Although Yanomami shamans had been working for weeks to bring rain, FUNAI elected to fly these volunteers in from the central Amazonian state of Mato Grosso. The shamans spent a long time cleaning the sun, wiping out the dismal red. Then they chanted over creeper plants and wet a small bamboo rod in the river, lustrating the ground in all directions. The next morning it began pouring, a full three inches. The rainy season had begun. The fires went out; the smoke dispersed; the crisis was over. The Kayapo flew home.

Though prayer had been rampant in Boa Vista—in late March Fernando Catao, secretary for regional policies, had declared that only Saint Peter could save them now—I

THE JUNGLE, "BUT THE FUSE THAT WAS LIT 30 YEARS AGO WITH THE SETTLEMENT POLICY."

clashes occur: It's Brazil's modern equivalent of our old West. Towns have raw names like Cockroach Lodge and Mining for Lice, and the state is stamped by the gold fever that wracked it from 1987 to 1991: In front of the governor's palace squats an exceedingly ugly statue of a *garimpeiro* sifting his pan. Legends circulate of miners bestowing new cars on their favorite whores, and of the time a miner named Vando Preto marched out of the jungle, dressed in rags, and made a bee-line for the Aipana Plaza Hotel, where he dumped out one of his four bleach bottles crammed with gold dust and ordered the staff

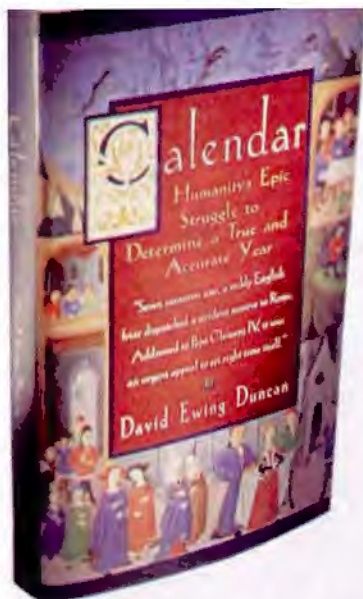
agents to approve and then monitor the annual clearing fires on some 18,000 lots. Even now, officials like dos Santos remain astonishingly blasé about the fires' havoc and the continuing threat. A typical comment came from Iguatemi Rosa, president of Roraima's land management agency: "No one is to blame for the fires but the weather."

"The truth is that the government didn't do anything to stop the fires," said Walter Blos, the head of Roraima's FUNAI office. Blos, a cagey, mustachioed veteran who spent six years among the Yanomami, had just been appointed to his job and was a wel-

could find only one official who allowed that the shamans might have brought the rain. Senator Marluce Pinto waggled her gold-jewelry-laden fingers at me severely when I brought up the shamans, as if I were a naughty boy. "FUNAI bringing the Indians here to make rain was a joke," IBAMA chief dos Santos sputtered. "It was a waste of money. It made us look foolish."

Walter Blos, on the other hand, wryly suggested that the shamans still had a little cleanup work to do. "The Indians are looking for El Niño," he said—El Niño's name

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of Crete and Santorini have been leading candidates in the past, but few Atlantis sleuths have been restrained by actual geography. And while the author convinces us that Atlantis never existed, he nonetheless acts as a patient guide through the thickets of controversy that surround the subject. In tracing both the scientific pursuit of this probably fictional place and numerous unscientific flights of fancy, Ellis gracefully imparts much about the history of archaeology and cartography, and the perennial yearning for lost worlds and romantic adventure.

Calendar: Humanity's Epic Struggle to Determine a True and Accurate Year, by David Ewing Duncan (Bard, \$23). As we approach the great millennial transition, it's a propitious moment to consider how far we've come in measuring our passage across the firmament of time. To aid that cause, veteran science and travel writer Duncan has assembled a lively history—dating back 13,000 years to the first known timetable, a crosshatched eagle bone—of the attempt to follow our exact place in the whirl of days, lunar cycles, seasons, and years. Central to his story is the ongoing struggle with one small complication: A solar year is some five hours and 48 minutes longer than the 365-day calendar that's been widely used since it was introduced by the Egyptians 6,234 years ago. The ensuing discrepancies tend to get people riled up: Londoners rioted in 1752 when a royal edict, designed to calibrate the out-of-whack British calendar, expunged 11 days from the month of September. Duncan also explains how our grasp of time has given us a better handle on space. These days, everyone from hikers using GPS locators to sailors rely on atomic clocks; precise time is of the essence, since "a billionth of a second translates into the space of about one foot for navigation." Alas, not even atomic clocks are

completely correct, because "the earth wobbles and wiggles, causing random fluctuations in the earth's rotation." It's a nice escape clause that reminds us that the calendar—"a cage of finite moments"—will never quite nail down reality.

An Affair with Africa: Expeditions and Adventures Across a Continent, by Alzada Carlisle Kistner (Island Press, \$25). Between 1960 and 1973, Kistner accompanied her entomologist husband on five expeditions in Africa, including stays in the Congo, Kenya, Liberia, Ivory Coast, Tanzania, South Africa, Namibia, and Angola. Thankfully, she had a sharp naturalist's eye, took detailed notes, and was eventually talked into writing this modest, eminently readable book about her adventures amid the seemingly inexhaustible plenitude of Africa's wildlife in the waning days of colonialism. Flush with scientific zeal and protected by youthful enthusiasm, the Kistners enjoyed enviable encounters and not a few close calls with deadly mamba snakes, charging black rhinos, bull elephants, and lions (one of which used Kistner's daughter as a pillow throughout a very long night in Botswana). A lovely memoir, and a memorable exercise in nostalgia. —**NAL ESPEN**

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refers to the Christ Child—"they are looking to catch him and put an arrow in him."

ONE MORNING WE FLEW INTO THE RELATIVELY pristine Yanomami village of Demini, carrying rice for FUNAI. We'd come to meet with Davi Kopenawa, a fortyish shaman who is also the chief of the maloca's 104 Indians.

Davi is the most famous—and perhaps the only—exemplar of the new Yanomami. He learned Portuguese at a New Tribes Protestant Mission when he was young, worked for FUNAI, and has traveled to New York, London, and Paris to publicize his people's plight.

A short man whose open face carried a playful red streak of onoto-seed dye, Davi wore blue shorts, a wristwatch, and a lion's tooth on a thong around his neck (an African souvenir purchased in the United States). Occasionally he flapped a hand over his shoulder to disperse the *pium*, no-sec-ems that gathered on his back. We were seated at a long wooden table under the eaves of his maloca, with Joaci alongside Davi, translating. It was nearly as cool under the palm roof as it was in the windowless, furiously

air-conditioned offices of Boa Vista.

The village's most powerful shaman, Lourival, also came and sat at the end of the table. Aside from the customary quid of tobacco under his lower lip, he sported only a baseball cap and the traditional penis string (a red cotton thread that circles the waist and tucks the penis up by the foreskin). He had been resting in his hammock, preparing for the arduous Pied Piper ceremony of recalling fugitive animals—in this case the peccaries, who ran away when the miners came.

That ceremony, like all Yanomami shamanic rituals, involves having *yakoana*, the hallucinogenic bark of the virola tree, blown four times up your nose by another shaman wielding a blowpipe. I tried just a pinch of the peppery brown powder and got a shimmery feeling, and could well imagine that with a megadose "the trees open up and you fly through them," as Lourival said. In that state of transport, the Yanomami call on the *shabori*, a beautiful manlike spirit covered with bright tattoos who wears a headdress of monkey tails and bird feathers. The *shabori* descends and hovers just above the ground. But in March, Davi and Lourival said, when they and six other Demini shamans petitioned him for rain—on three separate occa-

sions—the *shabori* was cross. "There is too much smoke," he told them, "and no one should be setting all these fires."

Lourival and Davi had invited the Kayapo shamans to do their ceremony at Demini, using *yakoana* so they would contact the Yanomami *shabori*, not their own. "Lourival wanted to see inside the eyes of the Kayapo," Davi said, "to see how they work, but the smoke was too heavy for the plane to fly in." Looking fierce for the first time, Davi said he suspected the Kayapo *shabori* thickened the smoke to help "show that *he* would bring the rain, not the Yanomami." Lourival hawked and spat, an enormous brown effusion of tobacco and drool.

Still, trying to quantify whether the Kayapo *shabori* was stronger than the Yanomami *shabori* was "a white man's question," Davi said sternly. Only I hadn't asked it. Then he tried to convince me that his group no longer engages in their head-bashing duels. "It still happens among the Yanomami in Venezuela," Davi allowed, "but here we each have our own girl, our own wife. We control ourselves."

That seemed plausible, as I looked around the lovely doughnut-shaped maloca at the women grating cassava and pounding acai berries with a mortar to make wine,

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their faces gleefully painted with charcoal and red dye, three sticks fanning out from holes beneath their lower lip. Naked children raced about carrying bows twice their height, and elders drowsed in their red hammocks. Of course, the young men—that group in whom the bellicosity known as *waiteri* is particularly prized—were out hunting. One woman was following up on the fruits of their waiteri; she was cleaving a seared capuchin monkey (which eerily resembled an infant) to bits.

"Everyone in the world has anger—what would you do if he stole your woman?" Davi continued, indicating Joaci. I raised my pen and mimed slamming Joaci over the head. The Yanomami laughed. Davi laughed too, but repeated, "We don't need white people reading that we are always hitting each other over women."

I realized that I was witnessing what must be a new form of behavior: a Yanomami trying to spin an outsider's impressions. Spin is a secondary stage of cultural self-consciousness: It requires an awareness both of how another culture perceives you and of how you wish to be perceived. The first stage—the dawning understanding of how other cultures see you—we'd witnessed at Ajarani, in the form of shame.

Davi understands that the Yanomami give the world a reason to save the Amazon, one far more compelling than abstract analyses of the economic value of biodiversity, carbon storage, and maintenance of evapotranspiration cycles. The office of Walter Blos, Roraima's FUNAI superintendent, features a poster with an image that emblemizes this exotic innocence—or, perhaps, our perception of it: a Yanomami woman suckling her child from one breast and a capybara, the tailless rodent, from the other. Davi has seen this oddly unsettling photo, and he knows that his people are a symbol. "We are the ultimate," he said, "the last Indians who never want to live in the city, have a car, have a TV. The white people respect the Indians who still walk around naked!"

Davi's nuanced concern for my perceptions was noteworthy because the Yanomami have long viewed "whites" (many of whom, in multihued Brazil, are browner than they) as a degraded afterthought in the creation of the world. We are accounted for either as an evil consequence of a female Yanomami not being sequestered during menstruation or, more prosaically, as creatures fashioned from river scum.

It is difficult to overemphasize just how differently the Yanomami see the world.

The most common version of their cosmology has the universe arrayed in three, or in some versions four, thin layers supported by giant tree trunks. ("The first time they saw me digging a well," says Carlos Zacchini, the Catholic missionary, "they stayed well back, certain I would fall through the earth.") Yanomami view the body not as a physical system that responds to biochemical compounds, but rather as an envelope containing four souls: what might be called the unconscious, the seat of desires, the center of health and life, and most strikingly, an animal soul. When a Yanomami is born, so is a doppelgänger capybara or tapir that shares his or her life force; if that animal is killed, the Indian also dies.

Illnesses, even those that only come from whites, are believed to result from a broken taboo or an enemy shaman's spell. When a child dies, the others eat its cremated ashes mixed with plantain mush to give its spirit a home. "Most of the unacculturated Yanomami, 80 to 90 percent, don't believe a malaria pill will cure them," says Ivan Soares Farias, an anthropologist with the federal government's Yanomami health team. "They think you are giving the mefloquine just to get closer to them. So after they take the pill, they feel free to

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ask you for something—beads, a gift.”

As a trading culture, the Yanomami are perilously susceptible. During the gold rush, they were puzzled by the miners mucking about with the land—they called them “wild pigs snorting in the mud.” Geoffrey O'Connor reports in his thoughtful book *Amazon Journal*—but the Indians admired the miners' stores. The Indians at Paapiú, the Yanomami area with the biggest influx of *garimpeiros*, were trading sex with the miners for lipstick, and gonorrhea and other illnesses began to take their toll.

The cultural and epidemiological threats from the miners actually remain a greater danger to the Yanomami than the fires, because it requires the unusual conditions of an El Niño for virgin rainforest, with its high humidity and cooler microclimate, to burn readily. While the Yanomami lost a few malocas to the fire, and many of them are low on food, the greater threat came from the preceding drought. The drying rivers and ponds and mining ditches produced ideal mosquito-breeding conditions, and malaria among the Yanomami shot up 100 percent in February and March. In Paapiú, January alone brought malaria to 117 of the 170 Yanomami. Much of it was *falciparum*, the deadliest kind, and only

battle-stations medical work by a volunteer agency prevented fatalities.

Davi's maloca has suffered relatively little from the miners or the fires, but he knows both threats still lurk. Though he says “there are white men, and there are white men,” he also knows that he can't count on the former to protect the Yanomami from the latter. The Yanomami must protect themselves. “We've got to learn Portuguese so we can defend our rights, not be robbed,” he told me. Demini is one of only four Yanomami villages with a teacher, who instructs in Portuguese and Yanoman. “We can't just move further into the forest, as we thought, because then the whites will advance to where we are now.” He fell silent. At last Davi tousled the hair of a small boy who sat proudly beside him, his nose peeking over the tabletop. “Still, the Indians who have learned Portuguese forgot their culture, and whites have no respect for them. And if this boy learns Portuguese he'll want to go to Boa Vista, where all he can become is a beggar or a thief.”

In his journey toward a self-reliant re-politick, Davi himself renounced the Christianity of his youth and became a shaman at the very late age of 35. Yet his Yanomami theology has been heavily influenced by his

experience outside the garden. “Oman, who created all the lands, also distributed them,” Davi said. “United States and Europe for the whites, and Brazil he gave to the Indians. Oman says not to destroy, to keep the forest clean, not to make big holes that create illness, not to throw garbage on the river. But Juraci is the bad spirit. The sons of Juraci live in the city. They like to destroy—the miners, farmers, priests, and the politicians, who are the worst because they put all the other ones here.”

ONE EVENING I MET IN YET ANOTHER WINDOWLESS Boa Vista cubby with Reinaldo Barbosa, the man most versed in the course of the Roraima fires. A lean, bearded researcher for INPA—the national Amazon research institute—Barbosa pored over satellite photos, took a long overflight, and spent 22 days in the jungle assessing the damage. It is his sum of 5,400 square miles of burned forest that has become the official figure. But Barbosa came out of the jungle armed not only with numbers, but with context and a historical explanation: “The real fire is not this one,” he says, “but the fuse that was lit 30 years ago with the settlement policy.” In 1970 Brazil's military dictator, General Emilio Garrastazu

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Medici, began a "penetration scheme" in the Amazon, and that supposedly discredited notion for massive resettlements of the poor into the jungle flourishes still.

In a speech to visiting judges at Boa Vista's Justice Tribunal, I heard Governor Neudo Campos boast, "We have four million hectares ready to produce! Lots of opportunities!" He trumpeted that "Road 174 to Manaus"—the Amazon's largest city—"is almost totally paved." With good intentions, no doubt. Not once did Campos mention the protected forest, which occupies 70 percent of the state. A Roraima brochure ballyhoos "a four-million-hectare area ready for agribusiness and agriculture projects. Nature is gorgeous and outstanding: dense Amazon forest in the south, natural pasture lands in the center, and mountains in the north."

Such pamphlets and proclamations make development sound shrewdly planned. But the actual government policy in Roraima—both federal and state—is as headlong as that prevailing in the state of Amazonas in the late 1980s, when the governor gave voters free chain saws. "Really what is happening is we have ten to 15 poor families arriving every day, wanting to claim their new land in settlements," Manuel Andrade Fre-

itas, Roraima's superintendent of the federal land-management agency, INCRA, told me. "It's out of control."

It's out of control because in Brazil 70 percent of the land is owned by 5 percent of the landowners, and politicians find it easier to appease the powerful Sem Terra—the "without land" movement—with forested federal lands in Roraima than by redistributing the already cleared lands of the rich. And every local politician wants settlers: more grateful voters, and more federal money coming in.

Lured by promises of the good life, thousands of landless families from the impoverished northeastern states are pouring into new settlements in Roraima. They burn the trees off their land, plant it with cassava and manioc for a few years, and then grow vexed with the lousy soil—all the nutrients in the Amazon, where the soil is about 3 inches deep, are bound up in the teeming vegetation. So they sell to a larger landholder, who turns the field into cattle pasture. (Land cleared by set fires, in which the soil has briefly been made more productively alkaline, sells for about \$130 an acre; forested land, for only 10 to 15 percent of that.) Cattle can survive on the grass for about ten years. Then the soil is tapped

out, and settlers go to burn more farther in. "Afterward," says Carlos Zacquini, "the land left behind looks like the moon."

"We need to ask INPA for a way to find sustainable agriculture here," said IBAMA's Ademir Junes dos Santos. "Maybe fruit trees, small coconuts, mangoes." I told him that I'd seen Philip Fearnside, the noted INPA researcher, in Manaus earlier that week and that Fearnside had said that while some agroforestry was possible in Roraima, far too much land was being cleared and the soil was simply too poor.

"So where are we going to put all these people?" dos Santos exploded, suddenly enraged. "The land must be good for *something*." He looked at me accusingly. "You can't just say it's good for *nothing*." I felt as useless as I had with the starving Yanomami at Ajarani II, but this time my guilt vanished after I thought about what he was saying. What the land is good for, of course, is the very "nothing" that dos Santos is tasked to assure: virgin rainforest full of Yanomami.

"As far as people come, we'll make settlements," said Iguatemi Rosa, president of ITERAIMA, Roraima's state settlement agency. A cocky, mustachioed bureaucrat, Rosa rummaged in a cabinet and pulled out a dusty booklet containing a 1964 law.



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He read from it at length, flashing an enormous gold ring on which two diamonds wrestled a ruby for precedence. He said it authorized him to give 100 hectares free to every family that wanted it. That law has long since been superseded and is so irrelevant that I couldn't quite think of a polite way of saying so, and so I merely asked why the federal settlements granted only 60 hectares. "Well, we don't really measure," Rosa said grandly. "We just say, 'You get from here to here.'"

When I asked about the fires, Rosa did an amazing about-face: "The fire came from INCRA's settlements," he said flatly, "and really there is nothing to discuss about this, because we have no settlements." What? Rosa was hiding behind a technicality—all the unclaimed land in the state still belongs to the federal government—but the express purpose of his agency, as he'd freely acknowledged earlier, is to facilitate resettlement. In fact, ITERAIMA supervises about 20 settlements.

Manuel Andrade Freitas, the balding, querulous local superintendent of INCRA, proved equally evasive. He denied any knowledge of the huge, three-million-hectare settlement alongside Road 174 that President Fernando Henrique Cardoso announced last June. He also said that his 29 settlements "were not responsible for the fire," and continued, falteringly, "The state settlements produced the fires near the Yanomami."

In the end, the question of who controls which settlements pales beside the sheer fact of the settlements' existence. What matters is that all roads lead to the forest. Matthieu Lena, a local health coordinator, showed me photos of his recent trip through the Trairao River area adjoining the Yanomami preserve. One showed a wide laterite road and a federal government sign declaring, "We are building 25 kilometers of road." "This road is being aimed right at the Yanomami!" Lena cried passionately—on the inevitable map, he drew it as a dagger aimed at the preserve. "Ten kilometers from the end of the road, people have already cut their way into the forest with machetes."

He flipped to another photo, of charred giant tree stumps. "All the region is fucking burnt," he said, with that slight emphasis of someone swearing in his second language. "Surrounding the Yanomami area with settlements and burning—it's legal! It's stupid, but it's legal. We're sweating here, doing everything we can, and in 100 years there will be nothing left. Nothing."

IN DEMINI, AS I SAT HAPPILY WITH ALAN AND Joaci in the midst of the forest that the world claims it wants to protect, it occurred to me that none of the officials I'd spoken with during the previous week had any specific or compelling ideas about how to save that forest from the fire next time. The UN report on the fires—itsself a flabby, useless document—dryly notes "the absence of a disaster culture, and related lack of preparedness" by any institution to face "similar circumstances in the future." Senator Marluce Pinto told me breezily, "It won't happen again. The people are alert, and the government is alert—we're ready to stop any fire as soon as it starts." She could offer no specifics. "We need to put clearing machines in the fields," said Governor Neudo Campos, "so they won't set fires anymore." He had no idea who might pay for this.

ITERAIMA's Iguatemi Rosa blithely said that progress lay in giving all the Indian communities "two tractors and 20 cows and two bulls." Even the Yanomami? "Yes—we've already done it at Auaris," he boasted. "FUNAI doesn't do anything for them, but we can." Alan slumped deeper on the sofa, rolling his eyes in disbelief. Such a gift, which flouts FUNAI's sole authority over the reserve, is arguably illegal.

"We will be the ones setting the fires next year," declared Ademir Junes dos Santos of Rnraima's IBAMA. He means that his EPA will be more active next year in explaining to settlers how to clear a trench around the fire zone, but it's still an eerie remark. "We have modern environmental laws," he explained, "but we can't stop people from breaking them. The settlers are poor, so they must keep burning." He noted that this spring's fire laid down a carpet of dead leaves and trunks in the rainforest—powerful kindling. "So next year the fire will go to the canopy—it will be a worse tragedy." As for the other looming problem, the miners, dos Santos shrugged: "We have taken the garimpeiros out six times, and last time it cost \$1.7 million. But it's all useless, because they get here, we confiscate their equipment, but they have no work, so they walk for 18 to 24 days back into the forest."

Alan Suassuna tells a funny but ultimately bleak tale of hiding for six days and nights in the jungle waiting for a mining camp's resupply plane to land so FUNAI could confiscate it. They got the plane at last, but all the miners ran away. And the miners went to court and recovered the plane: the pilot, as is customary, claimed that he'd developed engine trouble and had had to land (on a secret, well-camou-

flaged runway). All Alan ended up catching in the forest, he says, was hepatitis. Like dos Santos, he now believes keeping the miners out is nearly impossible.

And so we keep coming and coming. The Amazon is so large that fighting its fires and miners and loggers can seem like trying to dam the ocean. "People tend to be very fatalistic about it," says ecology researcher Philip Fearnside. "The problem is so huge that people assume it will all just be cut down eventually." Paradoxically, that fatalism springs from a lack of urgency: The Amazon is so large it seems that it could never disappear. The Amazon is so large that as it disappears we can only tell from those abstract satellite photos high above, where the shaboris look down.

In the middle of the jungle it seems the same world as ever, almost. In Demini's peaceful maloca, Davi watched as Alan dumped the ice out of our cooler into the courtyard. In seconds, all the children were on the glittering heap, astonished by how cold the crystals were and how briefly they lasted. They passed them hand to hand until they were handing on only everyday water. This was our small, ambiguous contribution to the education of the Yanomami.

"The land in the whole planet," Davi said, musing, "it's not so big. It's small, it's a small planet for us." I had just been thinking that the cultural alienation of Indians is an old story, almost timeless. And Davi's thought prompted me to realize that that old story will soon pass into history: There just aren't that many pristine peoples left for us to unearth, seduce, and destroy.

"You don't eat gold," Davi continued, trying one last time to impress me with the simplest truths. "You don't eat money, or trees. The land itself is the richness, and the land says to us look, that's enough—you've got to stop hurting me now. Our shabori says the world will get dark if the white people let the Indians die. It will be a world of darkness." His face was prophetically grim, reminding me of the huge stone profile of Crazy Horse near Mount Rushmore. Then he caught sight of my own face, smiled, and gently took my hand. A kind man, he didn't want to frighten me. **1**

Contributing editor Tad Friend wrote about Disney's Animal Kingdom in the May issue.

Volume XXIII, number 7 OUTSIDE (ISSN 0278-1433) is published monthly by MARINI MEDIA INC., 400 Market St., Santa Fe, NM 87501. Periodical postage paid at Santa Fe, NM, and additional mailing offices. Canadian Goods and Services Tax Registration No. R126291723. Canada Post International Publications Mail Sales Agreement No. 0672149. Subscription rates: U.S. and possessions, \$18; Canada, \$28 (includes GST); foreign, \$45. Washington residents add sales tax. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to OUTSIDE, P.O. Box 54729, Boulder, CO 80328-4729.